

Sheep Report

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Sheep numbers have changed very little in the United States and in Klamath County since 1950. In 1942 a very rapid reduction in sheep numbers in the United States began and by 1950 the numbers had decreased almost 50 per cent from the early 1940 numbers. In 1940 there were 92,000 sheep listed in Klamath County as of January 1 and by 1950 there were only 31,000 sheep reported as of the first of the year. After that time sheep numbers increased to around 45,000 head and remained rather constant until 1956 and 1957 when there was some increase in the numbers of sheep kept on farms. It is estimated that there are 15,000 sheep in farm flocks. For the past several years there has been a constant decrease in the numbers of range sheep but the number of farm flock throughout the country have increased so that on January 1 of this year there was an increase of approximately three per cent in the number of sheep on farms and ranches. The United States Department of Agriculture figures recently released show that a big part of the increase in the number of sheep on farms on January 1, 1958 was largely in the number of ewes and ewe lambs kept for breeding purposes. This would indicate that there should be an increase in sheep numbers throughout the country in the next few years. Prices of wool and lambs were favorable last year and this probably would account for the increase in sheep numbers. Generally speaking, lamb prices follow closely the prices of beef cattle and prices in the future will probably be determined to some extent by the prices of cattle in this country.

The committee feels that there are opportunities for profit in increasing the size of the present farm flocks in Klamath County and also feel that many other farmers who understand livestock could profitably include sheep in their farming operations. Increased numbers would help the price of wool and lambs for all producers by making larger volumes of lambs and wool which would attract more buyers. The county produces a surplus of hay, pasture and grain which would be profitably utilized by sheep and in addition sheep are very useful in cleaning aftermath from fields and aid materially in cleaning up weeds and left over grass along ditches, fence rows and other waste areas on farm lands. They also utilize dry land pastures very satisfactorily. In addition farm flocks provide employment for the farm operator during the winter months when other farm activities are at their lowest point.

Until the wool and lamb pools were organized to market wool and lambs from farm flocks the marketing problem was the greatest obstacle that farm flock owners had to overcome. A loss of five to 10 cents per pound on wool was suffered because no producer had enough wool to attract buyers. A similar problem existed with lambs. Only a small percentage of any one flock owner's lambs reached a peak and are ready to market at one time. Where there was no facilities to market these lambs as they reached the desirable weight and finish, such lambs passed the peak and were no longer top lambs. Many of the lambs in the past had to be marketed as feeders and in most cases the lambs were too big to make the most desirable feeder lambs. By sorting and shipping lambs every two to three weeks during the summer and fall, lambs were taken as they reached the desired weight and finish and as a result only a few lambs in the county ended up as feeders. The committee recommends that farm flock owners continue to pool their wool and lambs for the greatest possible returns from their sheep enterprises.

Some consideration was given by the committee to forming a county or basin wool growers association, which would include both farm flocks and range flocks. The purpose of such an organization would be to affiliate themselves with state and national wool growers association and to carry out some program to promote wool and lamb consumption.

A wool growers organization would serve as a means of social contact between sheepmen, a method of disseminating information, make possible group buying and generally serve the interests of the sheepmen. The committee believes that the government should continue the wool incentive program.

The committee felt there were two problems that should be solved this coming year in connection with pooling lambs. One of the most difficult problems to overcome is the determining of a method of shrinking lambs before they are weighed to arrive at a sale weight. The feed being consumed by lambs and the distance the lambs must be hauled to the stock yards for assembling the pool greatly influences the shrinkage that producers experience and with it the net they return from their lambs. It is felt that a more equitable system of determining shrink on the lambs should be worked out. The other problem the committee recognizes is the need for educating lamb producers in determining the fat grades of their lambs. It was felt that more effort should be made this season to get producers acquainted with the finish grades of lambs. Sheep producers should strive to produce cleaner wool of the most desirable grade and to produce more uniform and higher quality lambs so that the pool and the county will develop a good reputation.

The committee urges that farm flock owners make the most possible use of home grown feeds including hay crops, pasture and aftermath. Bred ewes should receive sufficient hay in the fall months as the pastures are cleaned up to keep them in good flesh. Older ewes must be fed more generously than younger ewes to keep them in strong healthy condition. Six weeks before lambing, ewes should be given from one half to one pound of grain per day. Hay and grain and pelleted mixtures of hay and grain should be available in creeps for lambs as soon as they are turned to outside yards. If lambs are to be finished as rapidly as possible, it is advisable to provide the creep feed as long as they are in dry lots and more rapid gains will also be made if the grain feeding is continued after the lambs are put on pasture. Lambs that are not finished by the time they are 85 pounds in weight, should be weaned and placed on feed in dry lot or in pasture.

