

# CANADIAN WOOL GRADING AND MARKETING

By  
A. A. MACMILLAN  
ASSOCIATE CHIEF, FIELD SERVICES

LIVE STOCK BRANCH



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A band of fine wool sheep on a western range.



# CANADIAN WOOL

## GRADING AND MARKETING

By A. A. MacMILLAN

Wool production in Canada approximates 20,000,000 pounds annually. The following table gives the sheep population and estimated wool production by provinces for 1933-34:—

WOOL PRODUCTION OF CANADA, BY PROVINCES, 1933-34

Province	Sheep	Sheep's Wool	Lambs	Lamb's Wool	Sheep and Lambs	Total Wool
		lb.		lb.		lb.
P.E.I. ....	34,900	262,000	19,200	67,000	54,100	329,000
N.S. ....	90,700	680,000	54,600	191,000	145,300	871,000
N.B. ....	69,300	520,000	44,600	156,000	113,900	676,000
Que. ....	341,800	2,564,000	270,200	946,000	612,000	3,510,000
Ont. ....	487,900	3,659,000	474,400	1,660,000	962,300	5,319,000
Man. ....	112,500	844,000	103,500	322,000*	216,000	1,166,000
Sask. ....	251,000	1,883,000	197,200	690,000	448,200	2,573,000
Alta. ....	423,200	3,174,000	273,000	956,000	696,200	4,130,000
B.C. ....	87,100	653,000	86,000	301,000	173,100	954,000
Ind. Res's. ....	1,441	11,000	1,410	5,000	2,851	16,000
	1,899,841	14,250,000	1,524,110	5,294,000	3,423,951	19,544,000

\*Includes only pulled wool from animals marketed.

Sheep raising is an important phase of live stock production in all the provinces. In the eastern provinces and on the farms of the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia, sheep flocks are mainly of Down breeding with some of the long-wooled breeds being kept in southwestern Ontario and on the western coast of British Columbia. Wool from domestic flocks is largely of the low medium and medium combing type with a small percentage of long wool.

On sheep ranches in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia foundation ewes are mainly of Merino origin. Rambouillet blood predominates and wool runs to fine and fine medium staple quality.

Since 1913 a great deal of attention has been given to improving the quality of Canadian wool and the manner of its preparation for market. Propaganda has been mainly directed to securing improvement in the preparation of fleece wool for market. Tub washing of wool and the washing of wool on the sheep have been discouraged. To-day practically all wool sold commercially in Canada is sold in the grease and the fleeces are rolled and tied intact as they are shorn. Another important feature of the educational work is the emphasizing of the importance of keeping fleeces free from chaff and seeds. This entails better housing accommodation and greater care in feeding. There is room for further improvement, although there has been a great change in the quality of domestic wools. The use of binder twine for tying wool has been discouraged and fleeces are now being tied with the approved paper fleece twine.

Coincident with the development of a desire on the part of Canadian farmers to put up a better wool clip, grew the urge for an improved method of

marketing. The Dominion Department of Agriculture initiated its wool grading policy in 1913, and for the next five years wool grading was performed to a large extent at local grading centres. This had the advantage of providing sheep raisers with first-hand information on the selling advantages of improved wool production, also the value of selling wool according to grade.

In 1918 the various wool growers' associations throughout Canada were encouraged by both Dominion and provincial Governments to organize a producer organization for the sale of graded wool. At this time producer wool growers' associations were marketing an annual total of 2,000,000 pounds of wool, co-operatively. Producers' organizations represented in conference accordingly decided unanimously in favour of a national organization, and the formation of the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers, Limited, was brought into being under the Dominion Companies Act.

### DOMINION WOOL GRADING POLICY

Previous to the organization of the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, the Dominion wool grading policy had been more or less definitely defined and applied. However, with the organization of the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, it became possible to consolidate and centralize the wool grading services for the Dominion. Local grading at centres within the jurisdiction of each of the provincial wool growers' associations had largely accomplished the main results of first-hand contact with growers. The erection by the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited of a central wool warehouse at Weston, Ontario, resulted in the centralization of wool grading service for the Prairie Provinces and Ontario at that point. The erection of another wool warehouse at Lennoxville, Quebec, centralized wool grading for Quebec province at that point. New Brunswick wool is also shipped to the Quebec warehouse. A local grading service is still provided at points on Manitoulin Island, at points in Nova Scotia, and at Charlottetown, P.E.I. Owing to the fact that British Columbia is able to ship advantageously to Great Britain via the Panama Canal, of late years a wool grading service has been established at New Westminster, B.C.

