

Ensilage as a Food for Sheep

Mr. O. C. Gregg, Superintendent of Farmers' Institute for Minnesota, has been conducting some experiments on feeding ensilage to sheep. He gives the result in one of our American exchanges as follows:

We made preparations to use ensilage in the feeding of our flock during the past winter. We have now some facts to report which seem to verify the thought that we had—that ensilage will enter as a large factor in the future production of good mutton in Minnesota. Our ensilage has been fed (beginning gradually) in troughs. These troughs can be readily cleaned by being turned over, that the center piece prevents any chance of the sheep jumping over them, and sometimes stepping in them and so spoiling the food. The troughs are also wide enough so that two rows of sheep will feed from them without undue crowding. We have estimated that they will furnish between seven and eight pounds of wool per head. There are a few young ewes in the flock which we do not consider in this estimate. The ewes are beautiful to look at, square on the back, bright of eye, active in appearance, and when the time comes for the feeding of ensilage they are anxious for their feed, and in case there is any delay at the time, they soon make their wants known by bleating about the troughs. The flock has been fed ensilage and good hay in the morning, with oat hay in reasonable abundance in the afternoon or evening. We have about ninety head of breeding ewes, including the lambs referred to, and they have been fed two grain sacks full of ensilage each day. This is not by any means heavy feeding, and it might be increased in quantity. This is a matter which we must learn from experience. We have fed the ensilage with care, not knowing what the results would be if fed heavily. Next winter we plan to add ensilage to the feed for our fattening flock. From the little experience we have had so far, we think the effects will be good, and that we shall be able to improve the quality of mutton by adding ensilage to the other feeds that we shall use in finishing our fattening flock.

Feeding and Management of the Sow

A sow should not be bred before she is eight months old, and in many cases it is better to delay breeding two or three months longer. The development of the sow will influence the breeder in this matter.

During the period of gestation, sows of all ages should have abundant exercise. In summer, pasture should be provided for them, in which there is plenty of shade. They should also be given plenty of water, especially during hot weather. For pasture, alfalfa and clover are among the best. At certain seasons rape is excellent. A permanent pasture of mixed grasses, especially if it contains numerous shade trees or is partially

wooded, makes an excellent run for sows.

Winter management is more difficult than summer. The greatest difficulty is to give the sows sufficient exercise, without which good litters cannot be expected. In many cases they can be given the run of the barnyard, where they will take exercise, rooting among the manure, or working among scattered straw or chaff, to find what little grain it may contain. If a dry, well-bedded sleeping place is provided, where the sows, from draughts, the conditions are almost ideal for the best results. When it is impossible to use the barnyard, a rocky shed with earth floor and a sleeping pen arranged in one corner, can be made answer the purpose. By littering the shed with cut straw or chaff, and sprinkling a very little whole grain among the chaff every day, the attendant can get the sows to take considerable exercise. Another method is to make use of small portable pens set outside lots. These pens may be made 8 feet wide, 16 feet long, 7 feet high in front, and 3½ feet high at the back, with shanty roof. The pens may be made of a single thickness of inch boards with battens over the cracks. In the front is placed a window, and an opening near one corner large enough for the sows to go in and out. No door is required for the opening. These pens should be placed facing the south, and about fifty yards from the feeding place. If kept well bedded and banked about the bottom of the outside with horse manure, they afford quite comfortable sleeping quarters. The sows are forced to take exercise in walking backwards and forwards between the pen and the feeding place. A pen such as described will accommodate nine or ten sows, though it is better as a rule not to have more than five or six sows together. Care should be taken to provide plenty of trough room; and the troughs should be located on high, dry ground, on a platform should be made on which to place them.

A record should be kept of the date of service of each sow, so that the date of farrowing will be known in advance. The normal period of gestation for sows is 112 days, though they very frequently run a day or two over this time. A week or ten days before she farrows, the sow should be placed

in the farrowing pen, so as to become accustomed to changed conditions before farrowing. She should still be encouraged to take a moderate amount of exercise, however.

The pen should be provided with guard-rails, made of 2x8 inch planks fastened with the edges against the side of the pen about ten inches from the floor. These prevent the sow from lying against the partition, and lessen the danger of injury to the little pigs, which often find the space under the guard-rails a very convenient refuge. A little cut straw makes the best bedding, as the little pigs are apt to become entangled in long straw, and find difficulty in keeping out of the way when the sow moves about. The sow should be handled, more or less, before she farrows, so that she may become accustomed to the presence of the attendant in the pen. A sow treated in this way is certainly likely to become irritable and excited when the attendant enters the pen after she farrows. If everything goes well, she will require but little attention after farrowing, and the less she is interfered with the better, except when it is absolutely necessary.

Many sows will take the boar a few days after farrowing. To breed a sow at such a time is bad practice. No sow can do justice to herself and two litters of pigs at the same time. Usually the sow may be bred again a few days after her pigs are weaned, if not too much pulled down in condition by nursing. If she has raised a large litter and is much emaciated, the chances are that she will produce a very small litter the next time, if she is bred immediately after the pigs are weaned. In such instances, she should be given three weeks or a month of liberal feeding to enable her to regain her lost strength and vitality before she is bred. Many a man has been puzzled to know why his sow, which had raised a large litter, should drop down to four or five puny pigs the next time. The reason is not difficult to find. To produce a large, vigorous litter, the sow must be strong and full of vitality at the time of service.

In feeding the breeding sow during the period of gestation, the feeder should aim to keep her in good, strong condition, without having her become extremely fat. Many farmers go to the other extreme, and keep their sows thin; and the thin sow will either not do justice to her pigs, or will become a mere wreck herself during the time she is nursing her litter—in fact, the chances are that both these things will happen. A sow may be kept in fairly high condition and still produce satisfactorily, provided she takes plenty of exercise.

When on good pasture, sows require very little meal. In this matter the feeder must be governed by the condition of the sows, and if he finds that they are falling off in condition it will pay him to increase the feed. Ground oats, mixed with wheat, bran or middlings, make a good ration for sows. It is well to avoid the heavier and more heating kinds of grain, especially during hot weather. In cold weather, when the sows take a good deal of outdoor exercise, more heating foods, such as corn, peas, or barley, may be used more freely, but always in moderation. In those sections where corn is abundant and cheap, there is a temptation to use it exclusively, a practice which cannot produce the best results. Wheat, bran and middlings are available in nearly every district, and will be found profitable to mix with corn



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