

SILVER-BEET AS A FORAGE CROP.

ARTHUR P. HOPKINS, Works Manager, Belfast Freezing-works.

AMONGST the various tests conducted at their experimental forage farm at Belfast by the Canterbury Frozen Meat Company in co-operation with the Fields Division of the Department of Agriculture, Industries, and Commerce, during the past twelve months, by far the most important and conclusive was that which demonstrated in a practical form the advantages of growing silver-beet or Swiss chard for topping off and finishing forward store lambs or wethers. From our experience at Belfast I believe it to have many advantages over either rape or kale. It is more quickly grown, recovers quicker from feeding off, is absolutely immune from blight, and, as far as my observation went, no tendency to either scouring or bloating was noticed. The only pest observable was a slight attack of the leaf-miner, which occurred before the first eating-off and did not recur in the subsequent growths.

The stock fed off at Belfast were mainly in the first instance most indifferent low-priced stores (hoggets and two-tooths), but which were eventually killed and sold in the company's butchers' shops at a considerable profit.

The breaks were fed off altogether six times during twelve months. It may be as well to mention here the advisability of feeding silver-beet off quickly and in small breaks, as the sheep eat it so greedily and closely that if they are left on too long the young shoots coming up are eaten right to the roots and the next growth necessarily suffers.

There is no doubt that stock will prefer it to either kale or rape. We found that rape could be fed off at least three times, kale only twice, the third time the stock (owing to its seeding) sulking on it; whereas they tackled the beet for the sixth time as greedily as at the first. The tendency of both rape and kale to blight must also be borne in mind. Had it not been for the long wet spell last winter, during which the retentive clay land at Belfast was too soft to put stock on, I am sure another feeding could have been taken off.

We used about 5 lb. seed to the acre, thinning the plants out 10 in. apart in the rows, and using 3 cwt. of the company's fertilizers per acre. Directly after each feeding-off the cultivator was run lightly between the rows.

From actual weighings, conducted by the Agricultural Department's officers under the superintendence of Mr. Alex. Macpherson (to whom