There is a very definite relationship between the official grading of wool and the establishment from year to year of wool values in Canada. Over a period of years the official grades of Canadian wool have been standardized to meet the exigencies of the Canadian trade, and also with a view to establishing a degree of uniformity so that Canadian wool would gain in popularity on British and foreign markets. At all times there has been the closest possible co-operation with officials of the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited and with the wool trade. The following is a copy of the official wool grading statement on which is recorded the grade for each farmer and a copy of which, with data, is forwarded to farmers consigning wool for grading and co-operative sale. This grading statement has been designed to cover all Canadian wools from fine merino to coarse braid types.



Central wool warehouse.



# WOOL GRADING STATEMENT

## LIVE STOCK BRANCH, OTTAWA

Folio.....

Co.....

PROV.....ASS'N.....SHIPPER'S LOT NO.....

WESTERN DOMESTIC ☐ WESTERN RANGE ☐ EASTERN DOMESTIC ☐

Member's name.....Address.....

Weight Railroad Bill of Lading.....No. of Sacks.....Condition of Sacks.....

Gross Weight at Grading.....Tare.....Net Weight.....

GRADE	Corresponding English Counts		BRIGHT		SEMI-BRIGHT		DARK		REVENUE
			Lbs.	Price	Lbs.	Price	Lbs.	Price	
Fine Staple	64's-70's-84's	STANDARD GRADES							
Fine Clothing									
Fine Med. Staple			58's-60's						
Fine Med. Clothing									
Medium Staple	56's								
Medium Clothing									
Low Med. Staple	48's-50's								
Low Med. Clothing									
Low Staple	44's-46's								
Low Clothing									
Lustre	40's-44's								
Coarse									
Grey and Black,—Fine.....		REJECT GRADES							
Medium.....									
Coarse.....									
Seedy and Burry,—Fine.....									
Medium.....									
Heavy.....									
Cotts,—Hard.....									
Soft.....									
Dead,—Fine.....									
Medium.....									
Damaged.....									
Tags,—Fine.....									
Medium.....									
ODD GRADES.....									

Date received.....Date Graded.....Manager.....

Weigher.....Grader.....

REMARKS:.....

.....

.....

NOTE:—Generally speaking, wool of strong fibre and over 2" in length is classed as Staple and under 2" as Clothing.



### CLASSIFICATION OF WOOLS IN THE FLEECE (Grading)

Classification of wools in the fleece comprehends what is technically called grading. The work of grading should be performed by wool graders, preferably at a central wool warehouse before the wool is sold for manufacturing purposes. In Canada, wool graders are supplied to any company or organization who agree to make settlement to the producer on the basis of the official grading and where there is a minimum of at least one hundred thousand pounds offered for grading at any one time. Grading is done without untying the fleece. Fleeces are placed on the grading table for the grader, who allocates each fleece to its proper grade. Fleeces of the various grades are warehoused separately, and when a sufficient quantity has accumulated are packed in regulation wool sacks to be offered for sale or shipped on consignment to wool sales.

The following table shows the correlation of American, British, and Canadian qualities (grades) and their distinctive terms:—

American	British	Canadian
Fine .....	64's to 70's	Fine
One-half blood.....	60's	Fine medium
Three-eighths blood .....	56's	Medium
One-quarter blood.....	50's	Low Medium
Low one-quarter blood.....	44's to 46's	Low Staple
Common.....	40's	Coarse
Braid.....	36's	Lustre

#### American Classification

The American classification and nomenclature are based upon the quality of Merino wool which, being the finest, was taken originally as the standard. Different crosses between the Merino and the mutton breeds were supposed to produce the intermediate grades. The first cross resulted in so-called "one-half blood wool"; that is, one-half Merino and presumably twice as coarse as the Merino parent. The other grades followed similarly to show the relative and corresponding lack of fine wool blood.



Proper method of examining wool on a sheep.

"Fine" is frequently subdivided into three separate classes, known as XXX, XX, and X. This comprises an exceptionally fine distinction for Merino wools. XXX represents the highest class obtained from the Spanish Merino, and is surpassed only by Picklock, derived from the Saxony Merino, which is

generally conceded the finest type produced in the world. This breed is confined almost entirely to Germany, and is not raised at all extensively.

