

THE PARASITES INJURIOUS TO SHEEP

The Stomach Worm (*Haemonchus contortus*)

Description.— The Stomach Worm of Sheep is a very small thread like creature that is found in the abomasum (true stomach). It may also be found in the upper part of the small intestine in cases of heavy infestation. The male worms are less than three quarters of an inch long. The female worms may reach a length of one and a quarter inches. The Stomach Worm may be any shade of white in color or they may be white with a blood red coloration showing through the body wall. This worm is a blood sucker capable of bringing the sheep or lamb down to the death point.

Life History of the Stomach Worm.—The life of the Stomach Worm from egg to sex maturity is best considered in three stages, viz, the egg to larva, the larval, and the adult or sexually mature stage. The egg to larva, part of its life commences with the development of the egg from the germ cell to the condition of fertilization in the uterus of the worm. After the eggs are fertilized they are released from the uterus of the worm to mingle with the food in the fourth section of the stomach of the infested sheep. The worm eggs pass with the food and food residues until they reach the soil in the dung pellets. As many as 6000 Stomach Worm eggs have been recovered from a single pellet of sheep dung. Should the temperature and moisture conditions be favorable to worm egg incubation at the time the worm egg laden dung pellets are scattered on the soil hatching takes place and a little worm is released from each fertile egg.

This little larva feeds on the fecal matter surrounding it for three or four days and reaches larval maturity in that time if the weather conditions are favorable. Frost and dry weather destroy many of the eggs and very young larvae. Once full larval development is attained the little worm is protected by a chitinous coat or sheath. In this condition the larva can withstand the Canadian winter. The larva after leaving the dung-ball may ascend a blade of grass or attach itself to other vegetable debris near the surface of the soil, or it may be washed into a pool of water. In any of these positions the worm may be taken up by the lambs while they are feeding or drinking from surface pools. The young worm carried on grass or in water, on reaching the fourth section of the stomach is released from its protective coat due to the action of the stomach juices. Now free, the little worm attaches itself by its armed head to the stomach wall, and taps a bountiful food supply. The growth period of 14 to 21 days brings the worm up to sexual maturity.

The stomach worm will like all other worms die of old age in time. Its length of life is believed to be six to ten months. Sheep heavily infested in the autumn will, if they survive, carry fewer worms in the spring, in any part of the country where winter infestation does not take place, showing that the life of this worm is short.