



CARE OF THE FLEECE

WOOL occupies a place of outstanding importance among essential war-time agricultural commodities. Further improvement in the quality of the clip would be a worthwhile contribution to the cause.

Every year, in Canada, too large a percentage of the total fleece wool marketed is more or less defective for manufacturing purposes. This defective or reject wool is lowered in value from thirty to sixty per cent and consequently represents a serious loss to wool growers. Such loss can, to a large extent, be prevented by taking good care of the fleece during the period of growth. At shearing time and in marketing, further care in keeping the fleece clean, dry and free of tags will still further reduce the amount of reject wool.

The main kinds of reject, damaged or defective wool may be classified as follows: seedy and chaffy, burry, black or grey, wet or damp, fleeces carrying tags, fleeces marked with paint or oil, fleeces tied with binder twine and wool from dead sheep.

In addition there are cotted fleeces and fleeces with a weak spot in the fibre. Other objectionable lots of wool are those that have deteriorated through being left uncovered or stored loosely before being sacked or because they have been held over for one or more years.

Seedy and Chaffy Wool

Wool in this category is characterized by the presence of seeds, chaff and bits of straw and hay in the fleece, particularly in the neck, shoulder and back portions. This accumulation of vegetable matter can be largely prevented by attention to the following details of management:—

1. Feeding of Dry Fodder in Winter Time:

Hay or straw should never be thrown down on the backs of sheep at feeding time, nor should it be carried in forkfuls over the sheep when being placed in racks, pens or yards. The flock should be penned elsewhere while the fodder is being placed in position.

2. Use of Proper Types of Feed Racks:

The V-shaped type of rack should be used and it should be so constructed that the top is tightly boarded to keep chaff or seeds from falling down over the backs or shoulders. The bottom side section should be slatted with the slats placed close enough together, so that the sheep cannot get their heads through into the main part of the rack.

The practice of allowing sheep to feed around hay and straw stacks is sure to result in seeds and chaff getting into the fleece; particularly when the sheep have eaten their way partly under the stack. If it is necessary to feed from outside stacks they should be fenced so that this feed can be fed either in racks or on the ground.

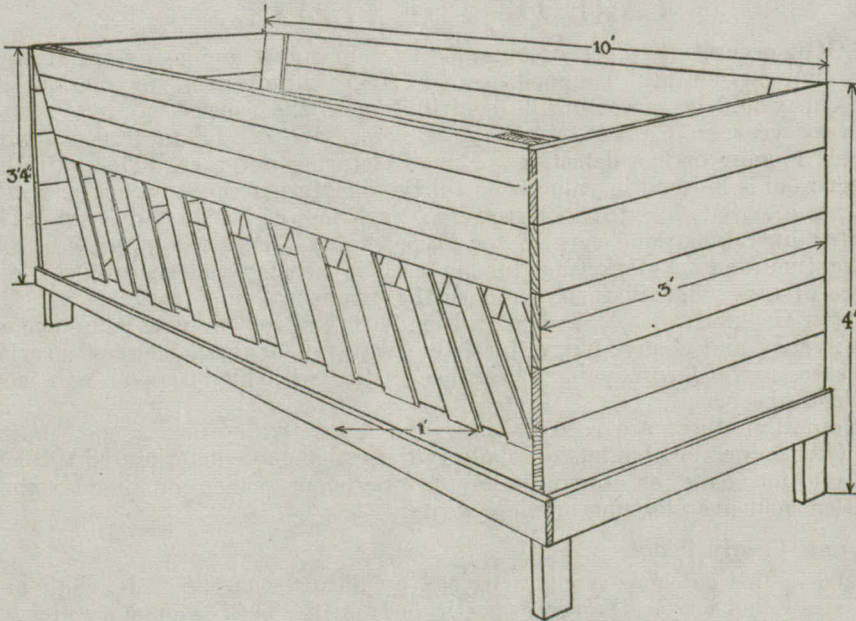
Published by Authority of HON. J. G. GARDINER, Minister of Agriculture, Ottawa.

