

TIMBER FOR BUTTER-BOXES AND CHEESE-CRATES.

In many instances dairy companies have had great difficulty in procuring sufficient and regular supplies of suitable packages for butter and cheese, the sawmillers in certain districts being either unwilling or unable to furnish the quantities of white-pine needed for this purpose. When the timber was eventually secured it was frequently unseasoned, and therefore unsuitable for immediate use.

In the past this shortage of white-pine has been attributed to the unrestricted export of this timber to the Commonwealth of Australia, where large quantities are still being used for the making of butter-boxes and other requirements of the timber trade, but from the 6th August, 1918, some restriction has been placed on the export of timber generally, which is fully explained in the *Gazette* notice of that date. It is believed that the Board of Trade now has the matter in hand with a view of regulating supplies of the timber needed in New Zealand, and no doubt due consideration will be given to the question of maintaining larger quantities of white-pine wherever practical, thereby prolonging the period over which this most useful timber will be procurable. It is, of course, well known that the supply of white-pine timber is within measurable distance of being exhausted. It is therefore advisable that the utilization of timbers other than white-pine be carefully considered, and that such timbers be thoroughly tested with regard to their suitability.

It may be mentioned here that a trial of Southland beech timber for butter-boxes was made during the year under the control of the Division, the necessary wood being supplied by the Lands and Survey Department. Every care was taken when making the trial, and a portion of the same churnings of butter was also packed in the ordinary white-pine boxes in order that a comparison could be made in any variation in the quality of the contents. The respective packages of butter were examined on three occasions at intervals of two months, and at the end of the period it was found that none of the butter showed any signs of deterioration as the result of being packed in the boxes made of beech timber. The trial was therefore considered entirely satisfactory and the wood found to be suitable in every way.

The Southland beech timber has been used for the manufacture of cheese-crates for a number of years, and is replacing white-pine to a considerable extent in the southern districts. Although beech timber is somewhat heavier and not quite so attractive in appearance as white-pine, the crates made from the former are considered satisfactory by the various dairy companies using them.

A number of butter-boxes of a design calculated to effect a great saving in the amount of timber required have been submitted to the Division to be tested. These packages appear to possess a considerable amount of merit in this respect, and, providing they are found to be of sufficient strength to stand the handling which takes place between the factories and the market, dairy companies will probably make use of them. It is expected that a trial of these special boxes will be made at an early date.

SALE OF BUTTER AND CHEESE TO THE IMPERIAL GOVERNMENT.

Early in the year meetings of representatives of all dairy companies and dairy-factory proprietaries were held at various centres for the purpose of discussing the question of disposing of the year's output of butter and cheese to the Imperial Government. At these meetings delegates were selected to meet at a conference in Wellington at a later date to further consider the matter and elect committees. The delegates from the cheese-factories met on 23rd April, and, after conferring with the Prime Minister, a Dominion cheese committee with full power to act was set up to carry on negotiations. A similar procedure took place on 9th May in connection with the delegates representing the butter-factories, a Dominion butter committee being also constituted and given full power to take whatever action deemed necessary.

On 25th June, 1918, an intimation was received from the Dominion cheese committee and the Dominion butter committee stating that the producers had decided not to sell this season's output of cheese at less than 10½d. per pound f.o.b., and the output of butter at a lower price than 196s. per hundredweight on the same terms. It was then ascertained that the Food Ministry in London could not see its way to purchase more dairy-produce in New Zealand than could be shipped within a reasonable time, owing to the difficulty which had arisen as the result of serious shortage in refrigerated steamers.

A month later cable advice was received to the effect that the Food Ministry was not yet prepared to make a definite offer for dairy-produce, but stated that the Imperial Government would probably agree to purchase both butter and cheese for a period covering twelve months after the war. At this time the position in regard to shipping was improving. Further cables were despatched and received. On 19th October the National Dairy Association received cable advice from its London representative to the effect that the Food Ministry was unwilling to consider a price beyond 181s. for butter, owing to the producers in Australia having accepted 175s. per hundredweight for their butter. The price offered for cheese was 10½d. per pound.

The butter and cheese committees again met in Wellington on 28th October, when a lengthy discussion took place with the Prime Minister, Minister of Agriculture, and Minister in Charge of the Imperial Government Supplies Department, the committees eventually deciding to accept 10½d. per pound for cheese f.o.b., the sale to be for a period of two years; but the butter committee still held out for 196s. per hundredweight for butter. Subsequently a cable was received by the Government from the High Commissioner stating that the Food Ministry was treating the offer of butter and cheese as one, instead of separately, and also that it was considered 181s. a reasonable price for butter, and that no higher offer could be made.

A further conference took place between the committees and the Prime Minister on 11th November, when it was agreed to accept 181s. for butter under protest, with a request that the