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CROP RATIONING—A USEFUL DROUGHT FEEDING TECHNIQUE

By H. E. FELS, Adviser, Sheep and Wool Branch

Standing cereal crops can be successfully "rationed" to sheep in years of feed shortage. Rationing crop feed will also reduce the sheeps' water needs.

A TRIAL carried out during the 1969 drought demonstrated that rationing standing crop is a practical method of feeding it to sheep when feed is scarce.

Rationing will be mainly a drought feeding technique for that part of the crop which will definitely be used as sheep feed. Crop that may or may not be needed for sheep would normally be harvested and the grain kept as a contingency allowance.

The suggested method of rationing is to hold the sheep in small yards in a corner of the paddock with water but no feed, letting them out overnight to graze the crop every third night at first, and later every second night.

Rationing should be fairly severe at first, so that the sheep lose condition. Severity of rationing can then be adjusted to hold them in store condition.

Rationing crop feed at the height of summer reduces water requirements at the time when sheep normally drink most. This is an important advantage, where water is scarce and must be carted.

In the crop rationing trial the sheep grew accustomed to living in small yards and returned contentedly when mustered out of the crop. Farmers confirm that mustering sheep out of a crop is surprisingly easy.

For ease of yarding, the yards should be in one corner of the paddock or outside the gate. A half-acre yard should be suitable for 500 sheep.

In normal years there should be no advantage in rationing standing crops. Rationing would be a disadvantage if standing crops were used to prepare sheep for market or to improve poor weaners. It should be lenient if used for ordinary weaners or for ewes in late pregnancy.

Crop rationing in practice

As soon as it becomes clear that feed is so scarce that part of the farm's crop will have to be used for sheep feed, the area likely to be needed should be estimated. This should be left unharvested for rationing in the early summer.

If sparse feed in other paddocks is not grazed out until later, the period during which these paddocks will be exposed to possible soil erosion and loss of pasture seed is reduced. Also, any advantage from reducing water requirements will be most useful in January-February.

Before rationing starts the sheep should be inoculated against enterotoxaemia, and drenched if there is a substantial risk of worm damage.

The sheep should be introduced carefully to grain before they are let into the standing crop.

One to two weeks after grain introduction starts it should be safe to allow them a few hours on standing crop on alternate days. When it is clear that they can eat standing crop without scouring, rationing can be started.

The sheep should be allowed to fill up on good paddock feed during the day before they are allowed into the crop, then let into the crop overnight. Next morning they are mustered into the yards.
Two evenings later the sheep are again allowed into the crop overnight, and mustered out in the morning; thereafter they can be let into the crop for overnight grazing every third night.

Some sheep should be condition-scored each week and any in particularly poor condition drafted off for hand-feeding as a special mob. When the whole flock is in vigorous backward store condition, grazing the crop can be changed to alternate nights.

When almost all the heads have been eaten, rationing should cease and the sheep allowed to graze continuously until the feed has, for practical purposes, been used up.

Aged sheep, hoggets, weaners and poor weaners should each be run as separate mobs. Poor weaners should be allowed to grow into good weaners by grazing crops without rationing. Good weaners, ewes in the last weeks of pregnancy and aged sheep should be rationed leniently.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Perth membership committee of the nation-wide Australian Conservation Foundation met recently to discuss plans for the membership drive.

Public interest in conservation was stimulated by HRH Prince Philip during his visit to Australia in 1963 by his request for help for the World Wildlife Fund.

A quick study revealed that Australia, far from being in a position to help, was itself sadly lacking in a national body concerned with conservation and that Australia's own flora and fauna were seriously threatened.

The Foundation was established in 1965 as a result of these revelations, and set up its secretariat the following year.

The ACF has as its aim "the wisest possible use, over a long term, of all our natural resources, applied for the benefit of man".

The ACF believes that some of the urgent problems which must be dealt with now are:
1. Contamination of the air.
2. Pollution of water.
3. Defacement of the countryside, leading to irreparable damage of the environment.
4. Destruction of natural safeguards against erosion.
5. Commercial slaughter of wild life, without proper controls.

The Foundation's immediate need is for more members, enlightened people who are concerned with the kind of country in which they, and their children, and their children's children will have to live.

The ACF receives a subsidy from the Commonwealth Government; however, this does not provide enough funds for all the problems which have to be tackled. Increased membership will furnish a much larger income from membership subscription so the activities of the Foundation can be greatly increased and expanded. But more importantly, increased membership will mean a stronger national voice on all conservation issues.

Anyone interested in joining the Australian Conservation Foundation should contact Brigadier C. M. L. Elliott of 1 Mosman Terrace, Mosman Park. Phone 31 3329. Subscription for ordinary members is $5.00. Members receive all conservation literature published by the Foundation.

Editorial material may be obtained from John Brennan, Department of Fisheries & Fauna, 108 Adelaide Terrace, Perth. Phone 23 4431.