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The Place and Management of Sheep in Modern Farming

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Sheep Management

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grass—if, however, sufficient of this is not available it should be supplemented with an allowance of hay, in any case in very rough weather, when the grass is covered with snow, some should be allowed, a few loads of any kind of roots thrown about the pastures will be readily eaten, as soon as they have become accustomed to them.

In my own case last season I had for use several small pastures of from 7 to 18 acres, these I had top dressed at intervals of about six days, this gave me a continuous supply of grass for a long period.

I started marketing the lambs as fat for the seaside trade, but I discontinued this as I found I could make more per lb. of them as stores in lots of 50 or a 100.

I have never had to give the ewes concentrated foods, as they have always kept in good condition without them.

SHEEP MANAGEMENT

By JOHN JOYCE

Milverton, Somerset

Our farm is altogether about 500 acres, part is on the new red sandstone, and part on the Devonian formation. The red land part is situated in the Vale of Taunton and the other part is in the hill country to the west of that vale. This latter part consists of pasture land, some of it recently laid down, and our arable land is on the former red sandstone land in the vale.

Our flock is a pedigree ram breeding one of the Dorset Down variety whose breeders claim that it possesses all the best qualities of both the Hampshire and South Down breeds without their defects. It consists of 300 ewes, these with their lambs after the lambing period, and with 100 ewe tegs most of which each year go into the flock to replace what we term "off-going" ewes, make nearly 800 sheep during March and April. The "off-going" ewes consist of four kinds—those whose udders are defective, those which have had a bad time in lambing, those that we deem too old to be likely to breed another crop of lambs successfully, and last comes the weeding out of the worst ewes, which conform least to the ideal type and shape of the breed.

After the drafting of these four classes from the last year's ewe flock we count what are left, and the difference between this number

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and 300 is made up from the very best of the 100 ewe tegs. Generally about eighty of them is required leaving fifteen or twenty of these tegs to be sold, and the old draft ewes also are fattened and got rid of generally in April and May. This system we have followed regularly for nearly forty years.

Beginning the year at the mating time, the first of August, we use as sires six or seven rams and ram lambs, picking a proportion of the ewes for the individual rams, sometimes placing two rams together. We select these rams with the greatest care and choose those which conform as nearly as possible to the best shape and type of the breed, but there is always, try as we will, a difference individually in the character and shape of these six rams, and so we select and mate ewes and rams on the plan of like being mated with unlike.

We have no room for the ewes during the tuppung season on our vale land, and so they have to run in different fields on the hill country pastures, each lot with a ram whose character and substance is more or less opposite to the character of the ewes which he is running.

We colour the breasts of the rams, for the first three weeks, with yellow, than the next three with red, then with blue and then with black. Each of the six rams is given a number, 1, 2, 3, etc., and every week we mark the ewes that have been served during the past seven days by each individual ram with the number that stands for that particular ram. All the ewes that have been served during the first week are marked high up on the near shoulder, those served during the second week on the near side, the third week on the near pin, the fourth week high up on the off shoulder, the fifth week on the off side, and the sixth week on the off pin.

Most of the ewes are served during these six weeks, but those that turn to the ram again, whether it be the third, fourth, fifth or sixth week, are re-marked according to the week they were last served. By this careful marking of the ewes each week, we are able at the end of nineteen weeks' gestation to take them out and bring them near the lambing pen where they can be watched and cared for more attentively. This happens about the 20th of December. Sometimes the ewes that will not lamb until March are retained in the hill country farms, the early lambing ewes only being taken home to the vale farm.

We place the rams with the flock about the first of August and take them out on the first of November, and that gives us a lambing period of January for the principal ones, some later ones in February, and the very last come in March.

The ewes run in those hill country districts until the end of November when they are taken back to the vale farm at Preston and

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there folded on the ley ground on the third crop of first year's clover and italian. They are given hay and a small allowance of turnips hauled out to them each day.

Our lambing pen is the usual one adopted by most breeding flock owners whose ewes lamb down in the months of January and February. We select the spot for the lambing pen in a part of a lea field where the pen has not been for many years and which will be planted to cabbage a few months later. The ewes are taken in over night into a space in the middle of the pen, whilst all round are small pens made just large enough for a ewe and her lambs.

Ours being a ram breeding flock, and since we turn out our rams for service the following August, we make a point of arranging for as many of our ram lambs as possible to have the whole of the milk of one ewe to itself and not have to share it with another, that is to say, those ewes which have two ram lambs, one is taken away from the dam and placed to another ewe. Those ewes which have a twin consisting of a ram and ewe lamb, the ewe is taken away from the mother leaving her with one ram lamb only to bring up.

The ewe lambs that are taken away are placed with single ewe lambs for the mother to rear two ewe lambs instead of one, while the ram lambs that are taken away from their mother take the place of lambs that die and the rest are placed at first with a ewe that has a single ewe lamb, and then her own ewe lamb is taken away later. Thus, in the early stages of the lambs' existence, and in fact, all along, until the ram lambs are sold, six or seven months, the ewe lambs are placed in the gallery and the ram lambs get the stalls and pit!