American wools are also divided into "territory" and "domestic" classes. The former refers to western range wools; the latter to eastern and middle western, such as are produced on the small farm. Range wool is of a finer character than the other, being either Merino or a Merino cross. It, therefore, usually possesses a higher shrinkage owing to the excessive greasiness of the Merino, but contains little or no straw or chaff, which unfortunately are found all too frequently in eastern wool. These conditions apply in similar fashion to Canadian wools.

### British Classification

Differences in the spinning qualities of wool on the worsted principle are taken as the basis of the British system of grading. The factor used is called a "count." A single count, which represents the standard or unit, will produce from one pound of scoured wool a fixed number of yards of spun yarn. Wool twice as fine as the established standard will spin as far again, since the weight being the same there must be double the number of fibres, and would thus represent two counts or, as commonly abbreviated, 2's. Therefore, the finer the wool, the higher will be the counts. A comparison of the range of fineness in the various classes can readily be obtained from the foregoing table.



Wool grading and wool packing in central warehouse.

### Canadian Classification

The Canadian classification covers the different grades as produced in all parts of Canada, and for fine wool as produced on the range, and all intermediate grades including coarse or lustre wool as produced by the long-wooled breeds. Sub-grades, as bright, semi-bright and dark, are necessary particularly for western wools, owing to variable climatic conditions. Canadian wool falls into three broad categories corresponding to broad geographical areas. The wool of Ontario, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces is known to the trade as "eastern domestic." In Western Canada there are two main classes, "range"



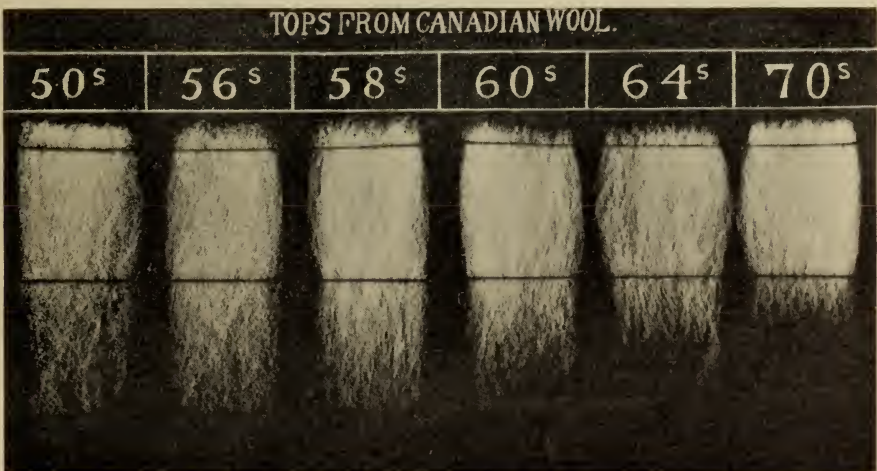
and "domestic." The former, coming from the southern sections of Saskatchewan and Alberta and the interior of British Columbia and being of Merino strain, are the finest quality wools produced in Canada. The domestic wools of the west are comparable to the eastern wools, with the exception that in many flocks where ewes from the range have been introduced, even though bred up from Down rams, the wool is of slightly finer texture for the grade.



Truckload of farmers' wool consigned for grading and co-operative sale.

### The Grading of Eastern Wools

Growers in Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, after receiving their grading statement often wonder why their particular wool did not grade nearer the top of the grading sheet, or in the grade marked fine, or fine medium. The answer is that the grading sheet used covers the different grades as produced in all parts of Canada, and the



Wool tops illustrating important grades of Canadian wools.



only wools grading strictly into fine and fine medium are the range wools principally of southern Alberta and southern Saskatchewan, or in other words, wools containing Merino blood. In these eastern provinces the highest grade in the fineness of the wool fibre comes from the Southdown; then the Shropshire, the Hampshire, the Suffolk. Typical fleeces from these breeds will usually grade medium and low medium; from the Oxford, low medium and low combing; from the Leicester, low combing and coarse; from Cotswolds and Lincolns, coarse. The above are only examples; it is the wool itself which determines the exact grade. Again, the word "low" does not mean low in quality, other than with reference to the diameter of the fibre. For example, the English term corresponding to low medium is 48's-50's, to low combing 44's-46's. The main grades then of eastern wools are: medium, low medium, low, and coarse.

