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# The Place and Management of Sheep in Modern Farming

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## How I Manage My Flock

**V. S. Bland**

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the ewe? What is the minimum quantity of roots upon which we can successfully fatten sheep? Cattle have received all the attention on this point, although much useful information is to be found in a summary of a large number of sheep-feeding experiments, which appeared in the Highland and Agricultural Society's Transactions in 1910. Where practical men disagree it is frequently because of differences in management, which may obscure the effect of bad rations or reduce the effect of good ones.

## HOW I MANAGE MY FLOCK

BY MAJOR V. S. BLAND

*Marlborough, Wiltshire*

FIRST of all I should like to thank Sir John Russell for the honour he has conferred on me by asking me to read a Paper here to-day. I feel I am quite unworthy of the task which has been given me. I will, however, do my best and if I manage to make one or two observations in the course of this paper which will be of assistance to those engaged in the sheep industry I shall be very satisfied and feel that I have not wasted your time.

The subject which has been allotted to me is "How I manage my Flock." At first sight this sounds a simple straightforward subject, but my difficulty arises in that I feel I shall be unable to tell you anything you do not already know. However, scarcely any two holdings are alike and what we do in one county of this small but varied island might be quite against the ideas of flockmasters of other counties to mine, namely Wiltshire, but I trust there may be useful points which might be well adapted to other counties.

I farm on the Wiltshire Downs 600 feet above sea-level and in a very exposed and rather late district of North Wilts. Some of the land is very hilly and the soil consists of strong to light land close to the chalk. The various farms which all join consist of about 2200 acres divided roughly at the present time as follows. One-third arable land 700 acres, not quite one-third Downs 640 acres and rather more than one-third grassland 870 acres, of which 370 acres are permanent grass and 500 acres is temporary pasture, *i.e.* arable land laid down to grass these last few years owing to the depression in cereal prices. A great deal of it on the hills, about 330 acres will probably never come back to the plough if my system can prevent it from becoming sheep-sick.

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I am, as you may know, a breeder of pedigree Hampshire Downs and keep a flock of 320 ewes for ram-breeding purposes, which with the co-operation of my shepherd have been very successful at the various shows these last few years. I would here like to make a strong point, that half the battle in successful sheep-farming is the close co-operation between the flockmaster and his shepherd. The owner must look well ahead to provide the necessary food and change of crops and he must have a good shepherd to make the best use of them, particularly in the case of arable land sheep. The other flocks I keep consist of 320 Kerry Hill ewes and 420 Kerry Hill and Exmoor.

I will first of all deal with the Hampshire Down flock on arable land as I consider the management of a Hampshire Down flock for ram breeding to be very similar to that of a flock kept for early lamb production which I would ask all those who live in suitable districts to consider. In early lamb production you have natural protection from foreign dumping and very few of the commodities we produce have this natural protection, further also the supply is limited. For early lamb production there is no doubt in my opinion that the Hampshire Down breed is pre-eminent owing to its early maturity qualities, and with good management you get a lamb of excellent quality and good weight in a short time. To produce this, lambing should commence in December or early January which means turning the rams in in August. No doubt the best food for the ewes at this time, to be commenced about fourteen days before turning the rams in, is rape and sainfoin so as to produce as many twins as possible and also, rather an important point, to reduce the length of time of lambing and thus get the lambs more level. Failing this I believe the next best method is for the ewes to be turned out in small lots on grassland. I generally try to get the ewes on to rape and sainfoin cleaning up behind the ram lambs. After the rams have been taken away low feeding for a time is all the ewes require, consisting of a Down during the day and laying behind other sheep at night, such as ewe lambs which have been kept for stock to come in to the flock the following year or late lambs to be fattened. The ewes will continue to do well on this keep up to towards the end of October. When November comes in I generally go on to white turnips and the Downs at day-time. Should frosts then start a small quantity of hay is given. This is continued until mid December when the flock is taken to the field on which they are to lamb. I like marrow kale and swedes for this purpose. During the last month at least before lambing, it is very important to lay the ewes as dry as possible at night and the ideal is to have an old clover field near-by on which they can be penned should the root ground get very wet and muddy. A fortnight at

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least before lambing the ewes are started on cake to insure a supply of milk when they lamb. I usually feed  $\frac{1}{2}$  to  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb. until lambing and then increase to 1 lb. after they have lambed according to the supply of roots and the quality of the hay. To ensure ease in lambing no doubt a proportion of the cake should be linseed. This I am sure is paid for many times by the number of lambs and ewes saved at birth through this safe laxative food.

