

Leave as little fat and flesh as possible on the skin, and remove what little remains while the skin is still green. If that is not done, the skin beneath sweats and does not dry readily or evenly, decomposition takes place, uneven tanning occurs, and the resulting basil is spoilt. Keep the skin free from foreign matter.

Expelling Body Heat

A good way of making sure that the body heat of a skin is expelled before it is stretched is by the process known as "potting." Place the freshly-removed skin wool upward on the floor of the woolshed, lift it by the wool in the middle of the back, and lower it gently to the battens. The skin is then in a heap through which air can circulate freely. This must be done before the skin is stretched or painted with anti-pest solution.

If a skin is dried in sunlight, skin side out, before the body heat is dissipated, it sheds its wool. In the trade a sheepskin with this fault is called a "puller." It becomes porous on being sliped and is graded unsound.

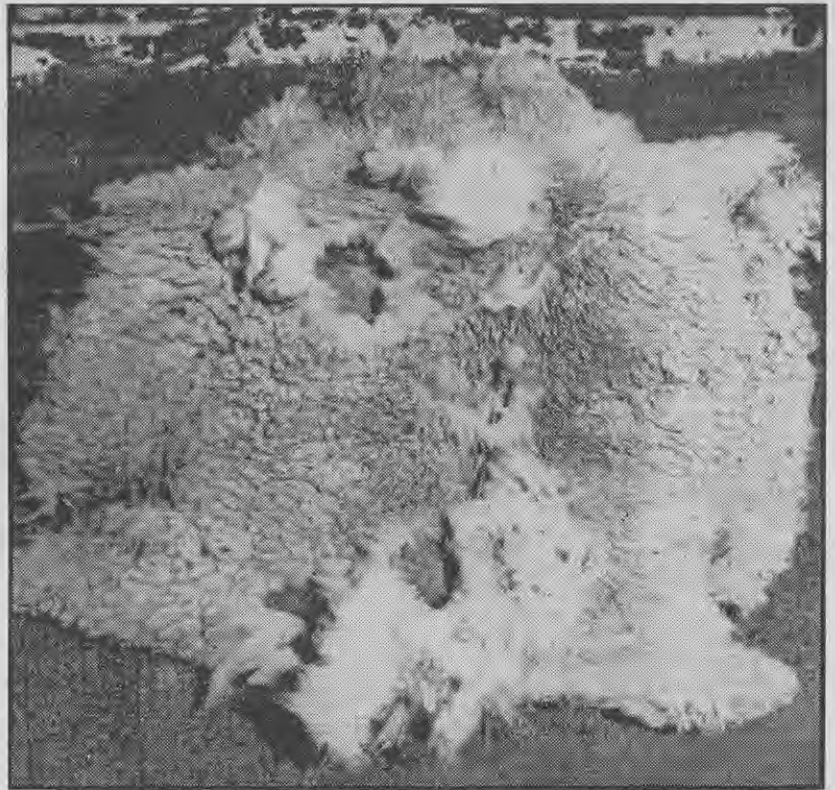
If a skin is stretched before the body heat is expelled and before a crust is formed, it may be distorted easily to any shape. A skin well prepared in every way except that it is wrongly stretched deteriorates in value.

Drying the Skins

It is best for the farmer to dry his sheepskins thoroughly in a woolshed, implement shed, or some covered space at sufficient height above the ground to avoid the risk of damage by dogs. Skins must not be hung on barbed-wire fences, dray wheels, fence posts, farm implements, or anything that puts the skin out of shape.

A simple yet efficient way to hang the skin after it has been potted is skin side out, with the neck and the butt squarely along two taut parallel wires kept 4in. apart by stapling them at intervals to small blocks of 4in. by 1in. board. If these wires tend to sag, it is easy to tighten them from the ends. The separate wires allow the free passage of air and do not compress the wool to the exclusion of air, as is the tendency when the skin is placed on rails or battens; this eliminates the possibility of sweating. The average woolshed is an ideal place for the drying of sheepskins.

To prevent the butt end from curling up and consequently sweating turn it under; or, better still, turn back just enough wool to prevent the skin from folding. Cut off the trotters. Clip off any dags or urine-stained wool. Keep turning down the edges of the neck, tail, and legs, and see that there is no overlapping until they have dried out.



Wool pulled from a sweated skin.

Leave the skin placed along the wire until it becomes crisp; it may then be placed neck and butt across the wires until the pelt (especially the edges, neck, and butt ends) is dry and firm. If the wool is damp, the skin may then be placed wool out until it has dried.

Skins must be dried under cover, because sunlight crusts the outer layer, preventing the inner moisture from escaping. The internal temperature rises and, as the inner layers contain a high proportion of fat, this, in effect, fries, raising a blister which, when the skin is tanned, forms an inferior basil. It is evident, therefore, that to prevent putrefaction the moisture must be removed from the skin, preferably by a current of dry air. Drying in direct sunlight is harmful. A woolly skin weighing 12lb. dries to about 8lb. under cover but to about 6½lb. in sunlight.

A carefully-dried skin has no unpleasant smell. A skin dried too slowly becomes sloppy. Freezing or chilling of skins for the market is not practicable as in the meat trade, for in freezing the fibres of the undried skin are ruptured. Carefully-dried skins, carefully packed, can arrive at their destination in good condition.

Weights of dried skins are not standardised; for a sound crossbred pelt 3lb. to 3½lb. is allowed. The buyer of skins has to estimate what a skin will slipe in weight of clean scoured wool, and add the weight of pelt. Weighing damp skins, like weighing damp wool, is very unsatisfactory.

If insufficiently-dried skins are packed in with a bundle of carefully-dried skins, both the undried skins and others in contact with them will deteriorate because of sweating and a general increase in bacterial activity causing decomposition. For that reason it is bad practice to put green skins on the top of a bundle of dried skins.

Preventing Pest Damage

Thorough, fairly quick drying is all that is needed if care is exercised in the packing and disposal of sheepskins. If there is danger of rat or insect damage, the skins may be painted with an anti-pest solution. The average dip solution on the farm, **provided it is not of a carbolic (Phenolic) type**, is satisfactory. With a carbolic dip there is a tendency, if the dip is over strength, for the phenol to tan the outer layer of the skin on the living sheep, as well as on the painted skin. That can be noticed in a comparison