

## Stock Department.

### Sheep.

#### No. I.

As the winter draws on, and our evening are prolonged, let us as farmers try to devote our leisure moments to the improvement of the mind.

To say nothing of the benefits that are derived, and the practical opinions that are mutually exchanged at the meetings of our farmers' clubs, and such kindred organizations, the memory may be stored with new information, or old knowledge be more deeply impressed upon the mind, by a careful selection of reading from the more practical writers in agricultural works and publications.

We propose, for the next few months, to enter into the spirit of the agricultural press upon the different varieties and breeds of live stock, their habits and peculiarities, condensing information into as short and practical editorials as may be deemed sufficient to treat fully of these subjects.

The importance of sheep to an agricultural community is very great. Unlike other classes of domestic stock, they are double producers, coming into the market as meat, and returning to the owner an annual interest upon their first cost by the periodical growth of wool.

It is in this yearly return that sheep as a class exceed in value any other class of stock, with the exception, perhaps, of the milch cows; and it is for this reason that we never consider the stocking of a farm in Canada complete unless there are to be found representatives of these two classes.

Although the breeds of sheep are various, they are practically divided into two classes, —the long-woolled and coarse mutton sheep and the short-woolled and fine mutton sheep.

It is for the farmer to suit his sheep to his soil and locality, for the marked peculiarities in each should be regulated by the nature of the soil and climate in which they are bred.

The following table will show their relative value as wool and meat producers, being a summary of the average clip and the average carcase weight of each breed, at two years old.

#### SHORT-WOOL.

Wool in the fleece.	Carcass weight, per quarter
Southdown..... 2½ to 3½ lbs	15 to 20 lbs.
Welsh..... 2 to 2½ "	8 to 10 "
Irish (horned)..... 2 to 2½ "	10 to 14 "
Merino, pure bred... 4 to 5 "	14 to 18 "

#### LONG-WOOL.

Coraswald..... 7 to 8 lbs.	25 to 35 lbs.
Leicester..... 8 to 10 "	25 to 30 "
Lincoln..... 8 to 10 "	25 to 30 "

These are the usual fleeces and carcasses of the pure-bred sheep, but so greatly have different classes been improved by systematic and careful crossing, that these averages have

been greatly augmented, while further hardiness and better economy of feed have also resulted.

The age of a sheep is generally counted from its first shearing, and is determined by examination of the teeth.

The sheep has eight fore teeth in the lower jaw, while it has none in the front of the upper. During the first year they are all of the same size, but at from 14 to 16 months the first two are renewed, and two more every year until the fourth shearing, at which time the sheep is said to be "full mouthed."

It should be observed, however, that sheep that are well fed and kept, usually begin to renew their teeth earlier than such as are stunted from neglect.

Nine years is the natural age of the sheep, but the teeth generally begin to fail, and the animal becomes "broken mouthed," at five or six years of age. As soon as this ensues, power of mastication is greatly impaired, and an animal can hardly be considered of any value except for its fleece. Indeed, we think that no sheep, except, perhaps, certain ewes especially famous as successful breeders, should be kept after the ages of three or four shears.

In Canada, the sexes are sub-divided into rams, ewes and wethers.

#### BREEDING.

The farmer in Canada must regulate the time at which he admits the ram to his ewes, by the food and accommodation that he can supply to them when lambing, and to the young lambs. We believe implicitly in early lambs, but we would rather advise that lambs should be timed for the first grass, than that they should be stinted of food in the spring.

Upon the treatment of the mothers throughout the winter, and of the ewes and lambs until pasture has fairly started, will entirely depend the success of the early lamb raiser. The man who breeds good, early lambs will have the finest spring lamb for the market, and the finest shearlings; but he who neglects his early lambs will find them surpassed by those brought forth later in the spring of mothers that have been generously treated.

Fifteen months is the youngest age at which a ewe is fit to breed, and therefore, by having early ewe lambs, they can be made to breed the second lot of early lambs in the ensuing spring.

Ewes will do better in Canada upon well cured pea straw than upon any other fodder, and if to this be added a fair allowance (too few rather than too many) of turnips, and a modicum of grain, and dry but airy shelter, they cannot but come through the winter well. We shall, however, presently enlarge upon the subject of feeding.

The period of gestation is generally allowed to be twenty-one weeks; but from various experiments that we have from time to time seen on record, and from our own experience,

we consider the mean duration to be about 152 days, or very nearly twenty two weeks.

Care should be taken that the ram be not required to serve too many ewes, for in such a case he cannot be depended upon, and his growth is apt to be impaired. Moreover, should the ewes all bear, their lambs are apt to be puny.

Much of course depends upon the age of the ram, and upon this point breeders are much divided in opinion. We are inclined to favour those who advocate the keeping of a tup to his second year, when his utmost powers can be exerted without fear of injury, for the yearling is not filled out, and the serving of a number of ewes is apt to stunt that full and perfect development of his points which constitutes the chief beauty of a perfect tup. If, however, he be allowed to run with the ewes in season as a yearling, fifty should be his full compliment, but a two shear ram may safely serve from 60 to 100 ewes.

Great care should be exercised to see that all the ewes have "blossomed," or come in season, and such as will not it is most profitable to turn with the wethers and prepare for the butcher.

The provision of some extra stimulant at this season will, however, generally bring all ewes into season, and this may be made by turning the sheep from comparatively poor pasture into a good clover field, by giving them some more nutritive food, such as linseed, which is the best for the purpose; or by giving oil cake, oats, &c., for a short time previous to the admission of the ram. Some flockmasters adopt the practice of using what is called a "teaser," but the safest plan is never to trust to one ram, but to endeavour always to have two with the ewes, thus ensuring the covering of all the ewes by one or the other.

#### NO. II.

Ewes, when put to the ram, should be in good order, but by no means fat. A ewe too fat is apt to frustrate the uses of the ram, and during the term of her gestation a too highly fed state is apt to be very injurious to the forming lamb, and is particularly dangerous when the lambing season has arrived.

Sheep require to be kept during our severe winters well sheltered, but not too warm. Indeed, open sheds, into which neither snow nor rain can penetrate, but in which ventilation is thoroughly secured, form the houses in which sheep thrive best. Nature has provided the sheep with a coat that defies the severity of our cold weather, but when that covering becomes saturated, it is long in drying, and in consequence the damp covering exerts its evil effects upon the animal's constitution for a long time.

The proper care of ewes in lamb is simple, and may be shortly summed up thus:

Regular feeding and careful handling. Dogs should never be allowed to molest them. As the lambing time approaches the ewes should be carefully watched, and if it is practicable, should be allowed a large roomy shed, so that, when the season of labour approaches, the ewe may get away from her companions, as is always their desire. In Canada, where flocks are usually small, no excuse should be given for a failure of per-