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Preparing Wool for Market



TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
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PREPARING WOOL FOR MARKET

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INTRODUCTION

The preparation of wool for market is a phase of sheep production that is often neglected by many ranchmen. They may excel in all other phases of ranching but fail to put their clip up in an attractive manner.

Proper preparation of wool for market is important to the warehouseman since his job is to sell the product. Generally the more attractive and well prepared clips sell first. Small, poorly prepared clips usually must be graded and repacked before they can be sold. More care should be used in the preparation of smaller clips because frequently the volume of larger clips helps sell them.

BREEDING PROGRAM

Preparing wool for market begins with the breeding program. A sheep cannot exceed its inherited ability to produce wool, even with superior feed and management. A ranchman should select his sheep for the most popular kind of wool and should strive to obtain uniformity of fineness and length. This can be achieved best through a selection program.

MANAGEMENT

The management of the flock affects the quantity and quality of the clip. Unless the sheep has adequate nutrition and good management, it cannot reach its maximum wool production. The fleece quickly shows the results of poor nutrition by a finer fiber that lacks strength. Infestations of internal and external parasites show up in poorer quality wool.

When the sheep has been bred for good wool production, provided with an adequate feed supply, and given good management, it will produce a fleece equal to its inherited ability to produce wool under those conditions.

Tagging is a management practice that improves the appearance of the wool clip. It consists of removing the

tags and dung locks from around the rear parts and between the hind legs of the animal about two months before lambing. This practice keeps the fleece cleaner at lambing time and makes it easier for the baby lamb when it first attempts to nurse.

Picking cockleburs off sheep before shearing will improve the appearance and value of the wool. The cost of labor and the going price of wool determine whether this practice is profitable.

PENS AND SHEARING FLOORS

The ranchman should provide a good clean place to shear. Catch pens, immediately around the shearing floor, should be sprinkled several times a day to keep down dust.

Some ranchmen provide concrete shearing floors. Such a floor is permanent but is hard on shearing heads and the shearers tire more quickly. Most shearing crews do not like to work on a concrete floor.

A portable shearing floor constructed of shiplap on a frame of 2" x 4" is probably the most practical.



Fig. 1 A shearing floor kept clean by the sweeper is essential to a well prepared clip. The trip board on the outer edge of the shearing floor keeps out most of the dirt and helps throw the sheep for the shearer.

Shearing floors should have a trip board to assist the shearer in throwing the animal and also prevent dirt from being dragged onto the shearing floor. The trip board is usually a 2" x 2" strip nailed onto the top outside edge of the shearing floor.

The ranchman should provide a sweeper to keep the shearing floor clean. The sweeper should watch for the shearing of black sheep and keep such fleeces separate and sweep up all the black fleece. Black wool usually is worth considerably less than white wool. Wool with black or dark colored fibers in it cannot be used in white or light colored fabrics. Consequently black fleeces should be packed separately.

If the ranchman cannot provide a good clean place to shear, he should engage a shearing crew with the necessary equipment.

THE SHEARER

The shearing crew will not do any more than is required but usually responds to the requests of the ranchman. The sheep has produced the best fleece it can with the grass and feed provided. The shearer can undo in approximately five minutes what it has taken the sheep 12 months to produce. With just a little care on the part of the shearer the fleece can be put up in an attractive manner.

The method of shearing is not important as long as the shearer does a good job. The shearer should be careful to take the fleece off in one piece. It is difficult to roll a fleece and make it attractive unless it is in one piece. Many shearers tear the fleeces badly during shearing.

The shearer should make as few second cuts as possible. Second cuts are made when the shearer fails to keep the shearing head down on the skin and goes over the same part a second time. Many second cuts may reduce the grade and value of the wool by reducing the average length.

The shearer should be instructed to keep the fleece clean by not stepping on it and to avoid using an excessive amount of lubricating oil. New oil should be used. Burned lubricating oil, which many shearers use, is one of the most difficult impurities to scour out of wool.

