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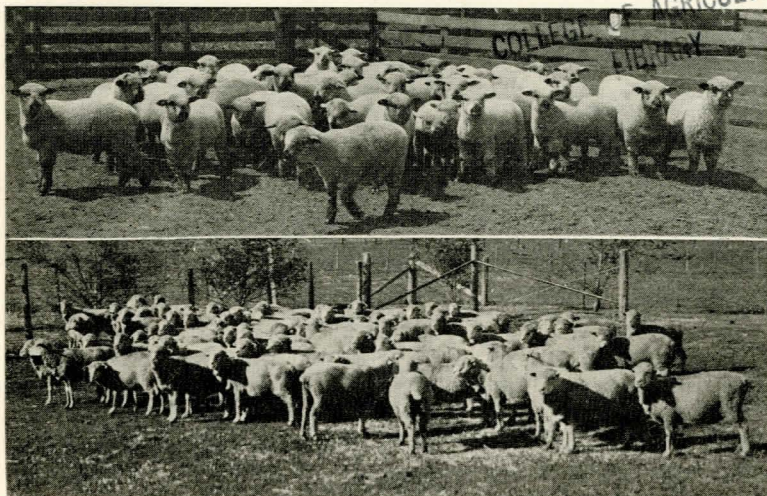
Extension Circular 222

July, 1938

The University of Nebraska Agricultural College Extension Service
and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating
W. H. Brokaw, Director, Lincoln

Starting Your New Sheep Flock

WALTER TOLMAN



Western ewes and some of their market-topping spring lambs.

NEW INTEREST in sheep flocks on Nebraska farms is developing for several reasons:

Sheep consume roughage and only a minimum amount of grain.

They produce two crops per year, lambs and wool.

Returns are large for the capital invested.

Sheep are unaffected by Bang's disease of cattle (contagious abortion).

They are better equipped to chew small hard grains such as barley, rye, and the grain of sorghum fodder than cattle and hogs.

The replacement of horses by tractors is releasing feed which may be used by sheep.

Sheep eat some weeds refused by other livestock.

Sheep manure is especially valuable.

The demand of sheep for extra care is at a season when other work is light.

Sheep Care

Anyone who has the qualifications of a good hogman will succeed with sheep, someone has said. Sheep, like hogs, respond to care and close attention. The care given at lambing and farrowing are about the same; often a hog-farrowing house is used for lambing. Elaborate equipment is not

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needed for sheep. A clean, dry place protected from the wind is all that is required. Parasite control of sheep is not unlike swine sanitation. With sheep as with swine the number and strength of the young depend to a great extent on the feed and care of the mother.

Sheep Feeds

Sheep resemble cattle and horses in their feed habits. Pasture and roughage make up most of their ration, although a successful flock owner expects to feed some concentrates. They have a special liking for young, tender growth and will eat many weeds which cattle and horses refuse. Sheep, like horses, are particular feeders and may be injured or even killed by spoiled or moldy feed and by overfeeding grain or by sudden changes of feed. Fresh, clean water and feed are necessary to success in handling them.

Sheep Are Timid

Sheep are timid, and should be handled quietly and patiently. Dogs and coyotes attack them to a greater extent than other farm animals. Usually they are confined in a dog-proof corral at night. Bells on some of the sheep may serve to scare coyotes and warn the owner when sheep are disturbed.

A Unit

Sheep are small animals. Seven ewes may be fed on the feed required by one cow or horse. The cost of seven yearling ewes is about the same as the cost of one two-year-old stock cow of comparable quality.

One ram will serve 30 or 40 ewes. Since sheep flock together and will require some special fencing anyway, 30 or 40 are little or no more trouble than one or a dozen. A unit of 30 or 40 ewes will bring enough income to justify their care, while 5 or 6 may be only a nuisance.

Selecting Breeding Ewes

Western range-bred ewes are considered ideal foundation stock for farm flocks because they are hardy, relatively free from parasites and are heavy shearers and good mothers. Experienced sheepmen are better qualified to raise purebreds than are beginners. Just as gilts and heifers are preferred to aged sows and cows for foundation stock, young ewes are most valuable. Ewe lambs are not satisfactory for breeding. They will breed late if at all, often have trouble at lambing time because of their lack of size, and may have very little milk and so disown their lambs or raise only culls.