### The Grading of Western Wools

The wools of Western Canada, as already stated, are of two main classes, range and domestic. The range wools come principally from Southern Alberta and Southern Saskatchewan and Central British Columbia. They have Merino foundation and are in grade the finest wools grown in Canada. The principal grades are fine, fine medium, medium, low medium. The domestic wools of the west are generally similar to the eastern wools. The Down breeds predominate. The terms bright, semi-bright, and dark, used in grading western domestic wools, are based on colour and quality, brought about by condition of the wool and by climatic conditions.

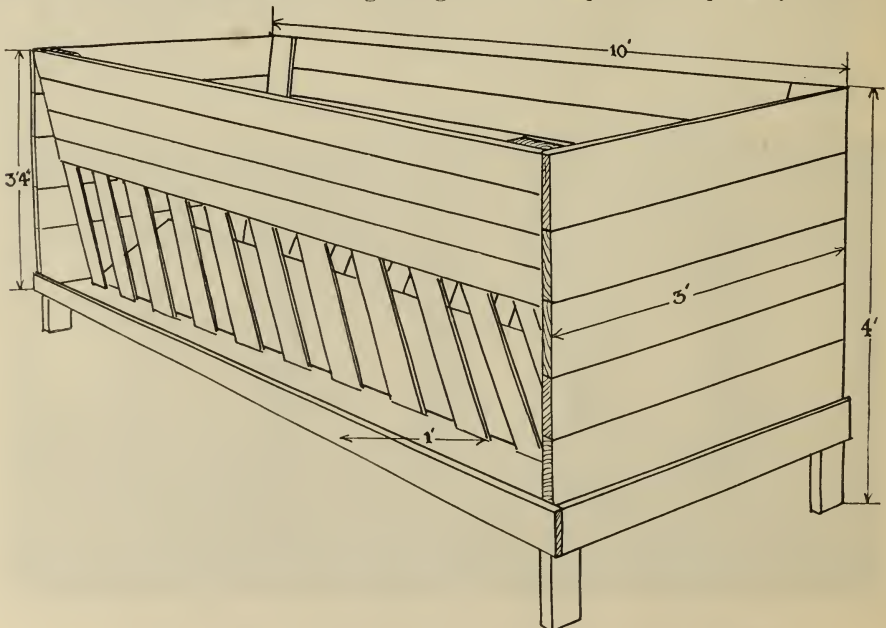
*Bright*—wool of good quality, bright in colour, low shrinkage, and in good condition.

*Semi-bright*—wool of good average quality, and as the name implies, semi-bright in colour.

*Dark*—wool dark in colour, inclined to be brashy and weak in staple, low in natural grease, shows lack of quality.

### Rejects

The principal rejects are seedy wools, burry wools, cotted wools, sisal. Rejects are always objectionable, and the grower is the only man who can take wools out of this class into the regular grades. Keep the sheep away from seeds



A type of feeding rack that keeps chaff and seeds out of the fleece.

and chaff and from the straw-pile. Do not pasture where there are burrs. Cotted fleeces are most common in long-wool breeds. Try shearing reasonably early in the season. Sisal is the easiest of all to overcome. The term sisal applies to wool tied with binder or sisal twine. Tie the fleeces after shearing with paper fleece twine; better not to tie at all than to tie with binder or sisal twine.

### **MARKETING OF UNGRADED WOOL**

In all the provinces there are still many sheep raisers who do not consign their wool for official grading and sale by grade. Many woollen mills, located in the centre of sheep-raising country, buy wool direct from the producer. Pedlars and local stores buy wool in exchange for groceries and other goods. Wool dealers located in cities and towns are also large buyers of wool.

The most of the wool purchased by pedlars, storekeepers, and wool dealers is purchased at a flat price per pound, although of late years a differential in price is made between the finer and cleaner lots and those of a coarser and more chaffy character.

Country fleece wool, unless sold direct to a mill, eventually is bought up by wool company or wool broker. These firms, depending on their market outlet, usually put the wool through a form of grading and in some cases the fleeces are opened and sorted.

