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# ADVICE TO THE BEGINNER IN THE SELECTION OF SHEEP FOR BREEDING

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# ADVICE TO THE BEGINNER IN THE SELECTION OF SHEEP FOR BREEDING\*

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## BREEDS AND BREED TYPES OF SHEEP

Many farmers may think that after they have spent a few months in learning the theory of sheep husbandry, they are capable of pursuing practical management with an assurance of easy success. They have possibly learned the symptoms of diseases with their remedies and, in detail, scientific management, but exigencies always arise for which they are unprepared and which probably, when studying the subject, they did not deem worthy of their consideration. It is strict attention to the little things in sheep raising that so generally leads to a great success. No one should enter extensively into the business without having had a thorough practical experience. Otherwise, it is best for him to commence in a smaller fashion. As his flock increases in size so will his experience, and he will learn for himself the proper methods to apply to every condition that may arise.

Too many beginners display an over-confidence in their prowess and knowledge of the sheep business. This makes them a prey to the salesman who sees no need of correcting mistakes that the beginner may make in the purchase of his breeding stock. Most generally this class of novice wishes to make personal selection of the animals, and if his ideals respecting type are somewhat astray, as is by no means infrequently the case, he gets in his flock many sheep which he would be better without. Had he been sensibly disposed and confessed his ignorance of many points of breed type, the salesman, unless he were most unscrupulous, would have aided him in choosing animals that would prove valuable to him. Few breeders who have any sort of reputation at all to sustain will take a rank advantage of a man who ingenuously leaves the selection of his purchase with them. In fact, many breeders state that they much prefer a buyer to make a personal choice than sell by description through the mail, since in the latter case they feel compelled, in order to uphold their honesty and trustworthiness, to send a better animal than the price really calls for. With personal selection the seller's liability is limited, since he does not feel himself responsible for what the purchaser does.

## SELECTION OF BREED OR TYPE

Choice of breed is the first difficulty that besets the beginner. The common question with those entering the sheep business is: What is the best breed? To that the only answer that can be given is that all breeds are good when

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adapted to the conditions under which they will be subjected in the district where the beginner's farm or ranch is located, and meet local market requirements. The selection of breed also depends largely upon the individual taste of the shepherd and the object he has in view in raising them. In Canada, success can be attained with any of the popular breeds produced here, but no person should ever commence raising a breed for which he knows he cannot obtain a ready sale. Perhaps his means and conditions do not warrant him to enter into the production of pure-breds. If he is breeding sheep merely for mutton purposes, high-class grades will suffice, yet even in buying grades he should take care to select only those possessing a good mutton conformation. Many farmers think that, since they own simply grades, "any old sheep" at all will produce good enough results in the flock, and, therefore, the more cheaply they can buy the better. This is false economy, for very frequently they obtain in their flock animals that do not pay for the expense of their keep. The breeding of sheep is now a well-established practice on many farms and in the fall of the year it is always possible to purchase well-bred ewe lambs of any of the popular breeds.

### UNIFORMITY OF TYPE

Unity of type in the flock should be the direct aim of every breeder. This applies to grades as well as pure-breds, and refers to the selection of a type of sheep possessing similar mutton and wool characteristics. With pure-breds this feature is especially important. In a flock of sheep where several types obtain, choice of a suitable ram is most difficult. Besides, disparity in this respect detracts from the general appearance of the flock and gives the buyer or casual observer an unfavourable opinion. Every breeder should aspire to produce a distinctive type. He should endeavour to breed a class of sheep possessing characteristics that, wherever the animals are, they will be recognized as his breeding. But to attain this he should never uphold some fancy character in preference to utility features. No feature should be given undue prominence beyond another, especially one that is purely ornamental. The establishment of an ultra form of some fashionable characteristic has at times become an obsession with many breeders of pure-bred sheep, and this sin (for it cannot be called anything else) must be avoided. The ultimate destination of most pure-bred rams is at the head of grade flocks, and their utility qualities should always be given careful consideration.

