

13. *The Chairman.*] You do not take store ewes down by train, do you?—Yes, the great bulk of them.

14. You do not drive them, do you?—No. Rarely anything is driven now, as the knocking-about they get is so much that it does not pay: it takes so much out of store sheep. Some of them are brought from north Taihape. You perhaps have six or eight days, and the sheep certainly do not improve with driving, whereas they are sent down in a few hours by train—possibly four hours.

15. What do they charge for sending them down?—From Mangaweka, 4d. per lamb, from Taihape 5d.; and you would get them on your own farm in the same day.

16. Where are they put out at?—Marton Junction or Greatford.

17. Then you would not have far to drive them to get them to this district?—No; only it would be far better to get them home to Sandon the same day. Even now some are railed right to the farm by a round-about method. Some farmers consider it better to adopt that method, and so save the knocking-about and get them there quickly.

18. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Is it the accepted practice of farmers in that district to wherever possible rail their fat stock?—Yes.

19. And they find it pays?—Yes.

20. Will you now deal with the question of grain in relation to the same question of mutual trade between the lower and upper districts?—We know that at the present time there is practically an unlimited demand for grain and produce from the Main Trunk district north of Marton, by which at the present time the Sandon district does not benefit.

21. I want you to give to the Commission some figures showing the extent of that trade and its permanency?—At the present time there is practically nothing that leaves the Sandon district that would go to the Main Trunk district, and I think it would be a fair thing to compare that with the Marton district, taking the triangular portion, say, Bonny Glen on the Wanganui side and Porewa on the Main Trunk side and past Halcombe. I think it would be fair to say that in that particular district there are about 600,000 sacks of grain sent away every year, the bulk of it eaten chaff.

22. Where is that product distributed?—Practically to every station north of Marton as far as up and beyond Auckland and Rotorua, and to New Plymouth on the other side; and in some years as far as Napier, but as a rule that would be abnormal in the case of the latter.

23. Is the Taranaki trade normal—a trade on which you can depend in the seasons?—Yes, it is a normal trade, and has been so for many years.

24. What have you to say as to the permanency of the trade?—The Auckland trade has been permanent, I suppose, for five years. It is an increasing trade; but the Taranaki trade is more normal.

25. There is a strong demand for this class of produce from the northern district?—Yes.

26. Do you sell largely yourself in that district?—Yes; I suppose we would turn over 125,000 sacks in the year, none of them from the Sandon district.

27. *The Chairman.*] What price are you getting per ton?—I think the fairest way is to say what price we have been paying. We have been paying £3 10s. per ton at Marton, on trucks up to £4; £3 10s. would probably be the minimum this year. There are approximately twenty-eight sacks to the ton.

28. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Is the production of chaff the principal line of activity undertaken by agricultural farmers handy to the railway?—Yes, within a radius of five miles.

29. Do they find by experience that that is a profitable form of farming activity?—Yes, and it has been in existence for a number of years. It would be payable spread over a number of years. It is one of the most reliable crops we grow, taking one year with another.

30. *The Chairman.*] Would it pay a farmer to grow oaten chaff at £3 per ton?—It was considered that £3 5s., with 2 tons to the acre, would pay very well indeed; but now we have abnormal conditions in regard to the price of labour and all commodities, and it is doubtful if £3 5s. would be a profitable price.

31. *Mr. Skerrett.*] Do farmers find it profitable to engage in the production of oaten chaff where they are distant, say, more than five miles from the railway-line?—No, it is not so profitable beyond five miles.

32. What do they do then?—Their farm is used for other purposes—grazing probably.

33. And do they thresh?—Yes, any grain that is grown. That is instanced by Marton. If you take a distance of half a mile from the line, perhaps the bulk of the farm is in oats for chaffing, and farther back it is only half as much, and yet farther back there is less grown still, and eventually side-tracked.

34. What is the cost of cartage five miles to Marton?—Anything from 7s. 6d. to 9s. per ton.

35. The vicinity to a railway-line is an important factor?—It means everything. It is the determining factor whether a farmer will grow oaten chaff or not.

36. How do you compare the land around this tramway as a chaff-producing country with the Marton country?—It is equally as good, probably better. For instance, when I first went to Sandon in 1896 more than half the farms were under cultivation in oats. That is when they had a market south.

37. Since then the Wellington market has been largely captured by the Canterbury merchants?—Yes; and Marlborough.

38. Owing to what?—To two reasons: the cheap rates from Wellington to Picton, and the large production of Blenheim chaff.

39. So that the Wellington supply mainly comes from the ports of Picton and Blenheim?—Yes.

40. Blenheim sends chaff up as far as Auckland?—Yes; it goes by steamer direct from Picton to Onehunga.