Just a word as to the lamb yard. Many lambs are ruined from being kept in the pen too long. Strong single lambs scarcely ever see the pens but go direct into one of the various small sheltered yards which I have joining the central lambing yard where the ewes are laid at night. Twins and young ewes have a separate pen and extra feeding. As soon as possible, weather permitting, the ewes and lambs go out on to the roots, swedes and kale, the lamb yard being so arranged that they are able to go out to the roots and come back to the shelter as they please. One important point here, keep the yards well bedded up with straw so as the lambs lay dry. Never let them lay in mud as chilling will soon result. The lambs should be got on to trough food as early as possible. A good mixture can be made of such ingredients as linseed cake, beans, peas and locust beans (finely kibbled), flaked maize, rolled oats and pea chaff. I endeavour to plan enough swedes and kale to last until the first week in May. Should I look like being short of roots, I put in some rye in the autumn and a useful fortnight's keep can be had with the addition of mangels thrown out several days ahead.

After roots are finished I like a cheap grass seed mixture such as Trefoil and Ryegrass which I put in especially as a catch crop for the ewes and lambs after a second corn crop. The folding and half-fallowing is a good preparation for wheat. A very general practice in my district, instead of putting in seed especially, is to keep back an old clover field which so long as ewes have not been folded on it the previous year, makes a very useful feed with the mangels.

In early lamb production most of the lambs will be sold whilst on this grass in April and May, but enough should be planned to carry on the later lambs and ewe lambs if they are kept for stock, until the vetches are ready about the first week in June. Winter vetches and spring vetches will carry on the lambs until rape is ready, and if this can be arranged to join a sainfoin field, nothing will do sheep better than rape and sainfoin. This brings me to the commencement of the year again. During the summer all the ewes require is to go to Downs by day and clear up behind lambs at night.

I think this covers the main points of an arable flock, and no doubt where one has dry arable land the method I have outlined is undoubtedly remunerative particularly so should corn prices

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improve. In early lamb production both the ewes and the rams must be fed well, as otherwise that touch in the lambs which is so essential to get the top price is just missed.

Now I come to the management of the grass ewe flocks. This is a comparatively new system of sheep farming on what was once arable land and I consider it is still in its experimental stage, but I give you here the system which these last few years has worked so far quite well and with which I propose to carry on. After this year, when my sowing down for the time being will be completed, there will be eight grass fields for each flock averaging about 46 acres each in addition to the Downs already mentioned. This grassland and Downs is not only confined to sheep, as a large number of cattle have been wintered out this season. The temporary grass fields are heavily stocked from spring to autumn and hence are of little use in winter, and the Downs are rested from sheep all the summer in order to grow keep for the winter. I intend to run these temporary grass fields in a fourcourse rotation as follows: First year hay and aftermath for sheep, second year sheep, third year cattle, fourth year sheep and so on, and by this means, I have so far, and hope to avoid, sheep-sick land which I think may prove one of the greatest difficulties in grass sheep farming. Being a late district the rams are not turned in until the beginning of November, so as not to have any lambs before April. I try to save two or three fields for each flock for some weeks before turning the rams in in November so as to get a good fresh green bite which will last the ewes for a month or six weeks. The ewes are divided into as small lots as possible. These and other of the new grass fields carry the ewes on until December, and then the ewes are transferred to the Downs by day and roots at night. I generally allow twenty to twenty-five acres of roots for each flock to last them until the middle of March, which I find of great assistance to the ewes as my Downs are not sufficient alone. I do not believe in the "Test of endurance system" for grass sheep, and they require every bit as much attention as arable land sheep, but one man can look after a much larger flock and the later date of lambing economizes extra labour from the staff of the farm, and further during the summer the shepherd has time to help at the busy periods of hay and harvest.

The ewes have cotton cake and oats at least a month before lambing, as the stronger the ewes are at lambing time far less will be the losses. In April we invariably get one very wet and cold week at least.