The beginner should study well and become familiar with the type or breed he has selected. He must be able to recognize undesirable features and disqualifications. These he should endeavour to preclude from his flock, and to this end he should practise a rigorous culling every year. Individuals which do not possess the merits that his ideal calls for should not be used for breeding purposes. The absolutely perfect sheep, however, is still unknown, but every breeder should essay to approach as well as possible to what he considers perfection of type. Therefore, he should practise judicious care in the initial selection of his foundation stock and in his subsequent breeding operations.



Merino Ram



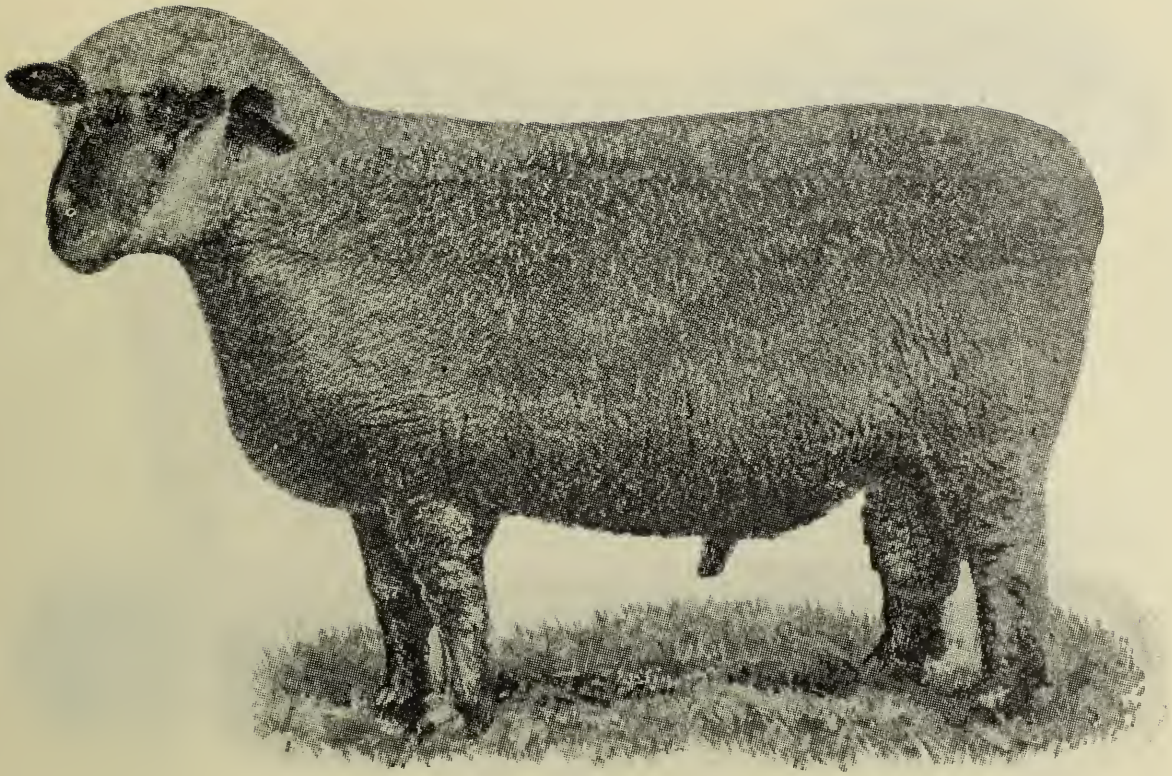
Rambouillet Ram



Suffolk Ram



Oxford Down Ram



Hampshire Ram



Shropshire Ram



Southdown Ram



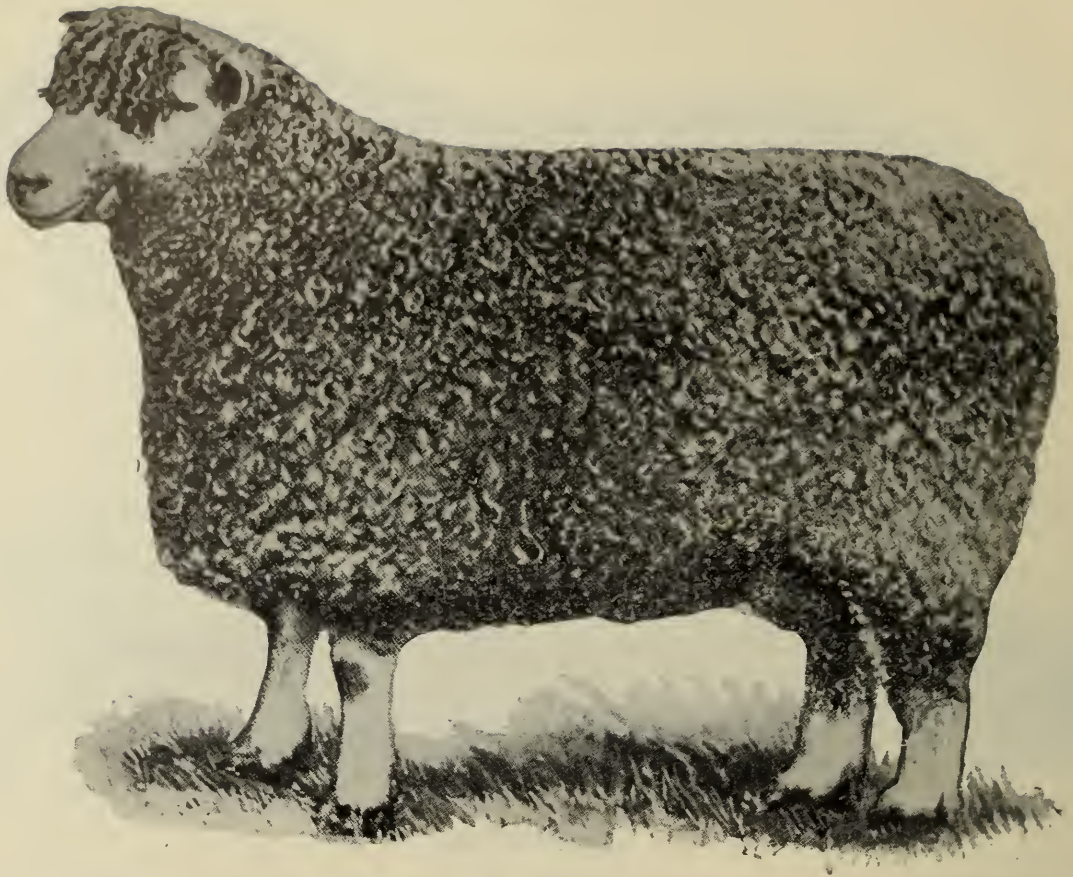
Dorset Horn Ram



Cheviot Ram



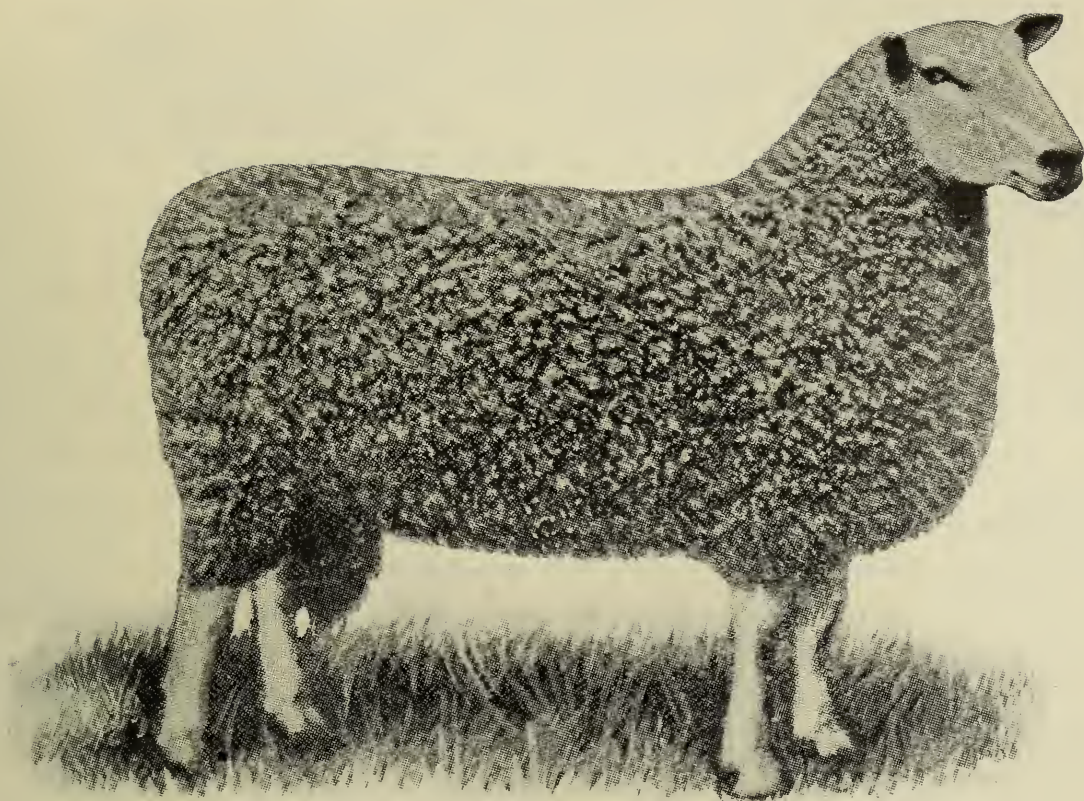
Ryeland Ram



Lincoln Ram



Cotswold Ram



Border Leicester Ram



Romney Marsh Ram

