

Are you aware that the prices that are paid in New Zealand by the different stock-buyers are fixed in London every week?—I do not know that.

*Mr. Hawken*: You assume that there is not sufficient competition at present in Canterbury, and that that is your difficulty?—That is one of my difficulties. We have a few freezing-works operating there, but I think that the more of them we have the better.

Do you find that the present freezing-works' buyers act together or in collusion?—Yes, they do act in collusion sometimes. I do not say they do it always, but they have done it.

And you have found great difficulty, I take it, with others in getting your meat into the works at times?—Yes.

What is the reason for that?—I cannot tell the reason, because I do not know much about the workings of the companies. I do know, however, that very often they combine together, and one company will buy stock on the hoof and divide it up with some of the others; or the buyers come along and take a portion of the stock without competing against each other.

You have found instances of that?—Yes; and if another competitor came in it would help to stop that.

And you think that Armour and Co. would supply the necessary competition?—I do.

Do you think that they would give more for stock than you are at present getting?—I do not say "more"; but they would be in the market as buyers, and probably stop the collusion on the part of buyers that has taken place in the past, where a buyer from one company will buy a line of lambs at the yards and divide it up with the others, and in that way not compete against each other. I think that Armour and Co. coming in would stop that sort of thing.

I suppose that being a shareholder you are always able to get your stock into the freezing-works?—I have only eighty shares, which I bought from a friend lately who wanted to go Home, to suit his convenience.

Have you found a difficulty in getting your stock into the works? And even if you wished to freeze for yourself, you could not get the space?—Yes; I have been refused.

*Mr. Field*: What is the extent of your operations as a sheep-farmer?—I fatten three or four hundred head of cattle every year, and three or four thousand sheep, and perhaps five hundred lambs.

Your operations are fairly big?—Yes.

What do you mean when you say that we can safeguard our interests against the operations of the American Meat Trust?—By not allowing Armour and Co. to own any freezing-works in New Zealand. Do not let them have freezing-works here. Let them buy on the hoof and export, and not carry on any works here, and let them be satisfied to do the same as anybody else.

I am not talking of Armour and Co. particularly; but do you not think there would be the danger of their outbidding other people to suit their own interests?—You cannot prevent them doing that now.

Can you see any means of preventing them doing it if they decide to, with all the money they have behind them?—I cannot answer that question, as I do not know much about the matter.

You say we can easily safeguard our interests; but how can we do that if they decide to do what it is alleged they have done in South America—practically monopolize the whole trade?—But they have freezing-works there.

No doubt; but I am talking about the possibility of their buying freezing-works here. Do you think we could prevent it?—I think so.

Do you not think they could do it by acting under other people's names?—I should not think so, as it is easily learnt who owns the works.

Do you say you have not seen the report of the Federal Commission set up in America?—No.

And your opinion is that you have nothing to fear from the American Meat Trust at present?—No. I would be in favour of cancelling their license as soon as they did anything detrimental to the producers, but until that is found to be the case I would continue the license.

Have you any idea as to how the Government should assist in providing precautions against the possible operations of the firm in question?—That is a matter I have not considered.

You are mainly here because you think it is wise to have them as competitors at the present time?—Yes, in the open market.

And you say that it is a fairly open market in Canterbury?—Yes.

Although you have seen evidence of the existence of a combine to keep prices down to a certain level?—Yes, I have seen that.

THOMAS HENRY WILKINSON examined. (No. 13).

*The Chairman*: What is your position?—I am a sheep and general farmer from North Canterbury.

Do you wish to make a statement on this subject?—I reiterate and endorse mostly what Mr. Hay has said; and I think strongly that Armour and Co. should have a free hand to buy our stock, just as any other firm has at the present time. I do not see any menace in their operations. I understand they have a yearly license now to operate, and as long as that is in vogue they cannot possibly do us any harm. We have heavy taxation to pay at present, and we want to take advantage of every means to obtain the money to meet it. I have been farming on my present place since 1893, mostly fattening stock during the whole time, and perhaps have a more open mind regarding the buying firms than many other farmers, because when I sell I usually sell the meat and work the skins myself separately. Of course, since the commandeering came in the difficulty has increased; but I have formed the opinion that Armour and Co. should be allowed to operate just as any other firm in New Zealand does to-day.

What is the feeling in your district?—The *bona fide* farmers and producers are all of the one opinion as far as my experience goes: they are in favour of the license. The feeling is very different to what it was a few weeks back, and people are now understanding the position better. When the proposal was first mooted a lot of people were led away by a few outsiders regarding the matter, but as soon as they understood the position—that the Government were able to cancel the license