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Editorial.

FRUIT MARKETS IN COUNTRY CENTRES.

Although under the Local Government Act provision is made for Councils to set up markets and trade in farm produce, not one of the 300 Shire and Municipal Councils in New South Wales has so far exercised this power; and it seems doubtful whether they ever will. The criticism is frequently made of our existing marketing system that most of the fruit and vegetables leaving the farms is forwarded direct to the City Markets, supplies for country towns then having to be re-railed often over the same routes to the very centres where they were produced. Clearly this results in deterioration in quality and added costs, and there are sound arguments for the establishment of wholesale markets in selected country towns—especially rail junctions—which could supply the needs of fruiterers in nearby centres.

Even if Municipal Councils are not interested to engage in trading in farm produce—and there are certain obvious difficulties in this connection—they could assist materially by acquiring premises for a market and letting them at small charge to a co-operative organisation which would run the whole concern. With small overhead expenses to meet, there would be every chance of consumers getting their fruits and vegetables at reasonable rates, and producers would get rebates on the year's trading profits. The co-operative could arrange for all types of produce to be supplied direct—some from local growers, some from co-operatives in other parts of the State, and the balance from the nearest large wholesale market. Business in the early stages could be assured by contact with retailers to ascertain requirements, say three times a week, and by arranging in advance with producers, co-operatives and agents for supplies as needed. This system has been adopted by private wholesalers in Broken Hill and works admirably. The important point is that continuity and variety of supply must be assured at the market, for the consuming public has a wide variety of tastes, and greengrocers are obliged by competition to stock practically all lines to satisfy public demand. The first essential is that the market should be conducted on a wholesale basis, but if it traded for retail purposes as well on certain days in the week or for certain hours each day this would tend to stabilise local retail prices in the shops, without interfering unduly with the trade conducted by existing fruiterers.

Surveys in country towns have shown that in a number of instances the methods adopted by shopkeepers in securing fruits and vegetables are haphazard. Supplies are not always continuous and prices are often excessive. The whole question of fruit and vegetable marketing is badly in need of overhaul, in both city and country. In remedying the position, established practices would have to be broken down, but with so many who stand to gain from an improved system, the problem demands attention.

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