Carrying prime lambs through summer

R.J. Suiter

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The annual lamb glut in September-October has caused many farmers to show interest in feed lotting and other methods of carrying over prime lambs for a higher priced market. Unfortunately however, little information has been available on the necessary techniques under Western Australian conditions. This report presents the results of the first year of a trial being conducted at Chapman Research Station to examine some of the problems associated with carrying lambs through the summer for later marketing.

Method

Eighty-four lambs born in 1969 were put into three feeding groups. All lambs were born from Merino ewes, but came from one of six mating periods with one of four breeds of rams. The ram breeds were Dorset Horn, Suffolk, Border Leicester and Merino, and the lambing periods were the five weeks following late-March, late-April, late-May, early-July, early-August and late-August.

The late-August lambs were weaned at 11 weeks of age and all others at 14 weeks. After weaning they were run together until late-November when they were sorted into three feeding treatment groups in separate eight-acre paddocks. By early December, each treatment group was on its full ration as follows:

(i) A drought ration of oats and hay (see Table 1).
(ii) The drought ration plus an additional 2 lb. oats per head per week.
(iii) Oats fed ad lib plus ½ lb. hay per head per day.

TABLE 1.—FEED CONSUMPTION, GROWTH RATE AND WOOL PRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeding Treatment</th>
<th>5/12/69 to 8/6/70</th>
<th>8/6/69 to 6/10/70</th>
<th>Oct. '69 to July '70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oats lb./head/week</td>
<td>Hay lb./head/week</td>
<td>Growth Rate lb./head/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought ration</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought + oats</td>
<td>6.62</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>0.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats ad lib + hay</td>
<td>10.81</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Because of seasonal conditions there was virtually no feed in the paddocks, and the feeding treatments continued until June 8, 1970, when there was adequate green feed. The lambs were then grazed together until shipment for slaughter on October 6, 1970.

Results and discussion

Although the numbers of animals observed were small, and 1969 was a drought year, the first year of this trial has supplied some useful information. The results can also be applied to a feed lot situation as the only feed available was that supplied in the feed troughs.

Growth rates, wool production and feed consumption for each of the feeding treatments are summarised in Table 1, and the costs of each feeding treatment are shown in Table 2. The effects of the other experimental treatments are summarised in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Under the conditions existing in 1969-70, no breed responded to a particular feeding treatment any more than any other breed. Neither was there a real difference in the growth rates of progeny of the British breed sires, although all were better than growth rates shown by Merino sired lambs.

Table 2 shows the cost of the feed in each treatment from an average weight of 52 lb. in early summer. Treatment (iii), generous feeding for a short time, was the cheapest way to finish lambs to marketable weight.

Farmers planning to market lambs in, say, April, have the alternatives of finishing them in late spring or early summer and holding them over in saleable condition, or holding them in an unfinished condition and finishing them with generous feeding for a short period before sale.

In theory, the second alternative requires least feed, but the necessary good quality feed may be unavailable or too expensive. Ample feed should be available in late spring and early summer. Another advantage of the first alternative is that the lambs can be made ready for market at any time.
Table 2 indicates the possible cost of the marketing alternatives, but their profitability will depend on market judgment.

Because the results may require different interpretation in different areas, any farmer thinking of acting on them is advised to consult his local district adviser, or contact advisers with the Sheep and Wool Branch at Head Office, South Perth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeding Treatment</th>
<th>Cost to marketable wt.—66 lb.</th>
<th>Cost through whole of summer</th>
<th>Weight at end of summer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drought ration</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>2.56</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drought + oats</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oats ad lib + hay</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>5.23</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Oats assumed at $0.60 per bus. and hay at $25.00 per ton.

NEW CHIEF FOR DEPARTMENT'S SOILS DIVISION

The appointment of Mr. G. W. Spencer as Chief of the Soils Division and Commissioner of Soil Conservation in the Department of Agriculture was announced this month.

Mr. Spencer (43) has been an officer of the Division since joining the Department as a soil conservation adviser in 1949; for the past three years he has been Officer-in-Charge of the Irrigation and Drainage Branch.

A member of a well-known Grass Valley farming family, Mr. Spencer received his secondary education at New Norcia and completed the degree in agricultural science at the University of Western Australia in 1948.

He was among the first advisers appointed to the Soil Conservation Service and gained wide experience on every aspect of soil and water conservation, including salt land and flooding problems, coastal sand dune stabilisation and the control of erosion in orchards. He was also concerned with investigation and application of soil erosion control methods for the Ord River Catchment regeneration project.

From 1961 to 1964 he was district soil conservation adviser and Officer-in-Charge of the Department's Northam district office.

As a soil conservation adviser Mr. Spencer developed a strong interest in extension methods and was later concerned with extension methods training for young advisers in all sections of the Department.

Mr. Spencer was transferred to the Irrigation and Drainage Branch in 1967 and promoted to Officer-in-Charge of the Branch in 1969. During the past three years he has worked on both Government and private irrigation schemes of all types throughout the State.