



Early Weaning of Lambs on Hill Country

INCREASED efficiency in the utilisation of pasture and great flexibility in stock management, especially in respect to shearing, pasture utilisation, and weed control, were two of the main advantages in early weaning of lambs on hill country that were indicated in work on this subject described by E. A. Clarke, Senior Research Officer, Department of Agriculture Animal Research Station, Ruakura, in an address to this year's Ruakura Farmers' Conference. The results of the research into early weaning, as discussed in the following adaptation of his paper, indicate what might be expected in similar early weaning of Romney lambs under average hill-country conditions.

PROBABLY the most usual time for weaning lambs in the North Island is in late December or early January, when the lambs are approaching 4 months of age. From time to time some farmers, for various reasons, have practised earlier weaning and reports on the merits of this practice have been uncertain and opinions often conflicting.

It is not uncommon to notice in a small flock where the animals are known individually or where ewes and lambs are suitably identified that lambs which become mismothered, especially later in the season, frequently grow well and suffer no apparent disadvantage.

Recent studies on milk production in ewes have also suggested that earlier weaning of lambs might warrant some investigation. In Fig. 1 are shown some average lactation curves of Romney ewes subjected to varying levels of feeding before and after lambing. The effect of level of feeding on the lactation curve is clearly shown. The curve produced by ewes with single lambs, under low-plane feeding both before and after lambing (L.L. singles), probably most nearly represents the situation obtaining with hill-country ewes. During the fourth month of lactation the lamb receives only about 10 per cent. of the milk produced in the entire

lactation period. Lambs begin eating grass at 2 to 4 weeks and consumption rises rapidly, so that by about 2 months the lambs are becoming less dependent on milk and more dependent on grass.

Milk Factor

L. R. Wallace has shown, for example with individually fed ewes and lambs, that lambs in the seventh week of lactation eat as much food, other than milk, as in the whole previous 6 weeks. The declining importance of milk and the increasing importance of other feedstuffs in the diet of the lambs with advancing age is shown in Fig. 2. Under conditions

HEADING PHOTOGRAPH: The Ruakura Hill-country Research Station in the Raglan hills, where the trials described were carried out. The results of the trials indicate what might be expected in similar early weaning of Romney lambs under average hill-country conditions.