The selling of wool locally is not in the best interests of the producer. One of the main reasons for its continuance is the fact that the buyer offers a cash price usually sufficiently low to permit of a substantial profit for the original buyer and allowing also for a subsequent commission on resales. A bad feature of local selling is the fact that the producer, having sold his wool, is not in a position to take advantage of any rise in the price of wool. Probably the worst feature of local selling of wool is the fact that, being sold for a flat or nominally flat price, there is not the same incentive to exercise care in keeping the fleeces free from chaff or in rolling and tying the fleeces in an attractive manner. Canadian wool, to bring the highest price, must be kept free from seeds and chaff and the fleeces should be prepared for market in such a manner that they present an attractive appearance for sale.

### **MARKETS FOR CANADIAN WOOL**

It is estimated that some 5,000,000 pounds of wool, produced in Canada annually, is used on the farms for home spinning and weaving. The bulk of this wool is used in the province of Quebec. Home spinning and weaving has received considerable impetus of late years owing to the low price paid for wool and the necessity for farmers to reduce farm expenditure.

Many Canadian mills are large users of Canadian wool, particularly those manufacturing plants that produce yarns and articles of wearing apparel such as suitings, overcoatings, mitts, socks, mackinaws, blankets, etc. Canadian graded wools are held in high esteem by British manufacturers, and of late years a number of foreign countries have shown considerable interest in the purchase of Canadian wool.

Exports of Canadian wool to the United States have fallen off materially of recent years owing to tariff barriers.

### **SHEARING AND PREPARING WOOL FOR MARKET**

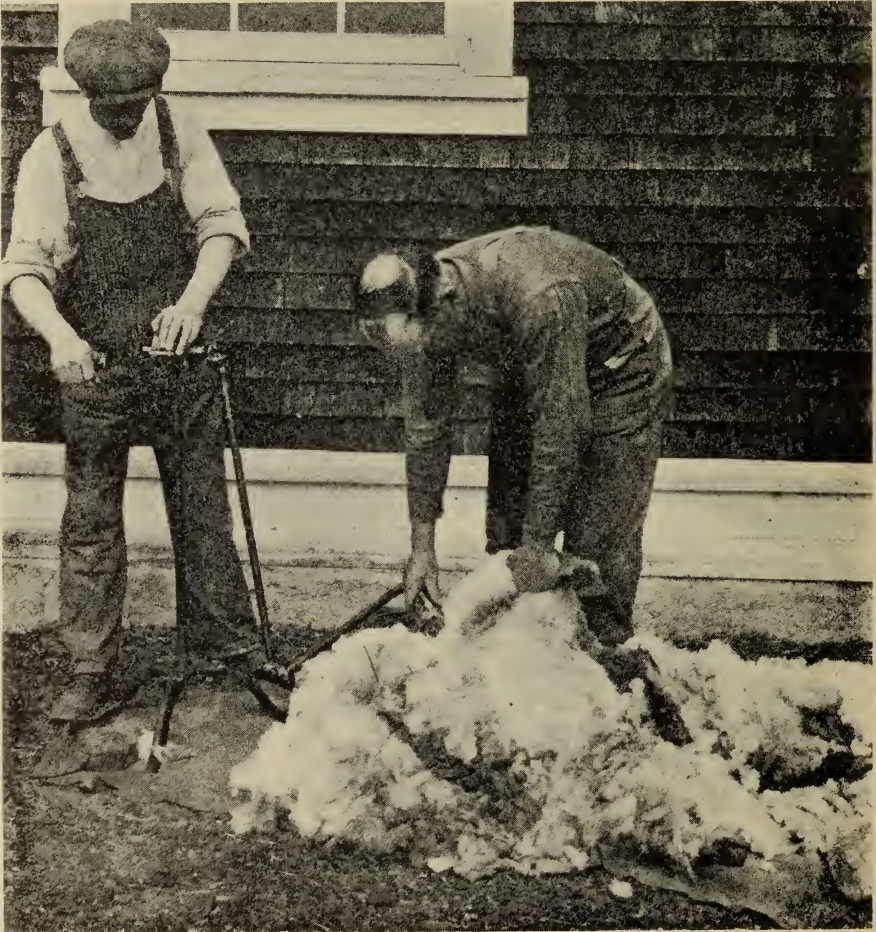
Shearing may commence as soon as the weather is warm enough and the ewes have finished lambing. Shearing should always be completed before the warm weather sets in, as late shearing causes loss of wool through pulling, the ewes lose flesh, and there is danger of the lambs eating some of the wool, result-



ing in the formation of wool balls in the stomach, which often causes death. Dry weather should be selected for shearing. A good clean barn floor, a couple of barn doors laid side by side or a few boards tacked together will serve for a suitable shearing platform. The ewes should be penned in a clean place handy to the shearing platform. It is good practice to tag the ewes before shearing. The tag locks should be kept separate rather than rolled in with the individual fleeces. Trimming the hind quarters before turning the ewes to pasture prevents the excessive accumulation of tags or dung locks.

