

Ideas Culled from Sheep Breeder's Annual Report, 1893.

"HOW SHALL THE GENERAL FARMER MANAGE HIS SHEEP SO AS TO REALIZE THE GREATEST PROFIT?"

Here the report most admirably fulfills its mission, and the useful ideas brought out in the prize essays written on this subject enter into the question of sheep breeding most fully from the ordinary farmer's standpoint. Each season's work is enlarged upon, giving the most useful details from start to finish.

We have arranged the thoughts of the writers so that the work commences at the most suitable season to begin the year's work in the flock, while we first give the opinions of Walter Cowie and A. P. Kitchen as to what is suitable for

SHEEP HOUSES.

"The sheep pen need not be a very elaborate building. In shape it should be long and comparatively narrow. A building 40 x 20 feet will accommodate thirty sheep nicely, and perhaps more at a pinch. It should face the south, and be provided with lots of windows for the sunlight to enter. The racks should run along either side against the wall, and be provided with troughs to catch the hay seed, and from which the grain may be fed. At either end double doors should be provided, so that the manure can be loaded directly on the wagon as it is driven through. While sheep withstand severe cold, yet it is wise to provide a comfortable house, which may be done by lining the shed with tar paper and boarding up on the inside; if too warm such a pen is easily cooled, and when extremely cold it is as easily kept sufficiently warm."

"A very good sheep pen can be built by putting posts, say ten feet long, in the ground, putting them down two feet in ground. This will make the wall eight feet high, which is plenty high enough. To these posts a 2 x 4 scantling can be spiked near the bottom, and a 4 x 4 mortised on the top for a plate on which the rafters can rest. Then side it in and clap-board it, and you have a sheep pen equal to the best. For a small flock of thirty-five or forty ewes, I would recommend a building 20 x 50 feet, divided into two compartments by a partition twenty feet from one end. This will leave a pen in one end twenty feet square, which could be made warm by double boarding, with tar paper between, in which to put the ewes for a few days at lambing time. The entrance to a sheep pen should be by a wide sliding door, which could be closed in stormy weather and left open at all other times to allow the sheep to run in and out at pleasure. The door should be wide enough to prevent the sheep crowding each other when going in and out, as it is very injurious to a ewe that is heavy with lamb to be jammed by the others when going through the door. Another advantage in favor of a wide door is that it enables one to back a wagon or sleigh right into the pen for the removal of the manure. The feeding rack should be placed all around the sides of the pen. My ideal sheep rack is made in the form of a box, about twenty inches wide and twelve inches deep, having a hinged lid made with slats placed about ten inches apart, so the sheep can get their heads down into the box, but still cannot hoist the feed out with their noses. The advantages of this feeding-box are many. In the first place, they do not get so much chaff and dirt into their wool as with the old style of rack. In the second place, they waste less feed. In the old style of rack the sheep kept pulling the hay out, and if it was clover, a large proportion of the leaves and blossoms, which are the very best of the feed, would break off and drop down amongst their feet, and was consequently wasted. With the feeding-box I have described, the leaves and chaffy stuff remain in the box, and are eaten up clean by the sheep. Grain, roots, or anything else can be fed in this rack without waste, and according to my way of thinking it is far ahead of the old rack in every respect."

We do not entirely approve of these two descriptions of sheep-sheds. If convenience is the aim, sheep, like other farm animals, must be fed from a passage, which, to economize room, should divide the compartments. If the racks are placed around the sides the sheep will be always in the way at feeding time, unless they are turned out until the racks and troughs are supplied with the feed. This is impracticable on wet days, and any one who has experienced the difficulty of feeding a lot of lusty, hungry sheep will require a better arranged shed and feeding troughs.

If a passage with racks is placed in the centre, the shed would require to be thirty feet wide; the sides can be subdivided for the different ages, and there will still be room for a wagon to drive through when the manure is to be removed.

Sheep require separating. They will do far better if about a score are fed together; if thirty-five or forty sheep are fed in one lot there will be a few of the stronger that will get the bulk of the grain, and lambs will do no good among a large number of old sheep.

Three of the writers, viz., John Dickin, A. P. Kitchen and John Bowman, take the time of weaning the lambs as the commencement of the flock year.

