

TRADE IN NEW ZEALAND PRODUCE.

Opinions of Importers.

Frozen Meat and Rabbits.—The principal of one of the largest meat-importing firms said he had no complaint except as to the New Zealand method of trading. He had sent purchasing agents to New Zealand, but the meat-producers there would not consign their produce—they preferred to sell it to the shipping companies and their agents, and in consequence the bulk of the meat goes to London. Meat from every other part of the world comes to England on consignment, and as New Zealand enters into competition with these countries, her producers could not continue to make terms for themselves. They could only obtain a larger market in Manchester by sending meat on consignment. If they did so they could draw on shipments up to a certain proportion of the value, and would receive prompt cash settlements. Lambs and young sheep are most in demand, having already superseded four-year-old sheep, which used to meet the popular taste. New Zealand lambs are the best imported. His experience was that the superior-artisan class and people who are members of co-operative societies will not have frozen meat. He finds when he gets meat from New Zealand that it is more convenient to have it consigned to Liverpool, for even when the steamer comes to Manchester they cannot put it out, as they cannot get at the particular consignment wanted. English mutton is now so dear that many leading butchers are compelled to sell frozen, but by doing so they generally spoil their trade in English, as their customers get suspicious that the frozen article is being sold as English. He believed that the prices of English and frozen mutton would approach nearer to each other. Frozen mutton is growing in popularity, and purchasers do not seem to mind the absence of flavour.

The manager of another meat-dealing concern said he would prefer to have foreign mutton shipped direct to Manchester, but his principals preferred shipping to London. Many thousands of pounds were lost every year through paying railway-freight on meat from London to Liverpool. He had been making representations on the subject to headquarters for years, but so far without result. The meat usually arrives in good condition, especially that sent through London.

Another local manager said he usually got his meat through Liverpool, and when he could not get it there he got it from London. The trade in frozen mutton was growing enormously: in seven years it had, in his case, increased from thirty lambs per week to three or four thousand. The demand is for small lambs; those from New Zealand are generally too fat. If there were greater facilities for landing New Zealand meat in Manchester the trade would grow more rapidly. Asked to state what were the obstacles, he blamed the Ship Canal Company for delays and disputes. For example, they made the shipowners shorten their funnels to get through the bridges, and when this was done they were prosecuted for causing a smoke nuisance. As showing what might be done in the way of popularising New Zealand produce, he mentioned that Mr. H. C. Cameron, before he became Produce Commissioner to the Government, started a New-Zealand-meat shop in Manchester, established a most profitable business, and now the shop is one of the largest and most prosperous in the city.

A partner in a large meat-importing concern that has a number of retail shops all over the United Kingdom said that a serious hindrance to the development of trade in New Zealand meat is the irregularity of the running of the west-coast steamers. February shipments of lambs sometimes do not leave New Zealand until the middle of March; they could never get reliable information as to the movements of the steamers. The s.s. "Fifeshire," with June shipments, did not leave New Zealand till the 8th July, and it was the first week in September when it reached England. What is necessary is that the steamers should leave New Zealand in the month in which the meat is shipped, and that information should be given as to the route, &c., so that they could calculate when the meat would arrive. If they had regular shipments by the west-coast steamers, and could get the meat delivered at Manchester, it would be much cheaper, and they could give a better price to the colonial producer. This season he had got 30,000 lambs from London which it would have suited him much better to have shipped direct to Manchester, but he could not ship to Manchester because of the irregularity of the service.

A dealer in New Zealand produce said that as long ago as 1898 he had worked up the establishment of direct trade between New Zealand and Manchester. In conjunction with another firm he had brought New Zealand meat, rabbits, &c., direct to this port. The Argentine people at once lowered the price of their meat, with the result that importations of mutton from New Zealand and Australia dropped. The trade by the west-coast route had since revived, and it would grow by natural and gradual process. A Government subsidy would undoubtedly improve the direct-steamer service and stimulate the development of trade; but even without that assistance the trade with Manchester had grown and would continue to grow steadily. He did not approve of opening shops to advertise New Zealand produce, as such action would tend to arouse hostility. When the proposal was mooted some time ago there was a great outcry against it from the retail butchers of Manchester. They were all desirous of doing a direct trade with New Zealand. At present in a great many cases return cargoes to the colony went through London. The buyers are stationed there, and they come to Manchester to buy goods, which are sent to London and repacked there.

A large dealer in rabbits remarked that the supply from New Zealand showed a rapid decline, and he quoted the following figures of imports from Australia and New Zealand:—

Country.					1900. Cases.	1906. Cases.
New Zealand	...	...	...	...	302,482	94,920
Australia	...	...	...	...	299,585	907,324