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To assist in Australia's food production, negotiations are in progress for the importation of 10,000 tractors. Pre-war importations averaged 3,000 yearly.

The Australian Agricultural Council, at its meeting in Sydney during February, decided that State and Commonwealth authorities should co-operate in preparing period market outlook statements for the primary industries. Work in this connection in respect of New South Wales will be principally in the hands of this Division.

Liaison arrangements have been established between this Division and the new Commonwealth Bureau of Agricultural Economics. This liaison will enable the closest co-operation on surveys and investigations of mutual interest, and a fuller interchange of information concerning economic developments in Australian agriculture, particularly as it concerns the market outlook for the main primary products.

An officer of this Division participated in recent State and Commonwealth discussions on planting policy for the citrus industry. Assistance has already been given to the Commonwealth in the preliminary work on an apple and pear survey shortly to be undertaken along similar lines to the earlier citrus survey.

SALES OF LIVESTOCK AT HOMEBUSH, SYDNEY

February, 1946.

SHEEP.

Supplies Fall Off.

Following on the beneficial rain which was received in many parts of the State during the month, the supply position in respect of both sheep and lambs deteriorated considerably, supplies falling far short of normal requirements. Yardings at Homebush amounted to 186,272 head, representing a decline of 91,908 compared with the January pennings.

Prime Sheep Scarce.

Wethers and ewes submitted aggregated 120,232, suitable trade sheep forming a substantial proportion of the offerings. Generally, there was a scarcity of prime heavy grades, more particularly crossbred wethers. Heavy ewes at times made a fair showing, some extra heavy drafts being included.

Rates Advance.

The sheep market showed some irregularity over the period but on the average prices were higher. Opening auctions showed little change in values, but at the next following sale a cheaper market was evident, the fall in prices ranging from 1s. to 2s. per head. Subsequently the market showed a strong upward trend, the increase in prices ranging from 2s. to 4s. and in places 5s. per head, although rates at closing generally were from 1s. to 2s. per head lower.

Good, heavy wethers at times were obtained for 4¾d. to 5½d. per lb. but mostly this class realised 5d. to 6¼d., while prime lines sold at 6½d. to 6¾d. per lb. Light trade wethers usually sold at from 5¼d. to 6¼d. but at times made to 6¾d. per lb. Prime heavy ewes were disposed of at up to 5½d. per lb. but for the most part sales were at 4d. to 5d. Light ewes on occasions were worth from 5½d. to 6d., but over the period prices chiefly ranged from 4d. to 5¼d. per lb. Generally, the cost of mutton on the average was about ¾d. per lb. higher than during January. Some exceptionally good prices were obtained and rates often exceeded 30s. per head, prime heavy wethers reaching 37s. and ewes 34s.

During the period a rise of ½d. per lb. was announced in the wholesale price of wether, ewe and hogget mutton to operate from Monday, 25th February, 1946. Corresponding increases, ranging from ½d. to 1d. per lb., were also granted on certain retail cuts of mutton.

Lamb Supplies Decline.

Only relatively small supplies of lambs and suckers were available, pennings totalling 66,040 head or about 41,000 fewer than in January. The general standard of quality showed some improvement, nevertheless medium quality light descriptions continued to be well represented. Prime light grades were scarce but moderate numbers of good to prime lambs, dressing from 36 lb. upwards, were available.

Strong Market Rules.

An active demand prevailed for the greater part of the period for all classes. Early in the month values were not fully maintained, a decline of from 1s. to 1s. 6d. per head taking place. Later, however, the fall in prices was fully recovered and the market closed very firm.

A stimulus to improved rates was the increase in the wholesale ceiling price which operated from 6th February, 1946. Rates advanced by 1d. per lb. to 9¾d. for lamb up to 36 lb. and to 9¼d. per lb. for lambs over 36 lb. Corresponding increases in the retail "ceilings" were also made ranging from 1d. per lb. on neck chops, legs, shoulders, forequarters, hindquarters, scrag neck, leg chops and rolled forequarter to 2d. per lb. on short loin and chump chops, cutlets and trimmed loins.

During the period, prime heavy lambs and suckers made to 10d. per lb. but at times only 8d. was realised. Mostly, however, rates ranged from 8½d. to 9¾d. Good, light descriptions sold to 11d. per lb. but on occasions were purchased for 8¾d. Generally operators paid from 9d. to 10½d. per lb. over the period. Prices in excess of 30s. per head were common, while up to 39s. per head was obtained.

Hoggets were also in comparatively short supply and met with a very keen inquiry at all times at prices ranging to 7¾d. per lb., but in some instances good trade lines were purchased for 6d. per lb.

CATTLE.

Reduced Supplies.

Yardings of cattle, although fairly even, were much lighter, the monthly aggregate, 16,323 head, showing a sharp reduction on the January total. The offerings included 2,340 auctioned in the store section.

Quality Variable.

The general standard of quality varied considerably while the proportion of grown stock also fluctuated to a marked degree. For the most part, prime descriptions were scarce, while small, fair trade cattle comprised a substantial proportion of the pennings.

Beneficial Rains Received.

