

PRE-LAMBING SHEARING OF EWES

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IF, during the early 1930's, the practicability and usefulness of shearing ewes a short time before lambing had been suggested, there would have been few who would not have ridiculed the idea without so much as considering it. To have deprived a sheep at a time when it was heavy in lamb of the protective covering of wool with which Nature had provided it, and during the coldest and usually the wettest time of the year—late winter or early spring—would have appeared so obviously contrary to common-sense farming as to have been almost absurd.

THE practice has been successfully undertaken, however, by so many farmers, and, strangely enough, mainly those in the colder parts of New Zealand such as Southland, Otago, and Canterbury, for so many years, that, whether it is a worthwhile and safe practice or not, it is an aspect of farming which warrants the attention of all progressive sheep men.

As pre-lambing shearing has in the past decade continued to increase in popularity in the South Island, where temperatures generally are lower than in the North Island, it is surprising that the practice is not more widely known to farmers in the warmer and sheltered parts of the easier country of the North Island.

Therefore, to acquaint farmers not only of the advantages and disadvantages claimed, but particularly of the methods and precautions to be adopted in undertaking pre-lambing shearing, the experience and opinions of a well-known Waikato farmer, Mr. H. P.

Hewitt, who farms 1000 acres on the Te Miro hills, near Cambridge, are recorded.

When Mr. Hewitt first sheared his ewes about 3 weeks before the date on which lambing was due, a sudden and severe hailstorm occurred immediately after one batch of ewes was turned out. However, none of the shorn ewes was lost. This experience, although it caused great anxiety at the time, gave him much more confidence to repeat the procedure during subsequent years, and the advantages were considered to be so decidedly worthwhile that it has since become a regular practice with him. Incidentally, although the clip on that occasion was of only 9 months' duration instead of the usual 12 months, the wool was of light condition and so free of any break that it realised 3d. per lb. more than that sold by neighbours.

Farmers who would consider shearing before lambing and who have adequate shearing-shed and suitable

paddock facilities are recommended to prepare for shearing operations by shutting up some good-pastured and, if possible, sheltered paddocks. In doing so it is wise to avoid those containing trees under which sheep would be exposed to cold draughts should a storm occur. The farmer cannot be sure of having the necessary amount of feed every year, but by shutting up a good paddock he can be sure that the ewes "just off the shears" obtain ample feed immediately. This essential of pre-lambing shearing is most important. Extra care must be taken in mustering, yarding, and particularly in handling the ewes at shearing, as obviously if this is done the shock of shearing is not aggravated. It is preferable to muster the sheep in small mobs and endeavour to complete shearing before 4 p.m. each day to enable the sheep to get a full feed before nightfall. Do not keep the sheep about the yards unnecessarily.

Advantages of Practice

The advantages claimed for pre-lambing shearing are:—

1. There is a greater natural exercise of ewes, which thus lessens bearing trouble, tends toward a continuity of feeding during the days of late pregnancy and so greatly reduces the incidence of sleepy sickness, and permits an easier lambing by the ewe.
2. It is contended that shorn ewes are quicker to take advantage of the shelter of gullies, hedges, etc., and will tend to lamb in a more sheltered place than would unshorn sheep.



In-lamb ewes just after shearing.

[Fraser Niederer photo.]