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# The Place and Management of Sheep in Modern Farming

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## Grassland Sheep in Hampshire

**H. Edgar**

H. Edgar (1932) *Grassland Sheep in Hampshire* ; The Place And Management Of Sheep In Modern Farming, pp 52 - 56 - DOI: <https://doi.org/10.23637/ERADOC-1-205>

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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



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yields not sufficient to warrant keeping any but the best land under the plough. I make no allusion to present values, which are probably due to dumping, and bear no relation to cost of production.

In speaking of grassland sheep in Hants, I would like it to be understood that most of the grass sheep probably spend some of their time on roots or have a few roots fed to them. It is still considered necessary to grow roots to eke out winter feed, and grow straw for fodder and litter, and it is also an advantage to get the sheep off the pastures for a month or two to allow them to sweeten and get an earlier bite in the spring.

The type of grass sheep varies greatly; I believe there are some Southdowns run on grass, although they might strictly be called arable land sheep. We have Kents, useful sheep where grass is luxuriant and closer stocking required, some Rylands and many flocks of crossbreds, the most popular of which is the Half-bred, *i.e.* the Cheviot-Border Leicester cross. This is a reasonably docile sheep, very adaptable and will cross with almost any type of ram for local requirements with good results.

My experience with sheep relates chiefly to grass sheep kept on a Hampshire hill farm. By hill farm, I do not mean the rolling stretches of corn land on the North and North-West of the county, but land found on the East and North-East side, hilly, fairly wooded, some of it strong clay overlying chalk on the top of the hills, with outcrops of chalk on some of the brows. It is obviously not an arable farm, being too enclosed, hilly, and heavy working with yields not sufficient to warrant keeping it under the plough, although when my father took the farm in '99, practically the whole of it was arable. My first experience was with the Mule ewe, *i.e.* Black Face Scotch ewe crossed Border Leicester, but for many years these have been superseded by the Half-breed Cheviot-Border Leicester cross, chiefly because they breed a closer coated lamb, which the butchers appear to prefer, wool has been worth more, and they are more adapted to folding if necessary, although there is no doubt they do much better on grass. The flock has been maintained by the purchase of ewe lambs from North of England and Scotland, these are put to ram in the autumn and given trough food all winter, usually on roots. Having a lamb in their first year we do not consider has any ill effects, in fact I am inclined to think they make better milkers, and are more prolific, but it is essential they should be reasonably well fed and a little extra care as shearlings. The bulk of the lambs off the ewe tegs are sold fat off their mothers. The stock ewes spend the bulk of their time on grass. To take the usual routine, immediately after weaning, the ewes are sorted as to tooth and udder. Those ewes which are not fit to rear a lamb are usually sold at local fairs as



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grazers, it being my experience that they don't pay to keep on for fat. Any ewes which are right in udder, but a little shaky as to tooth, are marked and usually put to ram earlier so as to get ewe and lamb off together. The main flock of stock ewes are put away on to the poorest pasture on the farm till about six weeks before going to ram, when they are moved to better pastures to flush them. The rams chiefly used were Southdown for early lamb, Suffolks and Oxford Downs for the remainder. The Suffolk cross is a closer coated lamb than the Oxford, which appears to be what the butchers prefer and is of course first-class quality. It has perhaps the disadvantage that it is a slightly slower doer and does not back so well as an Oxford, but either cross produces a very serviceable lamb. The ewes may run about all winter on grass or fold a few roots off after Christmas if required. About six to eight weeks before lambing, the ewes will get concentrates or hay, or both if their condition warrants it. When due to lamb, they are brought to a pasture field near the farm buildings, given mangolds, hay and concentrates, usually about  $\frac{2}{3}$  rds lb. oats,  $\frac{1}{3}$  rd lb. high-grade nut cake or Decorticated Cotton Meal. It has often been the practice to keep the single lambs separate and get them pushed off as fat lamb, but this depends of course entirely on the accommodation available. Concentrates and mangels are continued till there is a bite of grass, when they are discontinued, or if fat lamb is the objective, concentrates would be kept on. The ewes and lambs are kept moving round the various pastures till about first or second week in July when the lambs are weaned and go on to the second cuts. I've had some wonderfully good results on wild white clover and cocksfoot and perennial rye grass, then on to sainfoin and afterwards to rape, swedes and marrow stemmed kale. Most of the lambs are fatted, very few being sold as stores, although this year the store trade was the best proposition.

