Schools for farmers - Muresk winter courses revived

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During the years prior to World War II, the farmers' instructional courses held at Muresk Agricultural College during the winter vacation period were an exceedingly popular form of agricultural education. During July, 1953, a revival of these schools proved that they had not lost their popular appeal. Forty farmers of ages ranging from 15 to 65 years attended each of the two three-day courses, one dealing with sheep and wool and the other with pig husbandry.

In each case, the number of applicants was well in excess of the numbers that could be accommodated at the College. This applied particularly to the sheep and wool course for which over 100 applications were received.

The Sheep and Wool Course

This course, the first of the series, was held from July 22 to 24, inclusive, but students were asked to report at the College on the evening of July 21 so that the "settling-in period" would not encroach upon the course proper.

Those attending the course were called upon to bring blankets, sheets, towels and pillow-slips and were accommodated in the rooms normally occupied by the resident students who at that period were on vacation.

A fee of £2 was charged to assist in meeting the expenses of the course, including catering.

This was on a generous scale, well-cooked meals being served on the cafeteria system, with morning and afternoon teas and suppers supplied in addition to the main meals of the day.

Students from Albany, Broomehill, Bindoon, Coorow, Darkan, Gwambygine, Kulin, Katanning, Morawa, Mollerin, Muradup, Northam, Nangeenan, Perth, Piawaning, Shackleton, Tammin, Tinkurrrin, Trayning, Wagin, York, and Yilliminning found the course both instructive and enjoyable.

Junior Farmers' Clubs were represented by 14 members, including Ian Packham, of Tammin, who was awarded the title of Champion Junior Farmer of Australia when he gained first place in the 1953 competition organised by the Australian Broadcasting Commission.

Two of the students had attended the pre-war schools at Muresk and two others were former graduates of the College.

The school was officially opened on the eve of commencement by the Deputy Director of Agriculture (Mr. A. L. McKenzie Clark) and the students were welcomed by the Acting Principal of Muresk (Mr. A. J. T. Marshall) who outlined the programme for the course.

He explained that to facilitate practical demonstrations, the students would be divided into four groups which would be rotated through the different classes. For lectures, the groups would be united into a large class. The evening sessions would be devoted to the showing of instructional films by the House Master (Mr. B. F. Driscoll) and these would be followed by a general discussion.
The lectures, which were each followed by a "question period" proved very popular. Lectures on sheep feeding and management were given by the Acting Principal of Muresk College (Mr. A. J. T. Marshall); sheep diseases by the Senior Veterinary Surgeon (Mr. J. Craig); wool production by the Animal Nutrition Officer (Dr. L. C. Snook), and blowfly control by the Muresk Science Lecturer (Mr. G. D. Rimes). Mr. N. Davenport, Fat Lamb Adviser to the Department of Agriculture, lectured on this important phase of the sheep industry.

Excellent practical demonstrations on the selection and culling of rams and ewes were given by the Officer-in-Charge of the Sheep and Wool Branch (Mr. W. L. McGarry), who was able to illustrate the points of his discourse using pens of sheep showing various good and bad qualities.

The modified Mules operation was ably demonstrated by Mr. J. Reilly, the Sheep and Wool Adviser who, with Mr. McGarry, has instructed in this method of blowfly strike control throughout the agricultural areas. Both these officers also staged demonstrations of the complete handling of wool in the shearing shed.

Mr. H. P. Dwyer, stock and shearing instructor on the College staff, gave the students some very useful ideas when he showed them the best methods of killing and dressing sheep, and also in his practical illustrations of recommended methods of shearing, crutching and caring for the shearing machinery.

A series of pens containing Border Leicester rams, Merino ewes, first cross Border Leicester x Merino ewes, Southdown rams, and the progeny resulting from the mating of Southdown rams and first-cross ewes, were used by Mr. H. A. Lovegrove, the Muresk farm manager, in his talks on the breeds of sheep. The same officer demonstrated how lamb-marking should be carried out.

The smooth working of these demonstrations, which included the yarding of a large number of sheep and lambs every day, was a striking example of efficient organisation, and tribute must be paid to the good work of a number of the regular Muresk students who continued at the College during the vacation period to make this possible.

PIG HUSBANDRY COURSE

The forty students who enrolled for this course were drawn from widely-separated centres including Babakin, Bulyee, Bunbury, Beverley, Byford, Boddington, Chidlow, Cundinup, Dalwallinu, Doodlakine, Duranilly, Gabbin, Hester, Highbury, Kojonup, Kelmscott, Kellerberrin, Morawa, Merredin, Muckinbudin, Mundijong, Northam, Narembeen, Pingrup, Perth, Serpentine, Wagerup, Wongan Hills, Wanneroo, Wooroloo and Wubin. They included a woman student, Mrs. M. Peters, of Boddington, who operates a mixed farm single-handed, running a small dairy herd, a few pigs and a flock of sheep.