During the period, good rains were again recorded in various parts of the State, including Western areas, and the pastoral position is fairly satisfactory. The heavier falls, however, were scattered and at the close of the month many centres were in need of further moisture.

Medium Weight Bullocks in Moderate Supply.

Consignments of bullocks were mostly moderate and comprised chiefly good trade quality medium weights. On several occasions, heavy bullocks made a fair showing and a noticeable proportion of prime grades was included.

A weaker market was evident early in the period when values ranged from 49s. to 54s. per 100 lb.. Rates subsequently, however, were on a higher level and ranged generally to 56s. with odd, prime medium-weights realising to 58s. per 100 lb. On a per head basis, prices reached £21 11s.

Prime Steers Scarce.

Steers were well supplied during the first half of the month but later consignments were relatively light. For the most part, prime descriptions were very scarce, the bulk consisting of fair trade lightweights.

A strong demand ruled, particularly for good quality weighty lines, and rates reached 59s. per 100 lb. The market, however, was easier at closing, quotations for good to prime grades being 51s. to 55s. per 100 lb.

Steady Demand for Cows.

Supplies of cows fluctuated considerably but pennings were mostly satisfactory. Both light and heavy sorts of good trade standard were represented. A steady demand prevailed and variations in values were not marked. Average rates were about equal to those of the previous month, ranging to 48s. per 100 lb.

High Prices for Heifers.

Heifers were fairly well supplied, particularly during the second half of the month. Consignments chiefly comprised good trade lightweights. Values were considerably higher and as much as 58s. per 100 lb. was realised.

Strong Demand for Vealers.

Vealers were mostly very fair quality and included all grades of weight. Prime descriptions were scarce but the more weighty sorts included a substantial proportion of good trade lines.

Average values showed an improvement on January realisations and prices reached as high as 70s. per 100 lb. The market was easier at closing, however, at 53s. to 63s. per 100 lb.

PIGS.

Supplies Well Maintained.

Consignments of pigs were extremely irregular and while the number penned on the opening sale-day exceeded 3,000, the yarding at the closing auction in February was unusually light. Compared with the aggregate of the previous month, the total number submitted, viz., 8,800 head, showed little alteration. Arrivals by rail accounted for 5,865 while an additional 845 were disposed of by private treaty.

High Values of Baconers.

Baconers were well represented throughout the period and comprised all grades of weight, with extra-heavy descriptions making a particularly good showing. Quality ranged chiefly from fair to good trade.

Demand was very keen and the higher rates of January were exceeded during the first half of the period when the carcase equivalent values of most lines averaged about 10¼d. per lb. and ranged to 10¾d. Request was unusually strong for pigs exceeding 200 lb. in weight, and quotations for extra-heavy pigs in the 200-240 lb. grade ranged to 9½d. throughout the period. The scheduled price under the Pig Meat Plan for any pig exceeding 200 lb. is only 5d. per lb. On a per head basis, prices ranged to £8 9s. 6d.

The market was not quite so firm during the second half of February and many lines showed a decline of about ½d. per lb. Values generally, however, remained well above the basic rate of 9d. per lb.

Light Supply of Backfatters.

Supplies of backfatters for the most part were limited. The general quality was fairly good and offerings usually included several prime, extra-heavy descriptions. The market was very firm, particularly during the first half of the period, when values ranged to 7½d. per lb. Up to £15 8s. 6d. per head was realised.

Keen Demand for Porkers.

Consignments of porkers made the best showing for some considerable time on the first sale-day of the period but at closing, supplies were light and quality only fair. The bulk of the pennings comprised pigs suitable for purchase as stores.

Demand was keen throughout, rates ranging to 16¼d. per lb. for lightweights and 12½d. per lb. for heavy sorts.

J. R. WILLIAMS AND G. COLEMAN.

FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SALES AT CITY MUNICIPAL MARKETS.

February, 1946.

FRUIT.

Market for Apples Weakens.

Consignments of apples from local and interstate sources (including Queensland, Victoria and South Australia) increased as the month advanced. Demand was mainly for large fruit, sizes below 2⅜ inch being difficult to sell. The fixed maximum of 29s. per bushel was realised for local Jonathans, Delicious and McIntosh Reds until fairly late in the month but the market was weaker subsequently, few sales exceeding 25s. while rates generally ranged from 10s. to 20s. per bushel.

The first Tasmanian shipment, comprising Worcester Pearmain and Alfristons, was available on 22nd February. From 10s. to 18s. was asked for the first-mentioned variety and 10s. to 12s. for Alfristons but demand was slow and values had to be lowered. At closing, prices were 8s. to 12s. and 8s. to 10s., respectively.

Generally, satisfactory yields of apples are anticipated throughout New South Wales and other States and the general opinion in trade circles is that rates this season will be on a lower scale than last year, when production was particularly light.

Williams Pears Cheaper.

Fairly large consignments of Williams pears were received from Victoria and towards the close of the month increased quantities of this variety were forwarded from orchards in inland districts of this State.

Request generally was satisfactory for green packs but prices could not be maintained; 14s. to 16s. secured the best lines on offer while much lower rates were accepted for small sizes and packs that had reached maturity.