

If retail prices move with wholesale prices, and if, as Mr. G. H. Knibbs states, "it is not unlikely that expenditure on food alone furnishes a true indication of the standard of material well-being,"* this table would provide us with a good means of measuring the extent of the change in the cost of living during the last twenty years. Taking the single years 1891 and 1911, there is a rise of 12·7 per cent. If in order to reduce the influence of an abnormal year we take the averages of the first and last five-year period, the rise is only 10·9 per cent. Comparing the year 1911 with the triennial period 1894–96, there is a rise of 20 per cent. The rise has been more marked after 1901 than before, and during the nineties there were four years in which prices fell. The most abrupt changes occurred in the rises of 1902, 1905, 1907, 1908, and 1911; the falls in 1904 and 1909 were also severe. Since 1901 the rise has been 15 per cent.; if we take the average of the first and last five-year periods, 1901–5 and 1907–11, it has been nearly 5 per cent. This rise in these food-prices would have been slightly greater but for the effect of the remission of certain import duties.

This table may be compared with that given in evidence by Dr. McIlraith (page 274).

TABLE 3.—INDEX NUMBERS INDICATING VARIATIONS IN PRICES OF CERTAIN COMMODITIES.
(Base, 1890–99 = 100.)

Year.	Cereals.	Animal Products.	Other Foodstuffs.
1895	85	94	93
1900	84	113	101
1908	133	134	103
1909	104	132	102
1910	110	135	103
1911	119	131	107
1912, to end June	115	145	111

From this table it would appear that the group "animal products" shows the highest rate of increase; but articles other than foodstuffs are included in this group.

Table 30 in Chapter IV shows that whilst the general level of prices in New Zealand rose 7 per cent., when we compare the average prices for the two five-year periods 1894–98 and 1906–10, the following important foodstuffs rose higher than this average: Wheat (10 per cent.), barley (17), beef (20), mutton (20), lamb (25), bacon (36), butter (41), and cheese (61): showing a general rise for this group of 29 per cent. above the average rise. The price of tea, coffee, flour, and oats rose less than the average; and only the price of sugar, rice, and currants fell.

Mr. F. P. Wilson (page 408) adapted Dr. McIlraith's figures in convenient form for estimating the percentage of change over the last twenty years. This portion of his evidence is embodied in the following table:—

TABLE 4.—INDEX NUMBERS OF PRICES IN NEW ZEALAND, WITH BASE 1891 = 100.

Year.	Agricultural Products.	Pastoral Products.	Beverages.	Other Foods.	Average of the Four Groups.	All Commodities.
1891	100	100	100	100	100	100
1896	104	91	98	74	92	89
1901	82	108	98	79	92	90
1906	105	129	98	75	102	93
1910	110	132	107	70	105	95

The five agricultural products, wheat, flour, barley, oats, and oatmeal, show a rise of 10 per cent., comparing the first and last year of the period; the other foods, which include sugar, currants, sultanas, rice, sago, salt, salmon, and pepper, a fall of 30 per cent., due largely to fiscal changes. Wool is included in pastoral products.

* "The Cost of Living in Australia," p. 1177.