

WHAT ABOUT FARM FLOCKS?

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Will Sheep Continue to Pay; and What Are the Factors Involved in the Successful Handling of the Farm Flock?

The Trend of the Sheep Industry

The sheep industry produces two of our standard, much needed commodities, namely, meat and wool. Lamb and mutton are among the most healthful, nutritious and palatable of meats. Among the fibers, wool ranks next after cotton in importance. The average American uses five pounds of wool annually, while the world per capita production is only two pounds.

Foreign competition in sheep-raising has diminished during the past few years. Argentine, New Zealand, Australia, and the other principal sheep producing countries, with the possible exception of South Africa, are gradually replacing the range sheep industry with grain farming and more intensive ranching. The indications point to a continuation of this practice. In our own country it is probable that the same practice will prevail, the farm flock gradually replacing the larger range unit in importance in sheep production.

The attitude of mind being enjoyed by sheepmen can be gleaned from the following quotation taken from the December issue of *The American Sheep Breeder and Wool Grower*: "Optimism prevails in the shepherd clan. Some grades of wool are crowding the seventy-five cent mark, lambs are high and going higher * * * The President is with the sheep industry. No changes in the wool tariff are likely for some time. The shepherd's goose hangs high."

The possibilities of developing the farm flock phase of our sheep industry are particularly good in the irrigated valleys of Southern Arizona. Early lambs can be easily produced at a time when they will command the highest prices on eastern markets.

Advantages of Sheep on the Farm

Sheepmen claim, and justly so, for their claims are generally conceded by experienced men, that sheep show certain benefits or advantages which justify their place in a system of permanent agriculture. For instance, sale of lambs in fall or spring, wool in the spring, and breeding stock at all seasons, provide at least two cash returns annually. The sheep will consume scrubby and weedy types of



A GROUP OF TWO-YEAR-OLD EWES ON A VALLEY FARM.

vegetation little utilized by other classes of livestock. They eat the unmarketable roughages and clean up fence corners, waste areas and ditch banks. No expensive buildings are required for the farm flocks in Southern Arizona. Proper fencing and provision for shade, however, are necessities. Sheep equalize the labor on the farm, requiring least attention in summer when labor is scarce, and most in winter when it is cheap and easily obtained. These little animals are our most economical producers of meat, requiring less feed per pound of gain than the other classes of livestock. Only a small investment is necessary and the turnover is rapid. Well managed farm flocks often show a percentage increase of 125 per cent or even more. Sheep manure is higher in nitrogen and potassium, worth more per ton than hog, cattle, or horse manure, and is distributed rather evenly over the soil, the largest quantities being deposited in the highest spots where it is usually most needed.

Factors That Often Discourage

There is no denying that the farm flock has been a disappointment to

many farmers. Numerous causes have been cited as contributory to the failure of the farm flock enterprise. Lack of readiness for the enterprise is often the cause of discouragement. Remember, sheep are a nuisance unless you are equipped for handling them properly. Equip first, then bring the stock home. There are sheep enthusiasts who will inform you that little care is necessary in handling sheep. Comparatively speaking that is true, but some care is necessary, and it should be given at the time it is needed. Unthrifty ewes, inferior lambs, and consequent failure of the farm flock are the results obtained by lack of care. With increasing operating expenses, better care and increased quantity and quality of both lambs and fleece are necessary. Experience is a vital factor in connection with sheep operations. These animals are not so well adapted to the experimental procedure of an untrained husbandman as are hogs and cattle. The layout of equipment, the lambing period, winter feeding, and the fattening process are all operations which are best accomplished by

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the trained shepherd. The question of permanency is one which often figures materially in the success of the farm flock. The man who goes into the business one day and out the next is likely to show his returns with red figures. Farm sheep, as a rule, are profitable only when kept over a period of years. Disease often makes inroads leading from the plane of success. The sheep tick, scab mite, screw worm, round worm, and bloat may each take its toll and render the enterprise unprofitable. Remedial measures of a medicinal nature may be employed, or some measure of prevention may be accomplished by proper nourishment. Before making the investment it is well to take into consideration the marketing of the products. Can the wool be disposed of profitably? Can the lambs be fattened, and sold locally or polled and shipped to the larger markets?

Selection of Foundation Stock

In securing the animals for the flock, the number to buy is governed, or course, by the conditions on the farm. The amount of roughage, of other livestock, of waste land, of permanent and temporary pasture facilities, and of time and labor at one's disposal are important considerations. The safest and best way for the un-

trained sheepman is to get a few individuals and increase the flock as he gains in experience, though for the trained man it may prove more profitable to stock to capacity at once. Get good breeding stock. The increasing cost of maintaining an animal on the valley farms makes it imperative that one get animals with constitution, feeding capacity, quality, and breeding characteristics as well as correct in mutton type and in quantity and quality of fleece. The individuals in the flock should be uniform. An inferior ram is un-economical as an investment. Breeds of the heavy mutton type are not especially adapted to our hot climate, but native ewe or native ewe-mutton ram crosses do very well.

Feeding the Sheep

With considerable ditch bank and other pasture available little feed is required until fall. Fields from which the crops have been removed, and alfalfa land after the last cutting, may be pastured to advantage. Then as these feeds become scarce and it approaches lambing time the ewes should have grain in addition to roughage and, if possible, a little silage should be allowed. Grain feeding should extend through the suckling period and until the ewes and lambs are turned to pasture in the spring. Feed well. It pays.

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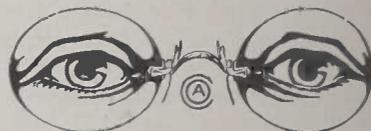
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