The old-time method of shearing with the hand shears is rapidly giving place to the shearing machine. Less skill is needed to operate the machine with the same efficiency as the hand shears. There is little danger of cutting unless carelessly handled. The position in which the sheep is held while the various parts of the body are being shorn can be best learned by watching a skilled workman at work.

The proper position for shearing is to place the sheep on its rump between the knees of the shearer. The sheep's legs should be left free and the head should always be held off the floor. In this position it may be tilted either to the right or left and backwards or forwards as the shearer may desire.



Cleanliness in shearing is important.



Experienced shearers differ in methods of shearing. Some prefer to shear lengthwise of the body, while others prefer to shear around the body. In either case shearing commences just below the jaw, the fleece being opened down to the brisket. The wool on the head, neck, shoulders, and front legs is then removed. The belly wool is shorn next and the inside of the thighs is stripped from in front. The right side is then shorn well clear of the back bone whether



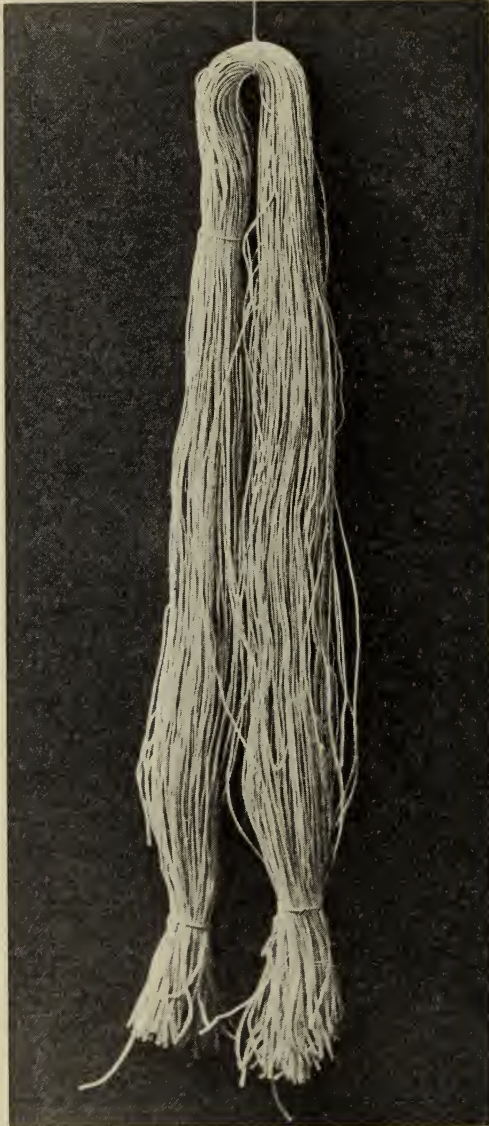
A well-shorn sheep and a fleece attractively rolled and tied for market.

shearing lengthwise or roundwise of the body. The ewe is then given a half turn and the remainder of the fleece removed. The wool should be allowed to fall ahead of the shears or machine head. The weight of wool is sufficient to keep the skin taut ahead of the machine. Extra pressure raises the skin and increases danger of cutting. Long strokes permit of greater speed. The shearing platform should be kept clean at all times—do not include cuttings. After the fleece is off and rolled aside—then, if desired, trim up the eyes and faces of any sheep with black or grey hairs, but do not mix these hairy bunches with the rest of the wool.

When shorn, the fleece lies on the shearing platform with the flesh side up. It should be turned over and spread out to its natural size. If chaffy and seedy a few shakes will remove part of this material. Straws should also be picked off.

The fleece may then be rolled for market. The edges should be turned in and the body of the fleece double lapped, when it will be about 16 inches wide and the full length of the fleece. It is then rolled tightly from the breach to the neck and tied with paper fleece twine.

