



The Mating of Hoggets

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FOR many years sheep farmers have been convinced that breeding from young stock has a tendency to reduce the vitality, wool clip, and general frame of a flock; in fact, not long ago farmers were not inclined to breed from 2-tooths (18 to 20 months old) for that reason, but to wait until the 4-tooth stage (2½ years old) before mating. Now that breeding from the 2-tooth is an established custom the stage has been carried a step further by some farmers by mating hoggets (7 to 8 months old).

ONE farmer in the Palmerston district found over the years that the odd hogget would be in lamb by accident with no apparent harm at delivery or during lactation; he also found that quite often those hoggets would produce twins the following year, whereas 2-tooths seldom produced twins in their first pregnancy. On this Palmerston farm all sheep are well pastured and 2-tooths were very forward in condition at mating and maintained good condition through to lambing.

Mated and Unmated Hoggets Compared

In 1949 the farmer drafted off 124 of his best hoggets and put 106 of them to a Southdown ram. The other 18 were kept as a control to check if there were any differences in the two groups. The lambing percentage in the hoggets was 64 and all lambs were sent to the freezing works with lamb drafts, including lambs from the older ewes. The practice has been continued each year with about the same percentage, and accurate inspection of the flock from time to time shows that there is no difference in the 4-year-old ewes between those which had produced a lamb as a hogget and those which had not been mated until the 2-tooth stage. Hoggets generally were better mothers than 2-tooths at first lambing and it was found each year that the 2-tooth which had produced a lamb as a hogget was a better mother, produced a greater number of twins, and had no troubles such as the sheep leaving the lamb. The only difference from normal in animal husbandry was the addition of a small amount of lucerne fed during winter.

The aim of this farmer was to reduce the troubles at lambing time among his young ewes and this was achieved as well as securing an extra crop of lambs. The flock is almost straight Romney and the farmer retains his

own replacements, so the lambs from the hoggets are of no use as replacements because of the Southdown ram being used. Lambing is drawn out over a longer period because of genital maturity taking place during the mating and some hoggets, being later lambs, are longer reaching maturity. The lambs from the hoggets are smaller and, though they cannot compete with the lambs from the older ewes for size, they fatten just as readily.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The advantages of this practice of mating hoggets are:—
Lambing troubles at the 2-tooth stage are reduced.

Hoggets like these, fed on a supplementary crop and with access to good-quality hay, could be bred from, but they must be well grown and well fed from 6 weeks before lambing up to weaning.

Hoggets are better mothers than 2-tooths at first lambing.
Extra crop of lambs.
Greater number of twins at the 2-tooth stage.

The disadvantages are:—

Longer time to complete lambing.
Lambs are not suitable to retain for flock replacements.

The practice of mating hoggets cannot be recommended to all sheep farmers, because hill-country flocks are not as well pastured as paddock ones, and generally hoggets are not in a sufficiently forward condition to mate; but there are many farmers on rich, highly fertile country who might try out the practice of mating hoggets on a small scale. However, it is important that hoggets to be mated should be well grown and receive the best of feed from 6 weeks before lambing up to weaning.

Farm Contractors and Workers' Insurance

SOME contractors employing men on farm contracts appear to be under a misapprehension that it is not their responsibility to insure their workers, as is required under the Workers' Compensation Act. However, this obligation is still the responsibility of the contractor unless the farmer is the legal employer of the contractor's men.

In an explanation of recent changes in workers' compensation legislation, with special reference to the position of contractors, the Workers' Compensation Board seeks the co-operation of farmers to ensure that contractors fulfil their insurance obligations.

The Board states that as the statutory indemnifier of uninsured employers it has had to pay a number of claims wherein contractors engaged in work on a farm failed to insure their workers. In many cases the contractors were of the opinion that the workers were covered by the farmer's own insurance company. However, there is no liability on the farmer's insurance company unless the farmer

is, in fact, the legal employer of the contractor's men.

Until the 1949 Workers' Compensation Amendment Act repealed Section 13 of the principal Act, a principal and contractor were both deemed to be employers of the contractor's workmen, but this is no longer the case. A contractor, therefore, as an employer, must fulfil his obligation to insure his workmen. The 1950 Amendment Act provides penalties for those who fail to do so, and offenders are liable to prosecution.

The Board suggests that farmers should ask their contractors to produce evidence of insurance before they are allowed to proceed with a contract.

Section 63 of the principal Act is still in force. Under this section a principal is responsible for any working contractor in connection with work in a gold mine, coal mine, the cutting of standing timber, or the clearing of land of stumps or logs; in these instances the contractor still remains liable for his own workers.