## CLASSIFICATION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BREEDS

Wool Breeds....	Fine-Woolled or Merino.	White-faced.....	{ (a) Spanish or American Merino. (b) American Merino. (c) Rambouillet and Delaine.
		Dark-faced or "Downs".	{ Oxford. Hampshire. Suffolk. Shropshire. Southdown.
	Medium-Woolled.	White-faced.....	{ Dorset Horn. Cheviot.
		Reddish-brown faced....	Tunis.
Mutton Breeds..	Coarse-Woolled.	Dark-faced.....	Highland.
		White-faced.....	{ Lincoln. Cotswold..... { White-faced. Grey-faced.
			{ Leicester..... { English. Border. Romney Marsh.

## THE MERINO

In America the Merino is separated, according to the degree of skin wrinkling or folding, into three distinct classes: A, B, and C. Although skin wrinkling comprises the obvious means of division, fundamentally it is based upon the fineness of the wool fibre, since a direct correlation exists between the quality of wool and extent of skin wrinkling. The most heavily wrinkled are recognized as possessing the finest fleece. The American Merino, which is descended, without radical change, from the ultra fine-woolled Spanish, is wrinkled virtually over the entire body. The wool is very fine and has a large yolk or oil content, which gives to it a high shrinkage.

A. and B. Merinos are not suited to range conditions on the prairie. The Rambouillet is the ideal range breed for prairie and mountain range in Canada. Being the largest in size, the generally accepted type is low-set, deep and thrifty with a strong top combing length of staple with density, fineness and weight of fleece. More attention is being placed on mutton qualities and feeder lambs of this breed are expected to be of a type that will finish in the feedlot at weights just around 100 pounds live weight. The Rambouillet as being developed in Canada retains the gregarious habits of the Merino with its characteristic hardiness with good herding qualities all of which maintain their adaptability for range conditions. The skin fold is usually confined to one large fold on the neck. The rams are usually horned although of late years polled strains are gaining in popularity.

