

the Gear Company, because they both buy the same meat. It must be an advantage to the Meat-export Company, inasmuch as the price indicates that it is better meat than that of the Gear Company, although it is precisely the same sheep.

29. Do you know whether any buyers have ever given any inducement to the farmer to breed a class of sheep which they say you should breed—that is to say, about a 65 lb. sheep? By the way in which they purchase do they ever give you any inducement to breed 65 lb. sheep?—No; they never make any difference whatever. If you had those sheep they would be the ones the buyers would leave on your hands.

30. They would not take a 65 lb. sheep if you had sheep of 70 lb. or 80 lb.?—No. If you had a hundred and fifty wethers they will invariably take the biggest sheep you have got in the pen.

31. *Mr. Haselden.*] What do you do with the sheep that they will not take—the 65 lb. sheep?—If you have no others you must keep them yourself.

32. Will not the buyers take them eventually?—If I have got more than sufficient I am tied down to send them to the Johnsonville sale and get what I can for them.

33. The freezing buyers absolutely refuse to take the 65 lb. sheep?—They say that they are not good enough.

34. You said there was a difference of from 6d. to 1s. in the price higher up the coast, in the Rangitikei and Manawatu Districts?—Yes.

35. I am sorry I never saw that advantage. That is against your statement that there is only one price?—There is only one price in our district. As far as the buyers for the Meat-export Company and the Gear Company are concerned, they only go up to Shannon, and they have only the one price. But if Mr. Gillies is buying for the Gear Company higher up he will frequently give more. I have been frequently told by my own relations in Palmerston that they have received 11s. and 11s. 6d. for lambs which were no better than those we have down below.

36. But the railway freight is higher?—Yes; but they have competition with the Longburn Works.

37. You object to the English butchers selling New Zealand meat as English mutton; but do you not think it enables them to give us a bigger price for our mutton if they do so?—I do not think so. They will not pay any more, and they pocket the difference. We do not get it, and therefore do not benefit by it.

38. *Mr. G. W. Russell.*] I suppose you are quite aware that all the people connected in a large way with the frozen-meat trade object to anything in the way of compulsory branding?—I suppose they would object to anything in that way.

39. Do you hold that your North Island sheep is as good as the South Island sheep?—Pound for pound it is.

40. What is the breed of your sheep?—Mine are Romneys.

41. Crossed with anything?—No; they have been practically Romneys for the last eight or nine years.

42. Have you ever had any estimate of the quantity of inside fat there is in your sheep?—No. A butcher told me some time ago the actual amount of fat he would get from a North Island wether, and I think it was 10 lb. That is how I arrived at the half-crown—at 3d. a pound, the price of tallow to-day.

43. You are aware that the custom of feeding sheep in the South Island is a great improvement on the North Island practice in the winter?—Yes.

44. Do you not consider that sheep systematically fed all through the winter season, so that they never stop growing or putting on fat, must produce a better class of sheep than the North Island sheep, which have to do the best they can during the winter, and then get a flush of feed in the spring?—That applies to some farmers, but other farmers keep their sheep going right through in the North Island; and as far as the lambs are concerned they are treated pretty well.

45. The principal grievance you have is that, as there are only two buyers, you do not get the benefit of competition?—Yes; and there is no retail trade whatever. Down South you have the Addington market, where, if you do not elect to sell on your own premises, you can send your sheep. Here you have to send your sheep to two or three yards; there is no option.

46. Has there ever been any attempt on the part of farmers to form a combination, and to employ the freezing-works to freeze on account of the combination?—Not on our coast.

47. It has not occurred to you that if the farmers, say, in the Horowhenua and Manawatu districts employed the freezing companies to freeze on their own account, you would then have the remedy in your own hands?—To a certain extent we should; but the bigger farmers on the Horowhenua side are largely interested in these two companies. Mr. Gear himself owns the biggest place at Te Horo, as large as nearly the whole of the rest. He has nearly 6,000 acres. A little further on there are big places with fifty or sixty thousand sheep, and these people are largely interested in the companies, and therefore it is not reasonable to expect them to assist a combination as against themselves.

48. You spoke of the Government making advances against the shipping-papers?—Yes.

49. Is it not possible for farmers to get advances from their bankers on the same terms?—Yes, you can get advances from the bankers; but it was suggested by me to carry on grading by the Government, so that you might get your advances from the bank. I think the Government should grade the meat, and then you have your warrant, and can get your advances.

50. But, after all, the difference between the grades would be only a bagatelle as against the total amount of the advances against your stock after it was frozen?—I do not think there would be very much difference in that portion of the thing as in the other point: that we want the handling of the meat at the other end. I think the meat should be graded and branded by Government Inspectors.

51. Of course, the altering of the arrangements at the other end would not affect the purchasing?—No.