I would summarize the case for grass sheep under the following heads:—

### *Labour Cost*

There is no great extent of hurdles to pitch, no succession of crops to be grown, shepherding is very economical as it only requires an hour or two a day during summer, no elaborate lambing folds are put up, a few thatched hurdles in the corner of the field for weakly lambs is all that is needed.

### *2. Low Cost of Producing and Rearing Lambs*

The maintenance of the ewe flock costs very little, having nothing as a rule from weaning time till six or eight weeks before lambing,



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when probably a small amount of concentrates would be fed and continued or not till weaning time, depending on whether the lambs were to be sold fat or as stores. Ewes with twin lambs might reasonably be expected to have concentrates till weaning time.

3. Grass sheep as a rule were very prolific and good milkers. I think I have done badly if I don't get  $1\frac{1}{2}$  lambs per ewe, and for many years have exceeded that average.

### 4. *Value of Produce*

Grass sheep as a rule were kept to produce cross-bred lambs which generally speaking were small, good cutters, made more per lb. than heavier breeds and were liked by butchers. I made up to 74s. apiece last July and August.

### 5. *Depreciation*

The depreciation on a grass flock is not so heavy as with arable sheep. Production starts early—in their first year and continues for several years after the ewes have become full mouth, due to retaining their teeth so much better on grass. They will continue to breed and rear lambs so long as their teeth are even, and more twins are obtained from older ewes. Also, up to recently there has been no wide discrepancy between the price of a fat ewe and the cost of an ewe lamb.

### 6. *Adaptability*

I have always found my grass sheep quite adaptable and have never had any trouble in keeping them in folds if necessary. Lastly, I've always found the returns from my sheep one of the few bright spots in my accounts.

I would like to issue a word of warning, don't be tempted and overstock with sheep on grass. They may do well for a year or two if the pastures are new, but there soon comes a time when the land appears to be sheep sick. Whether this is due to parasites I cannot say, but I am a great believer in regular pilling for worms both in ewes and lambs. The lambs are always pilled when the ewes are sheared and again at weaning. Footrot is another scourge which can be kept well in hand by use of a weekly run through a foot bath. Also, I consider it is not a good policy to keep sheep too long on one pasture, the more they are moved about, the better they will do.



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To anyone proposing putting more land to grass, I cannot too strongly recommend common sainfoin if their land will grow it. It produces a good hay crop for several years, and there is nothing like the aftermath for lambs. If sainfoin cannot be grown, don't forget wild white clover and cocksfoot. I'm aware of the many criticisms of cocksfoot, but provided a leafy variety is sown thickly and kept well grazed by horned stock, I've found it invaluable.

Another word of warning to prospective buyers of ewes or ewe lambs from the North of England and Scotland, beware of buying stock from a flock infected with scrapie. This is an insidious disease which may not show for several years, and cannot be detected at time of purchase. It is a good plan to take the auctioneer into your confidence and ask him to recommend flocks to you.

In conclusion, I would like to express my appreciation to the work done by pedigree breeders. Without the good foundation which they provide, we could not hope for the results we get.

## THE PLACE OF SHEEP IN MODERN FARMING

By H. W. DREWITT

*Colworth, Sussex*

### THE SOUTHDOWN

THE Southdown breed takes its name from the South Down range of hills which stretches across Sussex from Eastbourne to the Hampshire border. Here they have been kept from time immemorial, and at an early date were introduced into Norfolk and Dorsetshire. Lately many flocks have been started in Gloucestershire where a rather different type is favoured. In the United States and in New Zealand many pure bred flocks are kept, chiefly for the breeding of rams for crossing, as the Southdown sire is usually very impressive and leaves an indelible mark on any other breed of sheep.

Almost all the modern breeds of short-wooled sheep have been built up by an infusion of Southdown blood.

The traditional method of management was to run the ewes on the Downs during the day in the care of a shepherd and to bring them back at night to a fold of clover rape or roots according to the time of year. While thus of course enriching the arable land at the