During January and February as the lambs come they are marked according to their different sires. The ewes with their lambs are folded first, close to the pen then on the other leys, and after those are finished on the clover stubbles, and in March, they are folded on swedes and kale, a good part of the swedes having been carted away previous to the folding. The lambs run out through a lamb hurdle into the next fold which their mothers will have the next day and so on, where they get lamb troughs and a mixture of grain and linseed cake always available for them. The lambs eat off the best of the kale and swede greens and some of the swedes in this front cut; and their mothers came along next day and clear up what they have left. The ewes have a feed once a day of hay and a mixture of decorticated cake and grain.

About the beginning of April the swedes and kale are finished, and we have always a field of Italian and trefoil ready for them which has received, during February, one cwt. per acre of sulphate of ammonia to push it along and make it with mangels a good and substantial folding for them. The lambs still run in the front before the

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ewes getting mangel to nibble with their trough-food as before. This field lasts them until about the middle of April when our first piece of trifolium, winter barley and vetches mixture is ready for them. The field of Italian and trefoil they have just finished and left is immediately ploughed and transplanted with thousand headed kale plants for feeding with the lambs in August and September. Incidentally, we keep two fields conveniently placed for the purpose of growing this catchcrop followed by kale one year, and the next year it goes into barley or wheat, into which the seeds of Italian and trefoil are sown for the year after.

This first piece of trifolium, as above stated, is usually finished about the 10th or 12th of May and planted to mangel wurzel or beet, when the sheep are taken on to another piece of mixture of the same sort, but which was planted in the autumn about three weeks later than the first field was planted. Previous to commencing this last field, the lambs are weaned from the ewes and the ram lambs are divided from the ewe lambs, the ram lambs getting the front folds, the ewe lambs following them, and most of the flock of ewes are turned out to the hill pastures where they remain until the following autumn. The draft ewes which are fattening are kept in the fold behind the ewe lambs to clear up what is left from the folding of the two front lots of lambs. Each lot has mangels placed in the fold for them, with cake and grain in their troughs.

The next piece that this folding flock is taken on to is a piece of late variety of trifolium sown with a larger proportion of vetches than was sown in the last piece they folded. In the next piece after this is finished they are taken on to a crop consisting of vetches alone planted not before October or November, and from this when finished they are taken to a field of vetches and rape which were drilled in March. With the finishing of this last piece time has taken us on to about the 20th of July. The land that they have folded during the past three or four months is planted as follows, the first piece with mangels and beet, the second and third pieces with swedes and kale, the fourth and last piece with common turnips.

Now we come to the time for preparing the ram lambs for sale and getting them out to the markets. They are taken on to a piece of kale the planting out of which, after the Italian and trefoil I have already described; and they have also now a run out once a day on aftermath clovers, and folded at night either on the kale or the clover, according to the weather.

The greater part of these ram lambs are sold in August, and when most of them are gone we are able to pick our ewe lambs for future breeding. This is done very carefully, for we pick only a little more than half of our whole number of ewe lambs for this purpose and which

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will a year after be incorporated in the ewe flock. The cull ewe lambs now take the front fold and place, the rams having been sold and gone, and these culls are either sold for breeding or fattened out in the autumn for the butcher.

The ewe lambs retained for the flock are run behind their culled out sisters, and as the culls get sold they get a better time. Both lots are folded on the aftermath, the culls in front and their sisters behind, and they have a bite of kale also every day which has been drilled in the previous May. The ewe lambs for keeping sometimes run on the pastures after their crop of kale has been done, for a while, and finally are wintered on the late turnip crop which followed the spring vetches and rape, as we have seen, with cribs full of hay once a day.

With this system of folding and feeding we avoid a good many of the complaints which sheep are subject to and which we hear and read about, such as fluke, scour, worms, fever, etc. : also the land farmed like this is kept in good heart and condition and is able to grow the maximum crops of the neighbourhood pretty regularly whatever the season may be. This system is costly in labour and sometimes we get what we call stripping between the toes of the sheep and foot rot. We have tried most of the things which have been advertised for this trouble and have adopted a foot trough made of oak which we take about and which we fill with a solution of sulphate of copper in water, and through which we walk the sheep once or twice a week in summer. We have, however, come to the conclusion which confirms the opinion of a very good old shepherd in the west country, that in order to get and keep sheep's feet sound it does not matter so much what you strike them with, or what solution you use in the foot bath, but what does matter is the amount of importance which those in charge of the sheep attach to the curing and keeping their flock free from this complaint. For this there is no easy or miraculous remedy,—no waving the hands over them and it is gone,—but it is rather, I tell my shepherd, a question of "Prayer and Fasting"—that is, agonising in the mind about it and treating the matter of avoiding and curing this disease of greater importance than their own eating and drinking.