Current Information Letter

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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION DIVISION—PAUL E. MILLER, DIRECTOR

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August 3, 1942 | UNIVERSITY FARM, ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA | No. 00040

FILE UNDER: ANIMAL HUSBANDRY - Breeding, Care, and Management - Sheep

Flying Sheepskins Call for Shearling Pelts - By W. E. Morris, extension livestock specialist

Scientific tests have proved that sheepskin is far warmer than any fur. It is likewise more plentiful. Moreover, there is such an urgent need for the right kind of pelt for war needs that the War Production Board has sponsored a program to increase the number of shearling pelts available. Shearling pelts are the skins from sheep or lambs which have been sheared and the wool re-grown up to one inch in length before slaughtering. We consume normally about six million shearling pelts a year. Half of these have been obtained from Australia. The war demand has increased the need to about 15½ million for clothing for aviators and other fighting men exposed to the rigors of cold and other adverse weather conditions. The need for sheepskins for this purpose will continue as long as the present emergency lasts. Therefore, every effort needs to be made to obtain a supply from every possible source. The shearling pelts carrying about one inch of wool are used to make the parts of the flyer's suit that go around the body. Skins with three-eighths to three-quarters inch of wool are used for making pants, boots, helmets, and gauntlets. Many of the skins with only one-fourth inch of wool are used to make suits for the ground crew. About 80 square feet of tanned skins is required for a complete suit. This requires pelts from about ten sheep.

The Aim in Brief - The job ahead is to keep at the lowest possible minimum the number of sheep and lambs going to slaughter with less than one-fourth inch of wool. One-half inch would be better, and to have as large a proportion of fed and other slaughter lambs that normally go to market in full fleece to carry only shearling length wool. It is also well to remember that a shearling skin produced by a normal re-growth of wool following shearing is superior to a freshly clipped animal even though the wool length is the same. Sheep raisers and feeders should keep this well in mind in handling their operation. If they shear their lambs before marketing at the right time, they will not only supply a pelt that meets the specifications but also receive a good price from the pelts and have the wool to sell also.

Price Ceilings Assure Profits - The production of shearling skin has been made a profitable as well as a patriotic undertaking by action of war policy agencies. Price regulation No. 141 of the Office of Price Administration became effective on May 13, 1942, and establishes ceiling prices for domestic raw

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, University of Minnesota, Agricultural Extension Division and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating, Paul E. Miller, Director. Published in furtherance of Agricultural Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914.

shearlings, F.O.B. shipping points on the per skin basis as Grade No. 1 (one-half inch to one inch wool length) $2.15; Grade No. 2 (one-fourth to one-half inch wool length) $1.90; Grade No. 3 (one-eighth inch to one-quarter inch wool length) $1; Grade No. 4 (bare to one-eighth inch wool length and clipper cut skins with less than one-quarter inch wool length, and all shearlings with a wool count of less than 46's - low quarter blood) 40¢.

A recent OPA order removes the ceiling price on wool skins but does not affect the shearling situation. This action permits fair trading in non-shearling pelts that carry varying amounts and grades of wool. Inasmuch as both the skin and the wool from the skin are covered by ceiling prices, the over-all value should not be changed. The total supply of shearlings, which meet government specification, is being reserved for military use.

Wool Pulling Prohibited - Another regulation issued for the purpose of aiding the shearling program is that of the War Production Board amendment No. 1, which reads as follows: "No person shall hereafter pull or cause to be pulled any wool from any freshly flayed or salted sheepskin or lambskin when the wool is of such length and type as to constitute a wool growth of one inch or less and of 46's grade or higher, except skins black or mottled with black, or so torn or damaged as to be unsuited for tanning purposes."

Under normal conditions our largest domestic supply of shearlings comes from Texas and adjacent areas in the late spring and early summer months. For the most part they are yearling wethers, and shearling tanners consider them the ideal domestic shearling. However, the demands of the present emergency program are so broad that practically all sections of the country and all types of sheep production can make contributions.

The next large potential source of shearlings will be from the fed lambs of this coming fall and winter season, although it is hoped that some shearlings will be available from the slaughter lambs coming to market from both the range and farm states this summer and early fall.

Farmers should be made to feel that the secret in producing shearlings is to make it a definite part of their regular production program. The experienced feeder or grower knows just about when his lambs or sheep will be ready for market by their weight and the condition at any particular time. Such information should be used as the basis for determining when to shear his animals in order to get the greatest total returns. If he shears and ships immediately thereafter, he will find that he has either a No. 3 or a No. 4 skin - neither of which is acceptable under military contracts and the price he receives for his lambs is apt to be discounted from $1 to $1.50 per head.

Shearing Comb Important - The comb used in shearing sheep has a direct influence on the amount of wool left on the animal and likewise is a factor in the length of time necessary to hold sheep after shearing in order to produce a shearling skin qualified to meet military specifications. All sheepmen should become familiar with the different types of combs. There are three principal types used in the shearing of sheep, - the regular comb, the No. 5W, and the Texas goat comb. Experienced sheep raisers know that it is easier and more economical to shear sheep with a regular comb than to use one of these coarse so-called thick combs. A good shearer will shear about 100 sheep a day using a regular comb. In shifting to a No. 5W comb his production will be cut down to 85 to 90 head; while if he uses a Texas goat comb, it will drop still lower - 75 to 80 head per day.

Conditions will determine the type of comb to use. Normally it is better to use a regular comb as this increases production and cuts shearing costs. If lambs need about 6 to 8 weeks to finish for market from either the farm or feed lot, they should be sheared with the regular comb. If on the other hand they will finish in three to four weeks, the No. 5W comb should be used. If the sheep need only 10 days to 2 weeks to finish, shearing with the Texas goat comb will produce a No. 2 skin in that time.

The special combs also have another use in handling the shearing operation in cold or otherwise unfavorable weather. The use of the No. 5W comb leaves about one-half pound of wool on the animal and the Texas goat comb around a pound, - in both cases providing some protection against cold or other adverse weather hazards.

It is clear that if we are to reach the goal of 15½ million shearling skins, counting imports, by the end of next year, we will have to get a large number of them from the farm and feed lot lambs this coming fall and winter. The shearing of native and feed lot lambs will be an innovation for many growers. While the shearing of fed lambs has been done as a regular practice in a few producing areas, it is not the custom in many other commercial feeding sections.

The problem of getting shearers should not be insurmountable for the great majority of this work normally is only from March to July, and ought to be available for fall and winter shearing if arrangements are made far enough in advance. It is understood, of course, that many areas have difficulty in obtaining the services of shearers during the regular shearing season this year due in a large measure to war industries' call for workers and to actual military service. It is none too early for a consideration of any special problem likely to arise in connection with the production of the largest possible volume of shearlings from the coming native and feed lot crops and to work out solutions for them. It is important to shear only when the wool is reasonably dry and a good idea to market the wool promptly as there is the possibility of excess moisture which might cause mold to develop and damage the wool.

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