The first writer says: "I will commence my paper proper at the time the lambs should be weaned and follow the ewes and lambs throughout the year, claiming that the same care and attention is necessary to breed and feed sheep for the

market as any particular pure breed. I must imagine that a farmer has a flock of ewes and lambs. The lambs should be weaned by the first of August, and the ewes placed on bare pasture, the lambs upon the nicest you have, with access to pure water. Constant attention should be given to the ewes' udders, and in about three weeks any matter that remains in the same should be withdrawn and the ewes put on good pasture.

Now is the time to prepare the flock for the coming season. Weed out any that have a fault—one that has disowned a lamb, or has a bad udder, or bare of wool underneath, etc., etc. Replace these with the best of your shearlings to keep up your number, and see that their tails are nicely trimmed. Take the draught ewes and the rest of your shearlings and sell as opportunity offers."

The second writes: "We will start on September 1st, where this work was finished for last year.

Their lambs are taken from them now, or should be, and ewes turned on bare pasture for about two weeks to dry up the flow of milk. Now cull the flock, that is, see if any of them are beginning to lose their teeth, or are failing in other ways to make them unable to breed profitably. They should be separated and put in good pasture along with the ram.

The breeding flock will now need good pasture to enable them to build up for another year's work. Before turning them into stubble fields, go around all the fences and see that there are no burs or other weeds that will stick into their fleeces. About the first of November their pen should be ready, so that cold, wet nights they can have a dry place to lie, and what clover hay they will clean up, which is very little for some time yet. If they are not in good condition about the tenth of this month, they should get a pound of oats each per day, and on the twentieth let the ram with them, and continue feeding the grain for two weeks. When cared for in this way, they will be almost certain to all come in season within two weeks from the time that the ram was let with them. This will bring the last of the lambs in the first week of May. We think this time the best for several reasons: 1st—Very little expensive feed is needed, as the grass soon fills the bill. Lambs are ready for first grass. They are not so apt to be stunted. Also, at this season, the weather is so warm that the pen in which the ewes have been housed all winter will do for lambing pen."

While the latter, in writing upon this point, says: "As to the age at which lambs should be weaned, opinions differ. The shepherd must be guided in this by his own judgment. My own opinion is that the lambs should be left as long as possible with the ewes, providing that the ewes do not become too thin for breeding again. For the last two years we have allowed the ewes to wean their own lambs, never separating them until the buck was turned in with the ewes, and we have found this system to be followed by excellent results, producing a heavier Christmas lamb without any apparent injury to the ewe. Of course care must be taken not to allow the ewes to get too thin, as it is a suicidal practice to have them in low condition at the time of copulation."

With the two latter essayists we take issue. The first of August is late enough to wean the lambs; if there is any after grass it can be had by this time, and the lambs will do better, while the ewes will require all their time to regain their flesh before they are again bred to the ram, the condition of the ewes at pairing time having much to do with the number and strength of the next crop of lambs.

Three essayists, Walter Cowie, John Dickin and Jas. Bowman, write as follows on

PAIRING TIME.

"The ram should be admitted to the ewes from October or earlier to the middle of November, according as we desire early or late lambs. For early lambs we need warmer accommodations, a greater care, and we must be prepared to lose more or less of the increase. In return we obtain an earlier sale, or more money if held until later. However, unless the farmer is prepared to furnish the above conditions, he had better rest content with lambs dropped in April."

"The ram should not be allowed to run constantly with the flock during the time ewes are in heat. Either for twelve hours each day, or upon alternate days, he should be confined in a separate pen and fed liberally with a grain ration, preferably oats, and all the grass or clover hay he requires. The ewes which have been once served will in his absence go out of heat, thus preventing the excessive drain upon his system from repeated services. The ewes during the time of rutting may run as usual at pasture and should not be over-fat, but yet in strong, vigorous condition."

"Select a ram, the best you can purchase of the breed you fancy (let me advise the use of a pure-bred male with masculine countenance, but not too coarse in the head, with plenty of wool on legs and belly.) If the flock should number over fifteen use a shearing ram, if under that number a good strong lamb will do, and when he has been used two seasons will sell in November of the second season for more than he cost you; and when the time comes to mate these, take a little Venetian red and mix with common grease and put on breast of ram, see your sheep every day and note in book results. A good shepherd will know each sheep individually; if not, a very convenient way is to

obtain ear tags, and let every sheep be known by her number, then drive the sheep into a pen once a week and enter results as above. At the end of sixteen days change color on ram to lampblack, and watch if any of the ewes return, and note. The above, if strictly carried out, will make your work easier in the lambing season, as you will know which ewes lamb earliest and have a warm place provided for them."

