Feeding and care of the farm dog

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Most farmers acknowledge the value of a well trained dog when handling sheep, but few appreciate that without correct care and feeding such a dog may reduce their profits and constitute a hazard to the health of themselves and their families.

The occurrence of “sheep measles” due to *Cysticercus ovis* is widespread in the sheep of Western Australia due almost entirely to the feeding of raw mutton containing these cysts to the dog.

We know also that hydatid cysts are found in sheep and cattle of the South West and should offal from these animals be fed raw to dogs, they can quickly become a danger to public health.

Feeding

The dog is a carnivore designed by nature to live on meat derived from prey killed when hunting, or on carcasses found when scavenging. Despite this the dog will remain healthy and capable of hard work on diets far removed from those eaten in its wild state. We find equal adaptability in the fox, which eat frogs, beetles and even fruit.

On most sheep farms there is a supply of meat from cull sheep as well as meat and offal from those killed for home use.

Most farmers and their wives realise the danger of infecting their dogs with *Echinococcus granulosus*, the cause of hydatid disease, when offal is fed, and so avoid this risk, although some are extremely careless in disposal of offal.

Offal from cattle, sheep, pig or kangaroo, must be disposed of in such a way that the dog cannot recover it.

Few farmers appreciate that any part of a sheep carcass, including the heart, diaphragm and tongue, may harbour the cyst of *C. ovis*, and if fed raw may infest their dog with the tapeworm *Taenia ovis*. Meat or offal must be thoroughly cooked, the whole of it being immersed in the boiling water for at least 40 minutes.

Many authorities feel that such conditions will not be observed, and prefer to ban the feeding of meat unless it has been sterilised.

The lightweight dog of 30 lb. will require up to three quarters of a pound of meat a day for light work and nearly double that during periods of heavy work, while the dog of 50 lb. will require half as much again. Where meat is in short supply, the use of biscuit, oatmeal, pollard, stale bread or cooked potatoes can make the meat go further, and can be made attractive with gravy.

For those who find it impossible to cook the meat a sterilised meat meal is now available at reasonable cost, and can be used in conjunction with the previously mentioned starchy foods, the meal comprising 40 per cent. of the ration. Up to 10 per cent. of dripping can be used to provide the fat which dogs require. Pellets and meals are also available today compounded to provide a complete ration for the dog. When meals are fed some hard
tack in the form of cooked bones or hard biscuits help keep the dog’s teeth in order.

Adult dogs work well on one good meal a day given in the evening.

Pregnant or nursing bitches, and puppies up to six months require more generous rations, including cooked meat.

All dogs require a supply of fresh drinking water which is changed daily.

Kennel accommodation

The dog’s kennel does not need to be elaborate, but it should provide shelter which is dry and free from draughts, with the opening turned away from the prevailing bad weather. It should be large enough to give the dog ample room, say 2 ft. x 2 ft. 6 in., and is better raised a few inches from the ground on a stand.

A stout wooden box covered with a metal roof, or a 44 gallon drum, can provide comfortable accommodation, though metal kennels should have a floor of wood, sand or bags.

The chain should be at least 6 ft. and provided with a swivel which moves freely; this may be attached to a stake or allowed to run on a length of stout wire between two posts.

The kennel should be moved occasionally, and every few weeks the debris of bones and droppings should be removed. Dogs which are not working require a short period of exercise off the chain both night and morning.

Disease and pest control

Pregnant bitches and puppies require treatment at least twice for round worms, *Toxocara canis*, which may be a danger to children. Piperazine is efficient and safe.

Tapeworms

Working dogs should be dosed every two months with Bunamidine, a drug which is efficient and kills the worms within the dog. Arecoline hydrobromide may be used but when the dog purges it voids a quantity of infective material which can be dangerous. The makers’ instructions must be adhered to. Sheep drenches are not suitable for dogs.

Distemper

All dogs should be immunised against distemper at about three months, with later revaccination as advised by the veterinary surgeon.

External parasites

Many dogs lead a life of misery due to the constant irritation of pests which can be readily controlled today by means of substances like benzene hexachloride, or some of the organophosphorous compounds.

The dog’s surroundings must also receive attention as the dog flea lays its eggs off the dog.