

Sheep Production

program recommended

R. F. Miller

Sheep form an important part of California agriculture. Thousands of acres of the state's grazing land can be utilized best by sheep. Since sheep fit well into grain farming rotation to restore soil fertility, they can be used profitably on the worn out grain land which has been over-farmed in California.

Crossbreeding is the basis of our commercial sheep production, and the crossing of a wool type grade or crossbred ewe with a mutton type sire is the most profitable breeding program. Most growers prefer a crossbred white-face ewe—such as Corriedale-Rambouillet, Romeldale-Rambouillet—as a basis of the breeding flock. Such ewes are hardy, good rustlers, early lambers, heavy shearers, and usually good milkers.

Ewes should be selected for size, vigor, and milking qualities. Larger ewes within a certain breed or type produce the heaviest lambs. Milking qualities of ewes are important since lambs are marketed at an early age and it has been estimated that at least 75% of gain in lambs up to weaning time is derived from milk.

In commercial production the ram's inheritance represents over 90% in lambs produced. He may sire 50 to 75 lambs in a season whereas the ewe only delivers one or possibly two lambs. Selecting a ram of good size and with a record of producing lambs of weight and type acceptable to the trade means money in the producer's pocket. He should be a pure-bred to insure his carrying the proper inheritance for transmitting his kind.

Profitable production is based largely on grass or good range. The extensive development of irrigated pastures in California has provided productive fields of clover and trefoil.

In spring lamb production, supplemental feeding is recommended during the fall and winter months when natural feed often is limited. Parturition and lactation place a heavy drain on the ewes and supplemental feeding of alfalfa hay, cottonseed cake, shelled corn, cull beans, barley or other feeds generally is recommended for production of choice spring lambs. Feeding also increases the weight of the wool clip.

Lambing

Clean lambing quarters and sanitary precautions prevent navel ill or other infections of young lambs. A well-bedded

barn or open shed is desirable for lambing ewes, although outside or field lambing is preferred in favorable weather. Watch the lambing flock closely and render assistance when necessary. The aim these days is to save all the twins, especially under farm conditions.

Observations at the Ohio Experimental Station in 1947 have shown that ewes which raised twin lambs and sheared 12 pounds of wool made a gross return of \$55.84 per ewe, while ewes of the same breed which raised single lambs made a gross return of \$28.82 per ewe. Other ewes of the same breed which did not lamb or which did not raise a lamb cost the grower about \$18 net after the wool sale. Infant mortality is far too high in many flocks and can be prevented largely by proper feed, care, and management of the flock.

Sanitation

Docking and marking can be done when the lambs are two or three weeks old, depending upon size and development. Sanitary measures are important when using the knife and freshly marked lambs should not be allowed to enter a dirty corral or barn. The latest method of docking and marking utilizes a special instrument for placing a small rubber ring over the scrotum or the dock, and in due course of time these appendages drop off. This method—although new—has been accepted as very satisfactory since there is no bleeding, no open wound and consequently the danger of infection is minimized.

Parasites

Parasites are always a possible cause of loss and unthriftiness particularly when irrigated pastures are over-grazed by lambs. A simple and efficient method of controlling intestinal worms consists of adding one pound of phenothiazine powder to every 10 pounds of salt and keeping this mixture in a salt box or trough where the sheep have free access to it. In cases where lambs are heavily infected, an individual treatment with phenothiazine pellets or a proper drench of phenothiazine powder is recommended in addition to the lick.

While dipping is a satisfactory remedy for ticks or lice it is simpler and cheaper to spray with DDT or rotenone. Four pounds of 50% DDT to 100 gallons of water or one-half pound of 5% rotenone to 100 gallons of water are effective when applied as a spray—preferably at 300 pounds pressure.

Health

Watch for foot rot, Dobie mouth and other ailments. Sheep that are lamed by foot rot should be isolated from the main flock, the feet thoroughly trimmed to expose the infection and treated with a strong solution of blue stone and water—one pound of blue stone to one gallon of water. When many sheep are affected they can be driven through a shallow trough filled with blue stone solution once a week or every other day, depending on the severity of the outbreak.

Dobie mouth is sometimes found among lambs one to four weeks old when the lips and mouth will become covered with small scabs due to a minor infection and usually heals in about 10 days. Treat by breaking the scabs and rubbing in ordinary vinegar. Other mild disinfectants also may be used.

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Choice California spring lambs ready for shipment to central markets. These lambs are the result of mating mutton type rams with crossbred white-face ewes.