Walter Cowie, A. P. Kitchen and James Sharp score good points on

WINTER TREATMENT OF BREEDING EWES.

"As winter comes on the sheep should be folded at night and during storms. While they seem perfectly capable of withstanding the bleak autumn winds, yet a chilling rain under such conditions may be decidedly injurious. The winter food should be as varied as our resources will permit. Clover hay, pea straw and roots will of course form the staple. Clover should be furnished once a day at least, and clean, well-preserved pea straw *ad libitum*. A few oats will amply repay their cost in increased vigor of the animal, but not more than a gill or two per head need be supplied. It is not wise to give too many turnips to ewes bearing young, but yet a small quantity, say one to two pounds, will help digestion. A similar quantity of ensilage, if available, may be furnished also. Water should be provided constantly. Salt should be kept in a small trough, so that the sheep may help themselves at will."

"A good crop of turnips means a poor crop of lambs; as sheep are passionately fond of them, they are apt to gorge themselves, thus crowding and weakening the lambs. But it does not follow that because the excessive use of turnips is detrimental, the moderate use of them may not be profitable; in fact, when fed with judgment their place cannot be filled by any other article of food for keeping any class of stock in a healthy, vigorous and thrifty condition. As the season advances and the lambing season comes on, it will be necessary to feed a little grain, or clover hay, because the farther the animal is advanced in the period of gestation the more nutriment does the system require. It is also desirable that the amount of nutriment should be increased without increasing the bulk of the ration. It is bad policy to feed a bulky ration to any animal heavy with young, because the crowding of the fetus is apt to result in weak or deformed offspring. After lambing the ewes should be fed liberally, so as to induce a good flow of milk, because if one wants to raise good, thrifty, profitable lambs it is important that they give them as good a start in the world as possible. For this purpose a ration of clover hay, with a few oats, fed whole, and a liberal supply of roots is, perhaps, as good a feed as can be got. For milking ewes, I like mangels the best. They may not induce a greater flow of milk than turnips, but it is richer and has a better flavor; in fact, I have known lambs to refuse to suckle if their dams were given a feed of turnips as a change. When the lambs are about a month old they should be induced to eat a little grain. A small enclosure should be penned off at one end of the sheep-house, leaving an opening through which the lambs could run in and out at will. In this pen a trough should be placed having a little bran or ground oats in, and the lambs will soon learn to nibble at it; and although they will not eat very much, they will pay their owner handsomely for what they do consume."

"For the general farmer who is not in the show business, the lambs will be in plenty of time if they come from the middle of April until the same time in May. Coming, as they would, in time for the first bite of grass, there would be no standstill or go back with them, as we so often see in very early lambs. But we must say a word about the fall and winter treatment of the breeding flock. The ewes have had the run of the stubble and pasture fields, and they should be looking well; though run down in summer, they have had time to pick up again. But the first indications of winter are upon us, and the flock needs a little more attention. The sheep pen should be open at all times, that they may find shelter in wet and stormy weather. Shelter is of great importance in the cold, wet and changeable weather in the fall of the year. They should have the run of the fields as long as they are free from snow, supplemented with a few cut turnips and nice, clean pea straw fed in troughs and racks in the pen. Old and weak ewes will have a hard time to get their proper share of the feed from the young and vigorous, and should have a separate pen if they are to be kept another year. But, unless the flock is much reduced in numbers, they should be fattened for the butcher at once, as their clip gets lighter every year, and they are not able to rough it so well as the younger ones.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

Just as we go to press we are pleased to learn that at the Mauchline Show, one of the best held in Scotland this year, Mr. Andrew Mitchell, Barcheskie, Kircudbright, Scotland, was successful in winning nine first prizes, two seconds and two thirds, the champion cup for the best Clydesdale mare, champion cup for best Ayrshire, and also the champion cup for best three Ayrshire females.