

Enquiry into Sheep Industry

in Saskatchewan
By A. FRANK MANTLE

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During the fall and early winter an enquiry was conducted into the present status and future prospects of the sheep raising industry. A schedule of questions was sent to several hundreds of sheep raisers—both farmers and ranchers—throughout the province. A gratifying number responded and many went to some trouble in expressing their opinion as to the advantages and disadvantages connected with sheep raising in Saskatchewan.

Letters of enquiry were also sent to a number of the leading packing house operators, wool dealers, and smooth wire fence companies, asking them a number of questions as to those aspects of the sheep industry with which they were concerned. Here again a gratifying response was met with and there was evident upon the part of these companies a desire to co-operate in any movement looking to the fostering and building up of this neglected industry.

An analysis of the replies received from sheep raisers indicates that the industry of sheep raising is in a transition stage in Saskatchewan at the present time. The large flock of the exclusive rancher of sheep is being replaced by the more numerous and smaller flocks of the grain growing farmers who keep sheep merely as a side line.

Without exception, those ranchers who replied to the circular of enquiry, considered the industry as viewed from their standpoint to be on the decline. Some accepted the inevitable and were either disposing of their flocks or were bringing their methods into harmony with the changed conditions of their districts; others desired that old conditions might be restored and the ranching industry perpetuated—not recognizing that the homesteader and farmer had come to stay and would vastly increase the production of wealth per acre in their locality. Said one Maple Creek rancher, "My opinion of the sheep industry is that it will soon be a thing of the past on account of the ranch being taken up by farmers." In addition to this cause, the difficulty of controlling watering places and preserving them from entry, the scarcity of winter pasturing grounds near home, the competition for range rights and privileges of horse and cattle ranchers, and the increased cost of holding large range areas due to the Supplementary Revenue Tax, were given as reasons for the decadence of the ranching industry.

In view of these adverse and unalterable conditions it would appear to be inadvisable to attempt to stimulate the industry of sheep-ranching. The hope of the province from the standpoint of sheep production lies, (a) in assisting those farmers who at present are sheep owners by placing before them information as to how they may improve their flocks, how handle them to best advantage, and how secure the best

returns when marketing; (b) in so setting forth the advantages and profits accruing to sheep production that more farmers may be induced to make the experiment.

To these ends it would be advisable that the Department issue a bulletin dealing with this phase of farming in Saskatchewan and place it in the hands, not only of every owner of sheep at the present time in the province, but also of every farmer who is open to argument upon the subject.

A large amount of interesting and valuable data was compiled from the returns sent in, and it is gratifying to report that the pessimistic note, either as to the present state of the sheep industry on Saskatchewan farms or as to its outlook, was seldom struck. The consensus of opinion undoubtedly was, that, despite certain drawbacks, which will be enumerated later, sheep-raising is an easy, sure, and very profitable adjunct of grain farming.

The following facts, being based upon a large number of returns, may be regarded as authoritative. Forty-eight sheep comprised the average farm flock, where more than five sheep are kept at July 1, 1909, when lambing was completed; the composition of this flock is in the following proportion: 15 aged ewes, 8 shearing ewes, 7 shearing wethers, 17 lambs, 1 stud ram. Most lambs came between April 15th and May 15th and most correspondents considered that the best time of the year for the lamb crop to come. If suitable quarters are available and a supply of succulent feed has been arranged for during the previous summer, early lambs can be made very profitable and the farmer can sell larger and superior lambs at 7 months than those of the rancher at 18 months. Several farmers advocating early lambing gave the price realized for their lambs as being figures from \$1.00 to \$2.50 above the average.

The percentage of lambs saved is 83 out of every 100; when the number of twins is taken into account a man would be justified in expecting to save and raise, on an average, one lamb for every ewe. Without doubt this number could be much increased if proper attention were paid to the securing of a good ram, to the feeding of the ewes at the time of breeding and to the care of the lambs at, and after, birth.

The average weight of fleece was 7½ lbs. and the average price obtained for the wool was 9½ cents in 1909 and in 1908. Thus the average income from wool per flock of 48 sheep (excluding 17 lambs) was \$23.42 in 1909. The average price obtained for lambs was \$5.50 and for sheep \$7.25. The usual amount of stock to be marketed each year from a flock constituted as above described would be 4 wether lambs (the best and most advanced), 7 shearing wethers, and 5 of the 15

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