Select on fleece weight and cull the low producers

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Select on Fleece Weight and...

CULL THE LOW PRODUCERS

By W. L. McGARRY, Officer-in-Charge, Sheep and Wool Section

EFFICIENT culling of maiden ewes before they join the breeding flock is an essential part of any policy of flock improvement.

Removal of the low wool producers should be one of the first considerations when culling the flock. Culling in this manner leads to an immediate improvement in returns and the economic advantage of such a policy are obvious.

To illustrate the point, take say ten ewes, for convenience with fleece weights as follows:—

(This could apply equally to any number.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fleece Weight</th>
<th>lb.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>12£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>12£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>10£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total weight 102 lb.

This divided by 10 gives an average cut per head of 10.2 lb.

Suppose we cull 30 per cent. on fleece weight. This removes Nos. 8, 9, 10, leaving:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fleece Weight</th>
<th>lb.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>8£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7£</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>7£</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total weight 78 lb.
This divided by 7 gives an average cut per head of 11.1 lb.

This shows an improvement of 0.9 lb. or nearly 1 lb. per head in the average cut per head by removing those ewes which are proved low producers.

How do we obtain this proof and know that our selection is accurate? Simply by weighing the fleeces at shearing time.

It has been proved that visual selection for fleece weight is unreliable and inefficient compared with the scales which take the guesswork out of selection. Even if you could be 100 per cent. efficient in visual selection (most growers are about 30 per cent.) you would not know your selection was accurate without the proof which the scales can give.

Fleece weighing is quite practicable and presents no great difficulties provided the sheep are drafted off and shorn separately. Before shearing, the sheep should be ear-tagged with plastic numbered ear-tags.

Ordinary single-bag wheat scales placed at the end of shearing board, and a number of small cards are required.

This type of scale would require a light wooden frame or platform to carry the fleece. Hanging clock face scales with tray attached (see sketch) are better for fleece weighing, although they may require some extra outlay. These can be obtained from local distributors.

PROCEDURE

As the sheep are being shorn the picker-up writes the ear-tag number on a card and leaves it on the board opposite the sheep. The fleece is picked up with the card on top, weighed, and the fleece weight is then written on the card. The fleece is then thrown out and skirted in usual manner.

Later, at a convenient time the wool weights and ear-tag numbers of each sheep can be entered in a notebook from the cards. (This could be done during fleece weighing if desired.)

You now know your low producers and they can be culled to the extent desired. Always make sure they have a permanent identification mark.

Where the odd doggy or cull type fleeces are encountered when the fleece is on the table, the cards can be marked accordingly. It is easier to pick an undesirable fleece in this manner than when the wool is still on the sheep.

There are always a few sheep which are poor in conformation, too narrow, and so on. These can be eliminated during a light culling for only these characteristics, off-shears or just before shearing.

Officers of the Sheep and Wool Branch, Department of Agriculture, conduct field days on farmers’ properties, demonstrating the technique and shearing shed procedure of culling by fleece weight as described in these notes.

Where demonstrations are required, an application in writing should be made to the Officer in Charge, Sheep and Wool Section, Department of Agriculture, Perth, or the local district Agricultural Adviser could be contacted.

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