About a fortnight before lambing the flock goes to a sheltered field with fresh grass adjoining for the ewes and lambs to be passed on into after lambing. The less grass ewes are handled at lambing time, if the weather is good, the better, but in order to facilitate

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drawing out the ewes and lambs from those which have not lambed, the ewes are always brought into a large pen at night. The singles are put together in one field and the twins in another. I do not like running, to commence with, more than fifty ewes and the young lambs together, and this can be quite well done by dividing the fields up with temporary netting and so keep passing them along.

For the rest of the summer the ewes and lambs are taken from one grass field to another and round again, as undoubtedly constant changes are one of the necessities for success.

The best lambs are sold straight from their mothers in August, and I wean the smaller and later lambs at the same time and get them on to trough food which they readily take to within a week or ten days. At weaning time I physic them as a precautionary measure. I carry these lambs on during September and October and draw from them as they get fit. The cull lambs are got on to roots and are grown on and fattened and sold in February and March. During September and October one of the best feeds for grass lambs is young clover after harvest should this be available. The ewes after weaning will live and pick up almost anywhere.

The grass ewe most suitable to the system I have mentioned is one that is hardy, but I think a far greater point is to have one that is adaptable so that if it is necessary during the winter to feed roots, hay or cake, this can be done without undue trouble and delay. At the present time for my system I favour the Hampshire Down ram crossed with the Kerry Hill ewe. This cross produces a good quality lamb with size suitable for any purpose, and the ewe lamb has every appearance of making a very useful Half-bred ewe. I have a small number of 2-tooth ewes of this breed crossed again with a Hampshire Down ram with which I am experimenting this season. Although being young ewes they have lived with the older Kerry Hill ewes, and at the present time look every bit as well. My objective here, is in view of the fact that I keep two grass flocks, to be able to breed ewes for one of the flocks so that I only have one lot of fresh ewes to buy every year.

In conclusion, I should like to mention what I consider are the essential things so far as we know at present as regards grass sheep on arable land freshly laid down, namely, the ewes must be as strong as possible at lambing time and the lambs given a good start, frequent changes of fields and not on the same fields year after year without a rest from sheep, and lastly, dry laying.

I was instructed to be practical, and I hope I have not been unduly so by going too much into detail.

Finally, I should like to say a word as regards the Hampshire Down breed. This breed is undoubtedly renowned for its early

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maturity, hardiness, and quality of mutton and wool as was again proved by its success over all breeds at Smithfield this last year. There has, I believe in the past, been a prejudice against this breed as regards difficulties at lambing. Hampshire Down breeders have realized this for some years, and they have and are concentrating on producing the type of ram which is needed for present day requirements. I expect many of you have heard of our Marlborough sheep trials which have been carried on these last few years. In our trials last year the Hampshire Down ram was used amongst other breeds of rams on several different breeds of grass ewes, and no trouble was reported at all as regards lambing difficulties and the lambs from the crosses were without a doubt very favourably commented upon.

Further, I should like to mention that one of our largest commercial flock owners has carried on very successfully one of his large flocks of Hampshire Down ewes entirely on grass for these last few years and has gained awards in the flock competition with his flock. I consider the Hampshire Down ram, provided careful selection is made when purchasing which is necessary with whatever breed is used, is the finest ram for almost any breed of ewe.

## GRASSLAND SHEEP IN HAMPSHIRE

BY H. EDGAR

*Richford, Essex*

In considering the place of sheep in modern farming, it must be admitted that sheep have in the past, and probably will have in the future, a prominent place in Agriculture. In the old days, sheep were considered a necessary adjunct to corn farming and in these days when perforce more land must be laid to grass, they still hold their position.

The trend of events appear to be turning more to grass sheep. We are faced with undreamt of competition in grain growing, and while I am not prepared to assert that wheat is not the keystone of British Agriculture, I am convinced that stock has to be the backbone, and for preference I pin my faith to the ewe and cow. This is a solid conviction borne out by my experience on the grain growing belts of Canada and a fairly extensive knowledge of land in England. In Canada and like countries, land can be had cheaply, easily acquired, more economical to work, has no standing charges to bear as in England, and cheap transport. Here our expenses are heavy and