## THE "DOWNS"

The "Downs" are of British origin, as, in fact, are all of the mutton breeds except the Tunis, which is a native of Africa. The Oxford and Hampshire are the largest; the Southdown, the smallest. The Southdown, with the exception of the Highland, is the smallest breed raised in this country. There is not a very great degree of difference between the Oxford and Hampshire in respect to size. The Oxford shears more wool of a somewhat coarser nature than the Hampshire, and has a more compact body. Both are woolled upon the poll and legs and frequently over the face. The hair colour of the Oxford will vary from a black to an even grey; while the Hampshire in this regard is uniformly black or dark brown. The Suffolk to a great extent resembles the Hampshire. It is rather smaller, however, and possesses no wool on the head or legs. The Shropshire is exceptionally well covered upon the face and legs, the wool surrounding the eyes and descending even below the pasterns. The hair colour is a uniform brown. It is not so large as the Oxford or Hampshire. The mutton of the Southdown is held in high repute for its exquisite flavour. However, the yield is not as great as with the other larger breeds, nor does it shear so heavily. The face colour is an even grey or light brown. Wool covers the poll and legs, but is seldom found on any part of the face. The "Downs" are claimed to be the hardiest of the mutton breeds, and capable of withstanding most severe winter weather. Both males and females are polled. In fact, the Dorset Horn and Black-faced Highland, of which both sexes bear horns, are the only prominent mutton breeds with these most unnecessary appendages.

## OTHER MEDIUM-WOOLLED BREEDS

Dorset Horns, owing to their ability to breed fairly assuredly for the production of early lambs, have been popular when in the hands of breeders aiming to cater to special market outlets for lamb in our larger cities. In size they are comparable with the Shropshires. The ewes are good milkers. The Dorset is covered with wool on the poll and legs.

The Cheviot has now been introduced into Canada in considerable numbers. It is not a very large breed, and the quality of its wool is on the borderland between the medium and coarse-woolled types. It has been bred for years on the hills of Northern England and Scotland, and is therefore pre-eminently suited to rough and hilly districts.

Ryeland. A breed introduced recently mainly with a view to using the rams for crossing on range ewes.

## COARSE-WOOLLED BREEDS

The Leicester has remained the most popular and generally adaptable of the coarse-woolled breeds. In the more temperate districts of Canada, particularly southwestern Ontario and on the west coast of British Columbia and to a limited extent in other areas, Leicester lambs are marketed during the early

summer months, being recognized as one of the leading breeds for the production of well-finished lambs for early marketing. Leicester wool, while coarse, is lustrous and is in demand for special lines of manufacture.

The Lincoln and Cotswold breeds are not generally recommended. There is an annual demand from the United States for breeding stock of these breeds and a considerable number of breeders have found it profitable to breed these sheep and cater to the export market outlet. The Lincoln is probably the largest of the coarse-woolled breeds. The wool is long and coarse, but the fleeces have a high average weight.

### ASSISTANCE AVAILABLE FOR THE SELECTION OF BREEDING STOCK

Farmers and breeders are recognizing more and more the necessity for caution in the purchasing of sheep. Fortunately judging demonstrations, sheep marketing courses and other educational features are making it possible for the young prospective sheep breeder to more adequately equip himself with much of the essential knowledge of mutton conformation and breed character. Ram grading, which is now performed in a great many of the provinces, enables farmers or breeders to obtain first-hand information regarding the quality of rams produced in the various provinces. Prospective buyers are assured that a competent and conscientious official has given his unbiased judgment on the various animals offered for sale. If the prospective buyer wishes to do so, he may pick out from the list of graded stock those breeders which in his opinion should have the best quality rams of the top grade. If the distance or expense is not too great, he can visit the farm and make a personal selection, knowing that his choice can be made from grades already established. Farmers or breeders who wish to buy by mail can order from the official grades established in the various flocks. This permits of buying with a greater degree of confidence.

Federal and provincial governments have now established staffs of sheep promoters and agricultural experts, who are always at the service of breeders and farmers, and it is usually possible to get their advice or even their services in the choice or selection of breeding ewes. Governmental policies such as the Sheep Club Policy provide a means whereby young farmers can be assured of specially selected ewes at market values. Farmers wishing to start into sheep raising are encouraged to avail themselves of the advantages of federal and provincial policies as well as the services of the federal and provincial officials.

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