ROTHAMSTED RESEARCH

The Place and Management of Sheep in Modern Farming

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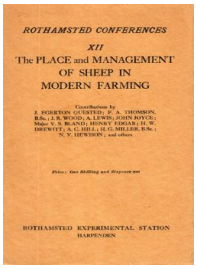

Discussion

Rothamsted Research

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field has a dressing, every fourth year, of 10 cwt. of Basic Slag, or its equivalent in some form of phosphate. This application of phosphates in addition to improving the amount of grazing, I believe, brings old pastures more into line with young pastures, on which sheep and lambs do so well.

DISCUSSION

Mr. J. F. H. Thomas (Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester).—This Conference has surely brought to our minds a realization of the vast knowledge possessed by flockmasters, and we must realize what a great need there is for a wider dissemination of that knowledge, not only for the benefit of other flockmasters, but also for the guidance of those research workers who are in a position to investigate important problems in sheep husbandry.

There are three types of problems needing full and immediate investigation :—

(1) Those relating to breeding and crossbreeding.
(2) Nutritional and management problems.
(3) Problems relating to disease and disease control.

There is a need for the closest co-operation between the shepherd, the flockmaster, the research worker, and those who can undertake the collection and correlation of data under field conditions.

In November last the Experiments Committee of the Bath and West Show Society approved of a scheme of inquiry into sheep farming systems in south-west England. The main objects of this enquiry were :—

(1) To remedy the present lack of any large scale inquiry into the problems of the flockmaster.
(2) To obtain reliable information on the varied methods of sheep farming practised.
(3) To ascertain the success of recent modifications in methods of feeding and management.
(4) To obtain information on the main causes of loss.
(5) To demonstrate the importance of problems in sheep husbandry which need specialised research under field conditions.

With the helpful co-operation of the agricultural organizers of the counties concerned in the scheme, a large number of enquiry forms were sent out to flockmasters. As a result of that preliminary circula-

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tion, in the capacity of investigator, I have received an immense volume of interesting and valuable information from flocks totalling about 40,000 breeding ewes. A brief summary of this data is now in process of publication as a preliminary report. The committee has recommended that for the future the investigation shall be restricted to four main problems of major importance.

Admittedly this whole project is an ambitious one, but it is an example of a systematic attempt to collect the valuable information which, by reason of his wide experience, the flockmaster possesses.

Finally the support which the scheme has already received clearly indicates the interest taken in an organized attempt to collect and correlate facts relating to sheep farming practice.

J. Hunter Smith (Oaklands, Hertfordshire).—Eight years ago Oaklands commenced a study of breeds and crosses of grass sheep. During the first four years Ryland—Kerry Hill—and Half-bred were tested for lambing performances and the lambs were also weighed periodically. The Half-breds produced more twins, and the lambs reached the marketing age more quickly.

The work during the next period of four years concentrated upon the Half-breds, and crosses with (*a*) Southdown, and (*b*) Suffolk were tested. The results showed that the Southdown produced earlier marketable lambs. There were a number of problems upon which information was badly needed, for example, Foot-rot and Intestinal parasites, since the life history of some of these parasites was absolutely unknown.

Mr. J. G. Stewart (Ministry of Agriculture).—The one great problem, was how to get over the depreciation on ewes. It had been stated that Half-bred ewes went on until seven or eight years old, but where do the thousands of culled ewes that are sold on the Borders every autumn go? They are purchased for 70s. to 80s. and go to England, where they breed a set of lambs and are then lucky if they fetch 40s. It seemed that the following suggestions had advantageous possibilities :—

(1) Buy gimmers.

(2) Buy well-bred ewe lambs at 50s.

(3) Half-bred lambs put to Hampshire and their lambs again put to Hampshire.

Another great problem was the equalizing of the lamb supply on the market. At the present time the market was flooded in summer and autumn. Lambs born in September were required, and of all breeds the Dorset Horn should be able to accomplish it. Going in for lambs as far as possible all the year round was suggested.

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Mr. JOHN JOYCE (Somerset).—Those flockmasters in Somerset who had bred to get two crops of Dorset lambs per year had generally stopped it. Breeding from ewe lambs with Dorset Horns was successful on account of the fact that they breed the first year, lambing at about seventeen months.

Mr. JOHN PORTER (Buckinghamshire).—A Staffordshire sheep farmer economized his rams, needed fewer, and therefore could buy the best. He took them out in a milk float at night and brought them in next morning.

A Bedfordshire farmer spoke of the value of Western Horn or Wiltshire Horn rams for crossing for fat lambs. They were very rapid growers. Kerry Hill ewes crossed with Western Horn ram produced lambs which were readily saleable at Bedford all through the summer.

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