Cutting or injuring the sheep should always be avoided. In Texas every cut is a potential screwworm case. Shearers should be careful about putting too much weight on the belly of a sheep, especially when it has a good fill.

SWEEPER

The job of the sweeper is to keep the shearing floor clean. He sweeps the droppings and dirt off the shearing floor and keeps the tags swept up and bagged. This can make a great deal of difference in the appearance of the fleece the shearer delivers.

"PICK-UP BOY"

The fleece should be rolled with the flesh side out. The "pick-up boy" should start at the neck and keep folding the belly and back wool under and rolling it toward himself. When the fleece has been rolled in this manner, the britch wool will come up last and permit the removal of tags or coarse portions. If the fleece has been properly rolled, the side wool, which represents the largest part of the fleece, will be exposed to the buyer for examination. This method of rolling permits the "pick-up boy" to start rolling the fleece before the shearer has finished.

"TIER"

The fleece is then taken to the tier who ties it. The twine should go from corner to corner, be crossed and then include the other corners. Heavy greasy fleeces tend to become soggy when tied too tightly. Wool buyers call fleeces

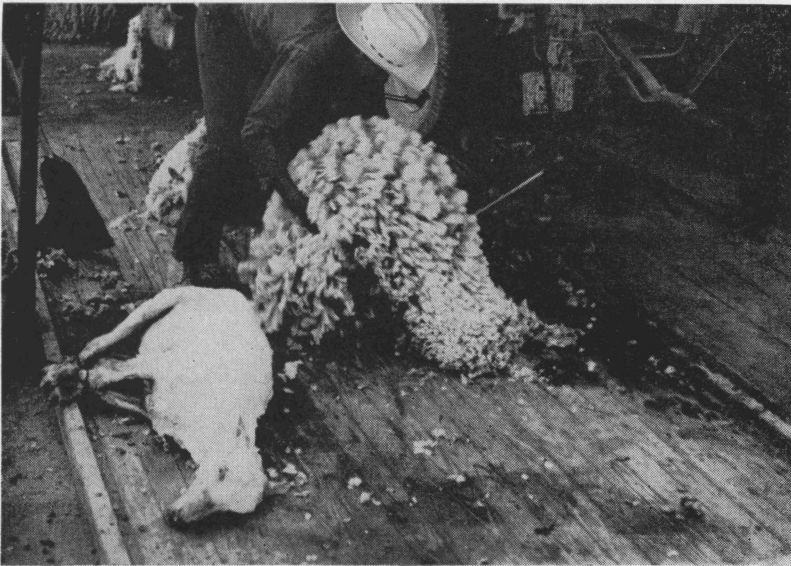


Fig. 2 The "pick-up" boy starts rolling the fleece before the shearer is finished.

of this type "slugs." When many of these show up in a clip, the shrinkage is raised proportionately.

Regular paper fleece twine should be used in tying fleeces. Sisal, binder twine or any twine made of vegetable material should not be used in tying fleeces as vegetable fibers will be shed into the wool.

PACKING

In Texas, wool is packed in 6-foot wool bags. A 6½-foot wool bag is used in the northwestern states. A waterproof