10-41

3. Care of Wool After Shearing:

Always shear on a clean floor. Many fleeces bear evidence of carelessness in this respect, since, when rolling and tying, particles of dirt and chaff are picked up from a dirty floor. The fleeces should be packed in clean sacks or bags and not left exposed in a corner of the barn, shed or granary. If exposed, the wool gets mixed with grain, feathers, fowl droppings, horsehair and other objectionable matter, as well as seeds and chaff.

In former publications, emphasis has been placed on rolling the fleece flesh side out. Many shearers who shear farm flocks are careless in this detail. Similarly, shearing gangs who shear range bands pay little attention to the proper rolling of fleeces. More general attention to this detail would greatly improve the appearance and definitely enhance the saleability of clips taken off by hired shearers.



THE V-SHAPED TYPE OF FEED RACK

In wool grading, the presence of seedy necks and backs does not mean that the whole fleece is condemned. Fleeces with excessive seeds and chaff are separated for special attention and the seedy portions are removed. In this way, the clean wool is salvaged and sold at full value and the producer suffers a loss only on the damaged portion of the fleeces.

Burry Wool

In the range sections of Western Canada, a small percentage of the clip is contaminated more or less with a type of hard burr. Where the only pasture or range available is all, or in part, infested with burr-producing plants, very little can be done to prevent them getting into the wool. Fortunately, these burrs attach themselves mainly to the belly or lower parts of the body and here again by separating out such fleeces the heavily burred portions can be removed before grading.

In Eastern Canada, the burdock burr is the worst offender. In pastures where the sheep run continuously, this plant is kept under control by the sheep eating it in its growing stage. The damage to the fleece usually occurs when the flock is allowed access to new pastures, roadsides, laneways and odd corners about the farm. These burr plants should be cut down and removed or burned before the sheep are allowed to come in contact with them.

On some farms other small burrs such as pitchforks, stickseed and other varieties may be present and the flock owner should avoid, if possible, turning sheep on pastures where they are prevalent.

Black or Grey Wool

Black or grey wool is quite suitable for some classes of woollen goods, but its use is limited because it cannot be used in any white or light coloured goods. This limitation results in a lower market value, unless a special market is available and therefore the breeder should cull out the black or grey fleeced individuals from his flock.

An objectionable type of fleece which is frequently overlooked by the sheep breeder, is one in which dark fibres are found growing throughout the body of the otherwise pure white stapled fleece. This tendency to produce grey fibres is more common in the dark faced Down breeds. A careful examination of the fleece in a good light may reveal dark fibres on the body and such individuals should be eliminated for breeding purposes. At shearing time the fleeces from sheep with dark wool on the head or legs should be given special attention. All dark portions of clippings should be separated and included with the taggy wool or, if there is any large amount, they could be put in a small bag by themselves. It is decidedly bad practice to roll the short, dark head and leg clippings on the inside of the fleece.

Wet or Damp Wool

Wool should not be shorn when the sheep are damp after a rain. If stored when damp or wet for any length of time wool tends to heat and become "musty" or "damaged," which means that the fibres are discoloured and weakened. Storing wool in very damp places or allowing sacked wool to lie on bare ground may produce the same effect. Accidental exposure to excessive moisture by storms or floods sometimes occurs. In such cases the wool should be spread out to dry at once. If the clip is too large to be dried on the ranch or farm it should be shipped immediately and the consignee advised of its condition, so that it can be spread out to dry on receipt at the warehouse, or sent forward to a scouring plant for immediate scouring.

Tags in Fleeces

Tags should be removed from the fleeces in all cases and packed separately. If the tags are heavy and wet they should be thrown away or washed so that the wool in them can be recovered. Tags, especially if damp, should on no account be rolled up inside the fleece. The inclusion of heavy tags increases the freight charges on account of their weight. Tags also cause discoloration of the wool with which they come in contact.

