

Mixed Age Versus Cast-for-age Ewes in Fat Lamb Production

IN the perplexing question of buying mixed age or cast-for-age ewes in fat lamb production the decision in favour of young ewe buying could be actuated by reasoning such as the following:

The old ewes seem so dear!

Why should I buy five-year ewes at 50s. to 65s. when I can get 2-tooths with all their life in front of them for a matter of 30s. more?

C. P. Tebb, Field Officer, New Zealand Meat and Wool Boards' Economic Service, Hamilton, in a paper he gave to this year's Ruakura Farmers' Conference Week discussed this question and an adaptation of the paper is given here.

THE best way to attempt to answer the question, and certainly the only logical way, is to take the facts and figures of many farms over a considerable period and average out the results. In this way divergencies of season, of situation, and of personal

ability in buying and in husbandry are more or less levelled out.

A five-year period seemed to be a reasonable minimum and of the seven years' total of records available to me I have picked 1952-53 to 1956-57 for two very good reasons. Firstly, I have more farm records continuously effective over that five-year term than for a similar term starting one year earlier or one year later, or for the

full seven years; secondly, and more important, the market for stock and wool was steadier over this period than over a five-year period starting a year earlier or later.

Out of my panel of some 105 randomly selected sheep farms whose owners are cooperating in the Meat and Wool Boards' continuous economic survey I have 37 fat lamb farms of the intensive type. Of these:

Only six bought consistently and solely 2-tooth ewes over the five years,

Only four bought consistently and solely cast-for-age ewes over the five years,

which means that only 10 farms (about a quarter) were effective to this discussion.

The other 27 had to be rejected from this analysis because:

Ten farmers were breeding some of their replacements

Nine farmers were buying part 2-tooths and part cast-for-age, with a definite 2-tooth tendency

Three farmers were buying ewe lambs
Two farmers changed from cast-for-age to 2-tooth buying half way through the period

Three farmers came into the survey too recently to meet the requirements of the five-year period (incidentally all these buy young ewes)

▼ A mixed age flock on a Waikato fat lamb farm.