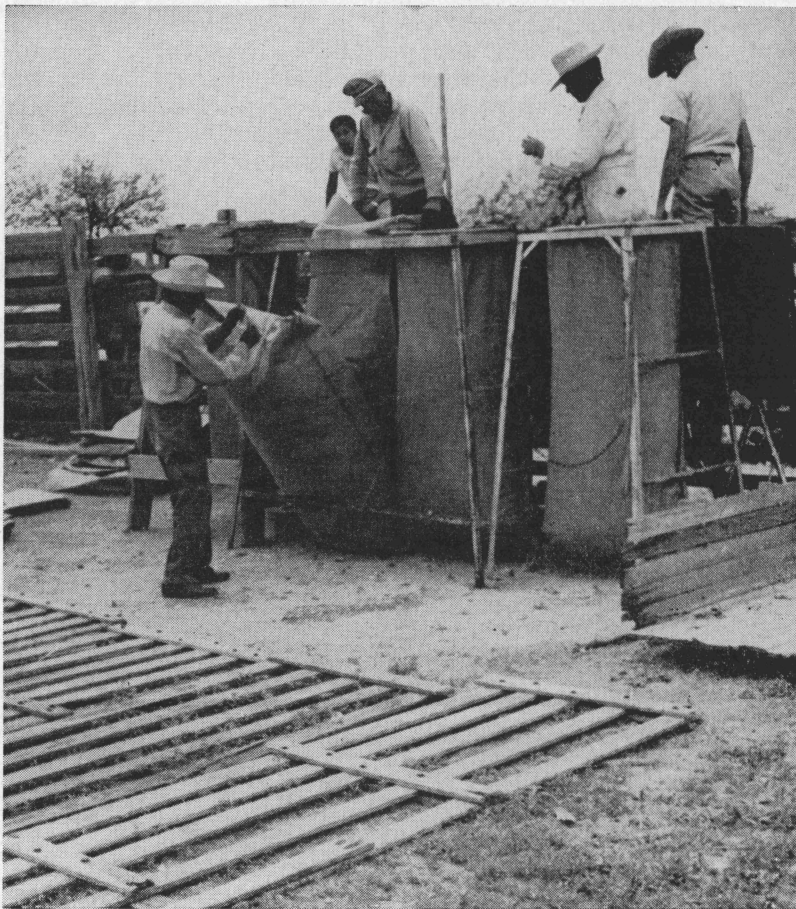


Fig. 3 These firmly packed "flat" bags are easily handled and the fleeces are in better condition when opened. Notice the panels to keep the bags off the ground.

bag was developed recently. The inside of the bag is coated with a waterproofing substance supposed to prevent extreme loss of moisture while in storage.

The tier hands the fleeces to the packer or tromper who packs it in the bag. The packer first should "tie off" some ears on the bottom of the bag. This can be done by placing a small handful of tags in each of the bottom corners of the bag and tying them off. The ears should be just large enough to give a good hand hold when handling the bag.

The flat-packed bag is a popular method of packing in Texas. A fleece is placed in each corner of the bag and tromping is done only along the seams. The fleeces should be packed in the bag firmly but not too tightly. When bags are packed too tightly, the fleeces lose some of their brightness and many of them are torn up by tromping.

The flat packed bag is easy to stack and there is less danger of the stack slipping. Such bags are easy to display and show off the wool to the best advantage.

In packing a round bag, the fleeces should be worked down in layers of three or four. It is more difficult to produce an attractive bag of wool by this method but more wool can be packed in each bag. The fleeces will usually be torn more by tromping in this method.

The packer should not try to tromp too much wool into the bag. Each bag should be firmly and smoothly packed.

The so-called "limber" bag of wool is difficult to handle. This is a bag of wool that has not been firmly packed and will bend or fold.

Many ranchmen instruct the tromper not to pack over a certain number of pounds into each bag. Most buyers have enough information so that they do not have to rely on the bag weights as an indicator of shrinkage.

The fully packed bag of wool should be lowered onto some boards or a clean floor and sewed. Ears should be sewed onto the top of the bag to facilitate handling. The bag should not touch the ground after it is removed from the sacking frame. When a bag is rolled along the ground, the wool picks up a coating of dirt that injures its appearance when opened.

Wool should be stored in a dry, clean place. Excessive moisture is harmful because staining and mildew sometime occur.

Trucks or freight cars in which wool is shipped should be swept out and cleaned before the wool is loaded. When



Fig. 4 The flat packed bag on the left and the round packed bag on the right are opened for display in the warehouse.

wool is hauled on open trucks, it should be covered with a tarpaulin to keep out dust and moisture.

If these points have been observed in preparing the clip for market, the wool warehouseman will not find it difficult to market the wool. He will have a better opportunity to get the true value for the wool.

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