Branding Materials

The use of insoluble substances such as paint, tar, linseed oil and old crankcase oil in branding range ewes or for numbering sheep for sales or for identification purposes is very objectionable from the manufacturer's point of view and should be discontinued. Branding or marking sheep with any insoluble substance is particularly injurious, since the brand or mark is usually stamped on the most valuable part of the fleece. It is difficult and costly to remove those portions of the fleece so marked, either when grading or sorting and if overlooked the insoluble material will not dissolve in the scouring bath and goes forward into the manufacturing process. The finished material carries the stain of the branding fluid and cannot be cleaned by solvents used in any known cleaning process to date. Branding fluids which are soluble and do not stain have been prepared and are sold commercially. Only such branding fluids should be used.

Fleeces Tied with Binder Twine

The use of binder twine, or other sisal string of like nature, for tying fleeces in this country is diminishing, but is still all too common. Fleeces cannot be presented on any discriminating market when tied with this material, without

suffering considerably in reputation and in price. The sisal fibres tend to become detached from the string and mingled with the wool fibres and are overlooked on the sorting table because they are too inconspicuous; but when the wool is made up into cloth and dyed these vegetable fibres are far from being inconspicuous: they show up as light streaks against the body of the cloth. The twine most recommended is paper twine and is easily available through marketing agencies, sheep breeders' associations, wool growers' associations and district agriculturists. It is preferable to leave the fleece untied rather than to use binder twine.

Cotted Wool

The fibres in a cotted fleece are more or less matted together and cannot be separated easily. If only slightly matted, the fleece is designated a "soft cott" and if badly felted together it is called a "hard cott." The latter has to be torn apart by mechanical means, thereby causing much damage to the individual fibres. Coarse woolled breeds are more subject to this condition than the fine or medium woolled breeds. The maintenance of a thrifty condition in the flock is the best means of curtailing loss from cotted fleeces.

Weak Fibred Wool

Fleeces are sometimes graded as "clothing" because of a "tender" or weak fibre. These "tender" fibres may be weak throughout or only at a particular spot, which indicates some period of sickness or shortage of food for a period of time. The latter condition is sometimes found in wool from range sheep which have undergone a period of short rations in the winter time during periods of heavy snow. To get well grown, strong fibred wool, the feed in the winter should be regular, including a variety of feed and some nitrogenous feeds such as clover or alfalfa hay or oilcake.

Dead Wool

Dead wool refers to the fleeces removed from the carcasses of sheep which have died on the farm or ranch. Wool from dead sheep should be removed as soon as possible after death, preferably by shearing, to prevent discoloration of the wool. Dead wool should be packed in a separate bag by itself.

Mothy Wool

Wool which is held on the farm for a year or more often becomes infested with moths which may cause great havoc. Wool should be marketed annually. If held over it should be examined from time to time and if any trace of moths is found it should be thoroughly sprayed with a moth-killing fluid.

Market by Grade and Improve the Condition from Year to Year

There would seem to be an impression with many farmers that if their wool is rather chaffy, seedy, burry or otherwise slightly defective and not tied or properly sacked, there is little use attempting to have it graded and sold on a graded basis. Such an idea is incorrect, since the wool is quite saleable in a loose condition, although not so easily handled as when tied with paper twine. Moreover, in the process of grading, seedy, chaffy and burry portions are easily removed from each fleece at comparatively little cost. Regardless of whether the fleeces have been well tied and specially put up, it pays to market any clip on a graded basis. Any group of official government grade statements will indicate to the grower of wool just how he may improve his clip, and the efficient manner in which reject wool is handled and marketed under the graded system. Graded wool is always appraised from year to year on the basis of expert judgment for shrinkage and yield, substantiated by official tests when considered necessary. One trial shipment of the year's clip for sale on a graded basis will demonstrate the important features of this plan and will permit growers to gain experience so that they can take steps the following year to have their wool in better shape to eliminate defects and prepare the clip in a more attractive form for marketing.