There is some opportunity for sheep producers to secure feeder lambs and fatten them to market. Here again maximum use should be made of any farm pastures first and then the lambs should be placed on full feed in dry lots. Locally grown hay and grain should be used to a maximum. Pelleted feeds have given excellent results in fattening lambs. They reduce the labor involved in feeding lambs, are the safest feed available for fattening lambs and will give more rapid gains on less feed than any feed formula known at this time. The relative economy of pelleted and unpelleted rations will depend on the cost of pelleting and the price of unpelleted feed. The greatest advantage through pelleting comes when the ingredients are highest in price. The use of hormones, antibiotics and tranquilizers may prove to have some definite advantage in fattening lambs. Attention should be given to the results of these materials in the experiments and under feed lot conditions and when their value is determined and decision made on their use should depend on the performance and cost of such materials in feed formulas.

Experience this past summer indicates that the fattening of lambs in dry lots during August and early September were not as satisfactory as desired. This may be due to the heat and dust in yards during that season of the year and better results may be secured when the lambs were given full dry feed on pasture. More consid-

eration needs to be given to this problem before definite recommendations can be given. It appears to be advisable to shear lambs for summer and early fall feeding because of the greater gains made from shorn lambs. The decrease in the price of finished shorn lambs and the return from the wool secured from shearing lambs needs to be taken into consideration in determining the relative profit from feeding shorn and woolled lambs.

Normally there is a shortage of lambs available for market during January and February and a surplus during August and September. The entire industry would be benefited if the supply of lambs was more evenly distributed throughout the year. This could be accomplished by changing lambing dates and by changing the pasturing and feeding practices.

The flushing of ewes, that is the placing of the breeding flock on good feed two to three weeks before breeding, will produce larger lambs, more twins and will also shorten the lambing season. The committee believes that early lambing is an advantage in this area. Probably the best starting date for lambing is around February 1. Earlier dates require better facilities for lambing and requires longer winter feeding which adds to the cost of the lambs. It is felt that any later date for starting lambing will place lambs on the market too late in the season. The best lamb market is usually during the early months starting with the early spring crop in California. February and March lambing permits the greatest use of pasture during the hot period of the summer, a time when pastures generally do not make maximum growth. Along with it lambs do not make the maximum gains during the hotter months of the summer.

Internal parasites of ewes and lambs in this area cost growers a great amount of money each year. Wormy lambs do not make efficient gains and require a great amount of extra feed to put them in the finished condition. Ewes also suffer from infestations of internal parasites. It has been found that the only way to control these parasites is to give ewes and lambs individual treatments of recommended worm medicines a few weeks after the lambs are on pasture and again in the fall. During the balance of the season sheep should have salt that carries deworming drugs. Sheep ticks and lice also cause losses in meat and wool production in sheep and lambs. These two insects can be controlled by proper application of several insecticides. One of the easiest ways on controlling these insects in sheep is to apply diethylin as a one and one half per cent dust to the ewes in the fall. About two ounces of the material is required for each animal. Diethylin should not be used as a spray because of the possibilities of injuring the animals. DD and toxaphene may be used as sprays in a concentration of one half per cent of active ingredients. None of the insecticides mentioned or other organic insecticides may be used on any kind of sheep within 30 days of slaughter. If lice and ticks are found within the 90 days they should be controlled with rotonone either as a dust or spray. It will be necessary to repeat the application of rotonone in about two weeks.

There are a number of diseases that sheep producers must watch to avoid losses. A few of the more prevalent ones will be mentioned here. Pregnant ewes paralysis is common in a number of farm flocks. This disease can best be prevented by feeding the ewes grain or molasses at least six

weeks before lambing period. Adequate exercise is also important in preventing this disease. Where ewes are attacked with the disease the best method of curing the disease is to give the ewe a cup of molasses in a pint of water every few days. Some more immediate relief has been secured by the use of glucose injected into the blood stream. White muscle has caused a considerable amount of trouble and some death loss in lambs. Lambs attacked by this disease may be given an injection of vitamin E. Another disease closely resembling symptoms of white muscle is over-eating disease, sometimes called pulpy kidney and also known as enterotoxemia. This disease can be prevented by the use of the proper vaccine a few days after the lamb is born. Foot rot also cause a great deal of trouble in sheep and the best control method to date is to trim the hoofs to expose all infection and to treat the hoof with strong concentrations of copper sulphate. Running the entire flock through a foot bath gives some relief from the trouble and another method that appears to offer some control of the disease is to maintain a copper sulphate vat in front of the watering trough so that sheep are required to walk through it when they take a drink of water.

The most satisfactory program for commercial producers to follow is to use cross bred white faced ewes and breed them to rams of the mutton breeds. The ones most commonly used are Hampshire and Suffolk lambs. These breeds provide large ewes that produce heavy fleeces and give an abundance of milk. Crossed with the mutton breeds lambs give excellent market lambs.

There is room for considerable improvement in the quality of both

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