The pig course was organised on the same lines as those which had proved so successful at the previous week's sheep and wool school.

Officially opening the course on the evening of July 28, the Deputy-Director said that pig-raising in Western Australia falls into three main groups.

1. As a sideline in dairy areas where skim milk provided the main food.
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Fig. 3.—Students at the Pig Husbandry course watch a demonstration of dipping to control parasites.

2. As a wheatbelt sideline where grain was the main food.
3. As a specialised industry near the metropolitan area where the major activity was the feeding of store pigs to porker and baconer weights.

He said that in 1940-1941 the official census of the pig population in this State gave the figure as 217,910, but by 1951-1952 they had declined to 86,499. The lowest level of 79,126 was reached in 1949-1950.

The local production of baconers was insufficient to meet the demand in the State and curers were anxious to obtain more pigs so that there was a good opportunity for farmers able to increase production of the right type of animal.

Lectures on the feeding and management of pigs were given by Messrs. K. Hope and B. Williams, of the Dairy Branch, Department of Agriculture, and Mr. J. Craig, of the Veterinary Branch, discussed pig diseases.

Fig. 4.—The Muresk farm manager (Mr. H. A. Lovegrove) demonstrates the breeds of sheep used in the production of export lambs.
On the practical side, the Muresk pig husbandry instructor (Mr. P. Garstone) spoke on the points of the pig, using some splendid specimens of the Improved Berkshire and Tamworth breeds from the well-known College studs.

He demonstrated methods of castrating pigs, using both the knife and emasculators, and showed how external parasites could be controlled by dipping, or spraying with oil.

Mr. M. V. Jansz, the assistant instructor, carried out the de-tusking of boars, using both a hacksaw and bolt-cutters, and also demonstrated de-worming methods.

The Muresk farm manager, Mr. H. A. Lovegrove, showed different types of pig premises and demonstrated tattooing and ear-marking methods.

Using dressed carcasses, Mr. Hope gave demonstrations of methods of carcass appraisal to emphasise the point that consumers no longer desire fat bacon.

The showing of instructional films, and sessions where the instructional staff formed a "brains trust" to deal with a barrage of questions were popular evening features.

The standard of instruction on both courses was of a particularly high order. All the instructors were well versed in their subjects and had the happy knack of being able to impart their knowledge in a pleasing and highly interesting manner.

The keenness and high standard of intelligence possessed by the trainees was particularly noticeable. They were all anxious to learn and as many of them were young in years, it augurs well for the future of the farming industry to have such marked enthusiasm and ability given full rein in the farmers of today and tomorrow.

Appreciation of the courses was freely expressed by the students who commented on the excellent organisation of the schools and the manner in which science and practice were blended in judicious proportions to make the instruction both helpful and enjoyable.

All agreed that their sojourn at Muresk had provided a pleasing break from farm routine; an opportunity to make new friendships and renew old ones, while gaining much valuable knowledge in an atmosphere of cheery good-fellowship.

One student voiced the opinions of many when he referred to the course as "the best two quids' worth he had ever purchased".

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**AN ELECTRIC FENCE HINT**

Since the widespread adoption of electric fencing in conjunction with strip grazing, a number of excellent ideas for rapid and easy movement of the fence-lines have been given publicity. Few, however, are as cheap and convenient as the method shown here.

It is used by a Kudardup farmer as a means of confining baconers grazing on pasture, and when inspected, it was holding 25 baconers on half an acre of ground.

This farmer uses bottles as insulators, after first cutting off the bottoms. This can be done by bending a length of thick wire or quarter-inch round steel into a circle that will just fit the bottle. The wire is made red-hot, fitted over the base of the bottle and allowed to remain there for about 10 seconds, then the wire is removed and the bottle plunged swiftly into a bucket of cold water. It will crack cleanly round the heated portion. Sharp edges should be removed by a few strokes with a file.

A number of short round stakes upon which the cut-down bottles will fit snugly are then driven in around the area to be grazed and it is a simple matter to erect the fence. For pigs a single strand of barbed wire is used, and the stakes were about nine inches above the ground; other stock would require longer stakes. An extra set of stakes may be driven in round the next strip to be grazed, and it is then a simple matter to lift the bottles off the stakes and move the fence to a new position.
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