Shearing on the range is usually well organized in shearing sheds and is performed by shearing gangs on a per head basis. Shearing sheds should be planned so that holding pens are easily filled, as ewes for shearing are required by each respective shearer. It is important that the shearing platforms be kept clean and that a careful check be maintained at all times to see that the fleeces are kept intact while being shorn and that each fleece is properly rolled and tied so as to present an attractive appearance for sale.



Paper fleece twine should always be used  
for tying the fleece.

## **Packing and Storing Wool Previous to Shipment**

In the case of farm flocks of from ten to twenty ewes, the wool can be packed in a regulation wool sack. Wool sacks are available on application to the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, 217 Bay street, Toronto, Ontario, or to any of the local wool growers' associations. In the case of larger flocks, sufficient sacks may be ordered to hold all the wool. Wool from range bands should be packed tightly and carefully, as loosely packed wool takes more space in freight cars and increases freight and handling charges. Wool, as soon as packed in wool sacks, should be stored in a cool dry place until it is shipped to the warehouse for official grading.

## **Shipping Wool to the Central Warehouses for Grading**

Where groups of sheep raisers are located adjacent to a common shipping point a very considerable saving can be made in freight charges if a pool car is arranged and all ship together. Similarly a group of ranchers can effect considerable saving by arranging shipments so that full carloads are sent forward to the central warehouses.

## **THE CANADIAN CO-OPERATIVE WOOL GROWERS LIMITED**

Since its organization in 1918, this company, which is truly co-operative in principle, has continued to operate as a most successful national selling agency for individual producers and some thirteen sheep breeders' and wool growers' associations throughout Canada. From year to year approximately one-third of Canada's total fleece wool production is sold by this producer organization. The carrying out of a sound business policy over a period of years (years of low wool prices as well as years of high prices) has won the confidence of producers and manufacturers.

## **Sales Policy**

Each year consignments of wool begin to arrive at the warehouses early in April, and by the end of May have reached considerable volume. June, July, and August are the three months during which the greatest volume of wool is received. Wool continues to arrive in smaller quantities throughout the fall and winter months.

Wool grading starts almost immediately consignments begin to arrive and continues in full swing throughout the summer and fall months. As soon as grading is well under way the company is in a position to furnish wool samples of the various grades to prospective buyers, and it is then possible to quote prices and negotiate sales. Graded wool is usually shipped when sold, while unsold wool is packed and stored for release or sale in quantities and classes as required by users and exporters. Under this policy Canadian graded wool is on the market the year round. Current requirements can usually be supplied and repeat orders taken care of. It is the objective to sell all the previous year's clip before the new clip comes to hand.

