

An attempt was made during the year to form a Colonial Dairy-produce Committee, for the purpose of promoting the better distribution and handling of colonial dairy-produce on the markets of Great Britain. Unfortunately, owing to the various trade interests involved, this endeavour, which was in accordance with a desire of dairy factory companies in New Zealand, was unsuccessful.

BUTTER.

Compared with any previous official year the price realised on an average for New Zealand choicest butter during the past twelve months has been higher than any hitherto recorded—it has been 112s. per hundredweight. For the previous twelve months, during which, for a time, as may be recollected, exceptionally high values were secured, the average was only 111s. While this satisfactory result has been obtained, I regret to note that there has not been such keenness in buying and freedom in handling New Zealand butter as in recent years. This, I am certain, has been largely owing to the increase in moisture which has been found in it. Concerning this increase a feeling of doubt has existed in the minds of the distributors and retailers, and serious complaints have reached me from traders handling the butter regarding it. Instead of getting closer in price to Danish butter, as had been hoped, New Zealand butter would appear to have been forced downwards in value. The difference in price between Danish and New Zealand butter is now greater than it has been for some length of time. It has recently been widening, until at the close of the twelvemonth there has been a difference of 12s. per hundredweight, whereas in the earlier part of the season 3s. to 4s. only separated them. In former years New Zealand butter frequently equalled Danish in price, or was within 2s. per hundredweight of it.

Generally speaking, except on the score of moisture, satisfaction has been expressed with the quality of New Zealand butter coming forward this season. There have, however, been one or two instances in which my attention has been drawn to faults. Short weight has been reported to me, and fishiness has been complained of.

The reports sent to Wellington have given information concerning individual shipments of butter.

CHEESE.

The market for New Zealand cheese has, as in the previous year, been highly satisfactory, the average price of 60s. per hundredweight having been obtained for the shipments. Buyers, while never showing any keenness to lay in stocks, have taken such supplies as they found necessary for their immediate requirements, and, as holders have been firm, have paid full value for them. Coloured cheese has been in short supply, and consequently for this a premium has been paid. New Zealand cheese has been giving satisfaction to those cutting it, and everywhere the opinion is expressed that the shipments recently coming to hand have shown a marked improvement on those of previous years. I am satisfied that this improvement in quality is largely due to the higher range of temperatures which have been maintained in the cheese-chambers on board ship during the voyage this season. As might be expected, a slight increase in the loss of weight in the cheese has been found, owing, undoubtedly, I consider, to the process of curing at the higher temperatures while in transit. The advantage gained from having cheese landed as has been done this season is, I consider, very great. Buyers bid for it more freely, so securing better prices with a readier sale, and each shipment is consequently more easily cleared up. The reputation of the New Zealand article is increased, and altogether the slight loss in weight that may occur is more than compensated for by the benefits derived.

MUTTON.

Supplies lately arriving have been much in excess of requirements, and consequently stocks of mutton have been accumulating in the cold-air stores. The outlook is not at all promising, as there is little prospect of an advance in prices being obtained for some considerable time.

There is no development in the distribution of New Zealand mutton throughout the country to record this year. Trade has continued steadily in the same channels as during previous years.

LAMB.

The consumption of New Zealand lamb has been good, and its reputation has been maintained. As with mutton, so with lamb, little has been done to specialise it in the Home markets. The reputation of "Canterbury" lamb is well known; but, unfortunately, this term is now generally applied in the trade to all frozen meat, no matter where from.

BEEF.

There is little to be said concerning the market for New Zealand beef during the past year. Prices have been fairly steady, but not high. The trade is, of course, small, although there has been an increase in shipments. No complaints have been received concerning the quality of the beef, which has generally given satisfaction to buyers.

HEMP.

Another year of very unsatisfactory trade on the hemp-market has to be recorded. The continued heavy shipments from Manila are undoubtedly the main cause of this.