Mulesing at lamb marking time

M Butler
IT'S SHEARING TIME

SHEARING will soon be taking place on your property. For a smooth annual wool harvest, remember:

1. Adequate prior preparation pays dividends.
2. Check overhead gear, down tubing, hand pieces, grinder, wool-press.
3. Order spare parts, combs and cutters, emery, bales, hooks, branding ink and brushes, spare guts, branding fluid, brooms.
4. Repair machinery.
5. Gauge hand pieces with the appropriate post gauge.
6. Give machinery a trial run—check R.P.M. Speed at friction wheel should be 600-640 R.P.M., according to manufacture; speed of grinder should be not less than 2,500 R.P.M.
7. Check shed.
8. Repair broken grating, wool table, wool bins, holding yards. Is your wool-rolling table large enough? It should be at least 10 ft. x 5 ft. in dimension.
9. Make sure gates of catching pens function smoothly.
10. Clean shearing board with disinfectant.
11. Is light adequate? More skylights may be needed or the existing ones may need cleaning.
12. Check counting-out pens and clean away weeds—make sure gates are secure.

The Sheep and Wool Section of the Department of Agriculture conducts shearing schools in country areas. If a school is required, early application should be made to the Officer in Charge, Sheep and Wool Section, Department of Agriculture, South Perth, or your nearest Agricultural Adviser.

MULESING AT LAMB MARKING TIME

By M. BUTLER, Sheep and Wool Instructor, Perth

REALISING that mulesing and tailstripping of sheep is the most effective system devised to counteract the loss and damage caused by blowfly strike in their sheep, many farmers and pastoralists are now incorporating it as standard practice in their system of sheep husbandry.

Experience over the years has proved its value as a means of reducing the susceptibility of sheep to blowfly strike, and if carried out correctly on the young sheep each year, it confers near positive and life long protection from crutch strike.

Woolgrowers are aware that blowfly activity is governed by seasonal conditions, and when these are favourable (particularly in those years when soft green feed is abundant), the blowfly becomes most active. They must keep a constant watch on the flock and treat any sheep that become struck.

Most strikes occur in the breech of sheep which, due to their conformation
remain wet in that area for long periods. The continued wetting of the wool in the breech sets up inflammation of the skin which gives off an odour attractive to blowflies. Such sheep quickly become struck and form the breeding ground for successive generations of blowflies.

Mulesing and tailstripping of sheep is designed to lessen the susceptibility of sheep to blowflies by enlarging the area of non woolbearing skin in the breech, which enables the sheep to remain dry and less susceptible.

Mulesing Lambs.

Although this treatment is best carried out on sheep at weaner age, quite a few growers mules and tailstrip their lambs in conjunction with marking, performing the whole routine of earmarking, mulesing, and tailstripping, castration and tailing at the same time, and in that order.

The practice of treating the lambs at marking time has the advantage that they are much smaller and easier to handle, and earlier protection from fly strike is gained, also the job is done without the necessity of further mustering the sheep.

Obviously, both marking or mulesing and tailstripping should never be carried out while blowflies are prevalent.

Some of the disadvantages of mulesing at marking time are that small lambs are relatively harder to do as they do not show development to the same extent as at weaning age and therefore require a thoroughly skilled operator to carry it out. Even then, a percentage may have to be retreated on reaching weaner age as it is not always possible to be 100 per cent correct in treating lambs. In addition to the risk of mismothering, there is added risk of infection, as lambs have a tendency to lay about in the yards and contaminate the wounds while waiting for a drink from the mothers. Weaners being forced to fend for themselves will keep more on their feet and away from contamination.

One of the essential things to keep in mind at marking time is that to achieve maximum protection from blowflies, the tails must be cut to proper length, that is, they must, when healed, be level with, or just lower than the tip of the vulva. Current practice among many graziers is to cut the tails short, in some cases, they leave no tail at all. By doing this they are depriving the sheep of any chance to keep clean and thereby increase their susceptibility to fly strike.

All Merino sheep, whether fine wool or strong wool types, will benefit considerably by being mulesed and tailstripped. This is verified by many growers who have learned the technique and put it into practice on their own flocks.

At Wongan Hills Research Station, experimental sheep left unmulesed and not tailstripped last year suffered fly strike to the extent of 20 per cent. up to March this year (crutching time), while a corresponding flock of mulesed and tailstripped sheep depastured under similar conditions registered not one strike. Similar results were obtained on Merredin Research Station.

Labour Cost.

The labour cost of mulesing and tailstripping sheep is approximately £2 10s. a 100, and being permanent, needs only to be done once in the sheep's life. As the useful life of the sheep on the property is usually about five years, it works out at something in the vicinity of 10s. a 100 a year or just over one penny a sheep a year, surely a small price to pay for the high degree of protection it affords the flock from blowfly strike.

While mulesing and tailstripping is much easier to do when applied to freshly crutched weaners, fly strike in lambs may be a problem on the property and it may be desirable to treat them as lambs. This decision is one the individual owner must make for himself. Those who have not, as yet, adopted mulesing and tailstripping, would relieve their sheep of a lot of suffering and save themselves valuable time and money if they adopted it as routine practice.

Officers of the Department of Agriculture have been instructing growers for some years how to correctly mules and tailstrip their sheep and are available to give this instruction where required. Applications for instruction should be made to the local Agricultural Adviser or direct to the Sheep and Wool Section, Perth.

—from an A.B.C. Radio Talk.