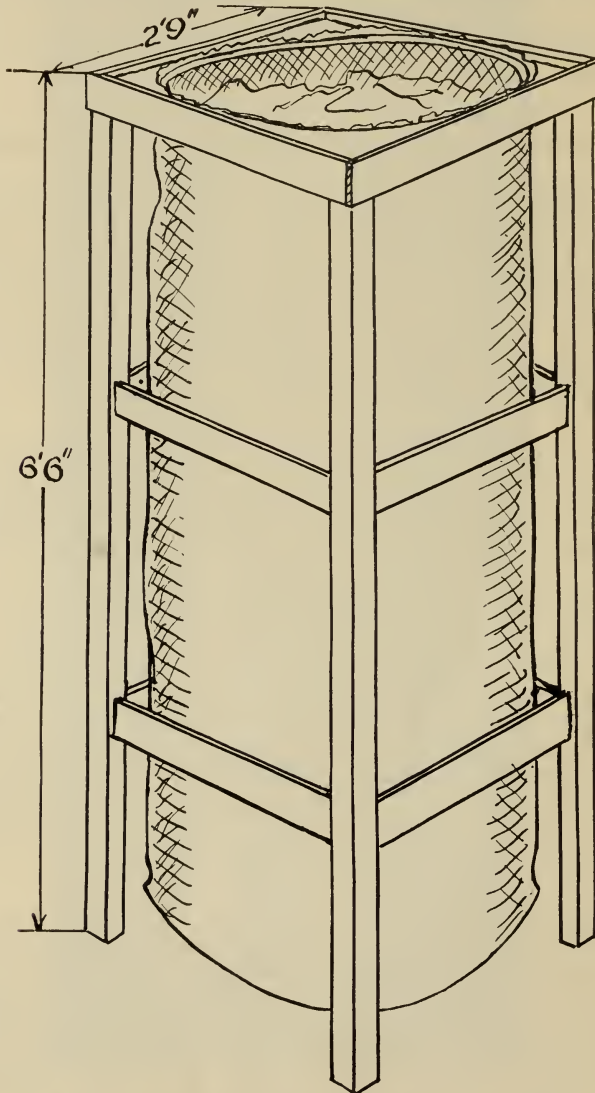
## **Credit for Wool Growers**

Under a successful policy of marketing wool as outlined above, it necessarily follows that final settlement for a considerable volume of wool cannot be made until long after shearing time. Producers naturally require funds with which to carry on, thus necessitating credit arrangements. Each association affiliated under the Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited is empowered by contract to borrow money on the security of the wool and to deduct the interest on the money borrowed from the proceeds of sale due to the affiliated



associations. On the basis of current world values, the parent organization decides each year the basis on which shearing advances, as they are currently called, are to be made. The local associations make advances to individual producers according to the grade and poundage of wool supplied, either from moneys received from the central organization or through banks on the security of warehouse receipts and bills of lading. The burden of credit interest among the various affiliated associations is reduced from time to time by making available to these associations moneys from the sale of wool as and when they become available.

The policy of making a shearing advance followed by a final settlement as soon as all the wool is sold and settled for has worked to the advantage of the producer, first in that he receives the highest possible average price for the year, and second, owing to the fact that the value of the wool clip is split into two payments, ranchers are better able to finance the year's operations.



Wool packing stand suitable for farmer or rancher.



**SHEEP BREEDERS' AND WOOL GROWERS' ASSOCIATIONS, WOOL COLLECTING STATIONS, WOOL WAREHOUSES, BRANCHES AFFILIATED WITH OR OPERATED BY CANADIAN CO-OPERATIVE WOOL GROWERS LIMITED.**

**PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND**

Prince Edward Island Sheep Breeders' Association, W. Boulter, Secretary, Charlottetown, P.E.I.

**NOVA SCOTIA**

Eastern Nova Scotia Wool Grading Station, T. F. MacDonald, Secretary, Antigonish.

Nova Scotia Wool Growers' Association, Geo. L. Fisher, Truro.

**NEW BRUNSWICK**

New Brunswick Sheep Breeders' Association, Stanley Wood, Secretary, Fredericton.

**QUEBEC**

Quebec Sheep Breeders' Association, Andrea St. Pierre, Secretary, St. Hyacinthe, Que.

Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, Quebec Branch, Lennoxville, P.Q., L. V. Parent, Manager.

The Sheep Breeders' and Wool Growers' Associations in Quebec also act as collecting agencies, assembling shipments of wool locally for shipment to Lennoxville.

**ONTARIO**

Ontario Sheep Breeders' Association, L. E. O'Neill, Secretary, Toronto.

Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited:

Weston warehouse open all year.

Carleton Place collecting station open May 15-July 15.

**MANITOBA**

Manitoba Sheep Breeders' Association, J. E. Rillee, Secretary, Brandon Man.

Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, Portage la Prairie, W. W. Thomson, Manager—Wool collections June, July, and August. A branch office of the Canadian Co-operative is located at Regina, open all the year to serve the interests of the growers in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

**SASKATCHEWAN**

Saskatchewan Sheep Breeders' Association, J. G. Robertson, Secretary, Regina.

Southern Saskatchewan Wool Growers' Association, G. S. Herringer, Secretary, Maple Creek.

Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers Limited, W. W. Thomson, Manager Regina.

## ALBERTA

Southern Alberta Sheep Breeders Limited, N. T. Macleod, Secretary, Lethbridge.

Alberta Sheep Breeders' Association, E. L. Richardson, Secretary, Calgary.

Central Alberta Wool Growers' Association, D. F. Chisholm, Secretary, Lacombe.

Alberta Provincial Sheep Breeders' Association, Limited, E. L. Holmes, Secretary, Edmonton.

Vermilion Wool Growers' Association, S. C. Hackbert, Secretary, Vermilion.

Eastern Alberta Wool Growers' Association, E. G. Wood, Secretary, Hanna.

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia Sheep Breeders' Association, Inc., M. E. Lauder, Secretary, Kamloops.