Yearling ewes are most valuable although ewes from 1 to 4 years old may be selected. Until a sheep is four years old its age can be told within a few months. Lambs have small teeth. At from about 14 to 18 months the middle pair of incisors are replaced by large, broad, permanent teeth. At about two years two more large teeth come in, one on each side of the other pair. The next pair of lamb teeth are replaced at about three years and the last pair at about four years. Yearling ewes may be bought from the range. Another very satisfactory way of securing yearlings is to sort ewe lambs from western feeder lambs. These lambs may be grown out for breeding the next fall. The first wool clip should pay the wintering cost.

Aged Ewes

As ewes advance in age they will shear lighter, require more grain, and be more likely to die. A ewe completes her usefulness at six or seven years. Aged ewes are sometimes available as breeders at low cost. If their teeth and udders are sound and if they are in rugged condition they may be profitable as "one-year breeders" in the hands of experienced sheepmen, in



A very desirable type western ewe and one not so deep-bodied, straight-lined, or smooth-necked.

spite of higher feed requirements, extra care needs, and possible high death loss. Purchase of such ewes has done as much as any other one thing to discourage new sheep owners because their handling is the job of an expert.

Ewe Type

Black-faced and white-faced western crossbred ewes are available. The white-faced ewes showing a cross of Corriedale, Columbia, Lincoln, or Panama are as valuable as the black-faced range ewes if they are large, heavy-boned, straight-lined, and relatively smooth.

The Ram

Only a thick-fleshed, rugged ram of mutton breeding is satisfactory for producing market lambs from western ewes. A ram one to five years old should serve 30 to 45 ewes.

Early or Late Lambs

The lamb market is usually high in May and early June. The summer and fall market is often \$2 to \$3 lower. January, February, and some March lambs may sell on this favorable early market if they are grain-fed. Lambs marketed by early June escape worm infestation and the setback of hot weather. Extra attention is required at breeding and lambing time for early lambs. Early lambs are usually decidedly most profitable for those who have the equipment, time, and temperament to handle them successfully. The time from breeding to lambing is approximately five months.

Ewes lambing in April and May require less care at breeding and lambing time. While these ewes are usually fed some grain before lambing

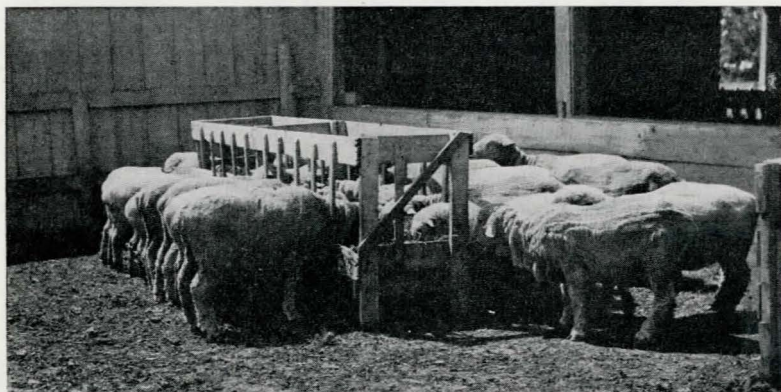
they are soon on pasture and need no more. If the pasture is good the late lambs often sell at the market top in the fall which is usually lower than the market top in the spring, with no grain although a short grain feed is needed if pastures are short or dry.

Feeding Farm Sheep

A farm flock will pick much of their living from feed that would otherwise be wasted. Sheep are in no sense scavengers but will pay for good feed and care.



Pasture, fresh water, and salt fill the ewes' summer feed needs.



Alfalfa is the basis of the best winter rations.

Alfalfa or other feed high in protein and mineral is needed when sheep are not on pasture. Some grain is fed in almost all flocks.

Nebraska Circular 48, Farm Sheep Facts, should be studied by every Nebraska sheep producer. Your County Agricultural Agent has other bulletins and can help you with your sheep problems.