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Scientific Fur Farming Is the Latest Wrinkle

A Kansas Breeder Produces Expensive Asiatic Lamb Pelts, Equal or Superior to Imported Karakule Article.

(Written by Harlan D. Smith of Kansas)

(The Orange Judd Northwest Farmstead) It has fallen to the lot of a Kansas farmer to introduce a new industry to the farming sections of the United States—fur raising. L. M. Crawford of Chase county is the first man in the United States to produce the expensive Persian lamb, Astrakhan and Krimmer furs for commercial purposes. He has turned his entire ranch of 1900 acres into a fur farm, and he expects to grow some \$9000 or \$10,000 worth of these furs this year.

Crawford has proved that the production of furs can be accomplished in this country as well as in Russia, from whence comes the 14 million dollars' worth of Persian lamb, Astrakhan and Krimmer pelts imported by the United States every year. He obtains these furs crossing Karakule rams from Asia on American Lincoln ewes. The skins from the resulting lambs, when only a few days old, are worth from \$6 to \$12 apiece. When I visited the fur farm, April 6, 1913, Crawford already had nearly 300 of these lambs and the lambing season had just begun. The Karakule is a hardy and prolific sheep, consequently few ewes will fail to bear one lamb at least. Many of them will have twins. A few of the lambs were torn dead, but that did not affect the value of the fur. In fact lambs prematurely born sometimes bear the most expensive pelts as they have tighter curls.

Crawford's experiment at least has gone far enough to convince breeders at the Kansas agricultural college that a new branch of farming of great economic promise for the United States has been discovered. An expert breeder from the college, Dr. K. K. Nabours, is co-operating with Crawford in an effort to develop the new industry. Dr. Nabours believes that in the course of a few years the farmers of this country will be producing the 14 million dollars' worth of these furs annually needed by the United States. By keeping a few Karakule rams any sheep

breeder might increase his profits quite materially every year by the production of these lamb skins. It was a little more than a year ago that Crawford converted this ranch into a fur farm. It was then that this Kansas farmer decided to try for a share of the millions sent out of this country for the expensive furs of Asia. It required faith, but Crawford had it and he went at his new undertaking in no half-hearted way. He bought 30 pure-bred Karakules, the larger part of the only herd ever imported to this country, so far as is known, and shipped in 1100 Lincoln ewes from the Gooding ranch in Idaho. The entire investment was \$35,000.

Last fall Crawford, with the advice of Dr. Nabours, began crossing the 19 Karakule rams in his herd on the 1100 ewes. From these crosses he is now getting lustrous black lamb skins worth \$3, \$10 and \$12 apiece. Some of the lambs come as Persian lamb fur, which is the most expensive; others as Astrakhan, which is a fur of looser curls, while some of the pelts have a gray shade and are known as Krimmer fur. This last is less expensive than the other two kinds.

The Karakule is a desert sheep native to Bokhara, central Asia. Because of the extreme heat of summer and the intense cold of winter in that country these sheep have become inured to these hardships and can therefore stand much more heat and cold than any native American sheep. The scant vegetation on the steppes of Bokhara also has developed the Karakule into a great rustler and browser. In hardness only the Mexican goats and the American mountain sheep can compare with them. This explains why the hybrids resulting from a cross between the Karakule and any American sheep would starve. No goat will keep underbrush down more efficiently than the Karakule, and in this and many other respects these animals resemble the goat more than the sheep.

But the Karakule does not possess the disagreeable musk flavor of the goat family, and of American sheep. A massive head, a short face and a nose line greatly bent are characteristics of the Karakule. The ears are large and pendulous; feet thick, short and very strong. The tail is large and triangular shaped with a twist on the end. Often it weighs 35 pounds. Sometimes it is so large that it has to be supported by a two-wheeled cart to which the animal is hitched. The wool is gray, long and coarse, with occasionally a soft under wool, which indicates the presence of tight-wool blood, and is not desired, except on the front of the head and on the rear extremities, where it is black, very lustrous and curly. The young lambs are black and curly and possess a wonderful luster. Excellent tight-curl black skins have been produced on the Crawford ranch by crossing Karakules with American Lincolns and Cotswolds, and Crawford believes it safe to predict that the Leicester and Wensleydale breeds will give fully as good fur, if not better. The hybrids produced by Karakules on native sheep are of greatest value as fur, but they have other qualities which will make them a highly desirable type of sheep. They grow much larger than the native animals. Tests made by packers at Ft. Worth, Tex., and such breeders as Rhome, Goodnight, Simonson and Crawford proved conclusively that when American tight-wool sheep, Merinos, Rambouillets, Shropshire and others, are crossed with Karakules or with Karakule-Lincolns there is an increase in weight amounting in some cases 50 per cent. Thirty-five per cent is considered by sheep buyers as an average increase. What is even more important is the fact that the Karakule strain seems absolutely to breed out the woolly or musk-like flavor of the meat of tight-wool sheep.

Mr. Crawford has the co-operation of the Kansas agricultural college in developing his new industry. Dr. Nabours has advised with Mr. Crawford in the crossing of the sheep. He is making a close study of heredity. He is particularly interested in the possibilities of interbreeding Karakules with native sheep and with hybrids. If the hybrids produced follow the Mendelian law of inheritance, it will be possible for Crawford to get any of the pure-bred Karakules without the necessity of importing more rams from Asia. If the hybrids of pure strains in the second generation do not split up into pure-bred Karakules and pure-bred Lincolns, accord-

ing to the Mendelian law, but blend and breed true, then this country will have a new breed of sheep. And such a breed, Dr. Nabours believes, combining as it very likely would the good qualities of the Karakule and of the native sheep, should be a very valuable one.

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