

## Pa. Farm Price Level Steady

The September Index of Prices Received by Pennsylvania farmers was unchanged from a month earlier. Higher prices for eggs and milk were offset by lower grain, fruit and vegetable prices. The index was up 4 percent from a year earlier and 257 percent above the 1910-14 base.

Egg prices, advancing steadily since May rose to 45 cents per dozen, 8 cents higher than August and 10 cents above September last year. The sharp advance brought the price level to the

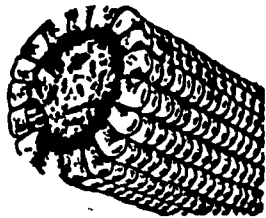
highest point in almost two years. Milk prices advanced seasonally as supply declined.

Average prices of selected commodities are: Milk, (per cwt.) \$6.05; Eggs, (per doz.) \$4.5; Broilers, (per lb.) \$1.6; Steers & Heifers, (per cwt.) \$25.30; Hogs, (per cwt.) \$20.30; Corn, (per bu.) \$1.12; Wheat, (per bu.) \$1.09; and Oats, (per bu.) \$65.

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## Shearing Sheep With Chemicals No Nicks, No Cuts, No Shills

Nothing looks quite as naked as a chemically defleeced sheep, but this rarity may become common if preliminary tests pan out.

The chemicals being tested interrupt cell growth in the bulb of each wool fiber, causing a ringlike constriction. The constriction moves up from the bulb of each wool fiber as it grows and in 6 to 7 days, reaches a position just below the skin surface.

At that point, the fiber breaks easily, and the whole fleece can be separated at the skinline, leaving the sheep completely bare. An operator grabbing a handful of wool and rolling his wrist along the skin can defleece a sheep quickly and systematically without strain on himself, discomfort to the sheep, or wastage of wool.

Ease of removal in fact, is the main advantage of chemical defleecing. Shearing with clippers is a highly skilled task, calling for wages of about \$12 per hour at Beltsville, Md., where the ARS trials are being conducted. By contrast, a non-specialist drawing about \$2.50 per hour can quickly learn to remove fleeces from sheep treated chemically.

In addition, defleecing, unlike shearing, does not leave nicks and cuts on the skin. Although sheep seemed unaffected by the complete lack of fleece, precautions were taken to keep sheep out of extreme weather after defleecing. Wool has grown back normally on sheep defleeced since the trials began. The most recent trial showed that defleecing can be delayed beyond the minimum of 6 to 7 days after chemical treatment so that a short growth of new wool forms below the constriction point of the wool fibers. The fleece separates as easily as before but the new coat does away with the possibility of having to protect sheep from extreme weather after defleecing.

Compounds tested for defleecing by ARS biologist E. H. Dolnick and co-workers are new drugs used in anticancer studies. Medical scientists at the National Cancer Institute and Hazleton Laboratories, found that these drugs, aimed at stopping cell

growth in tumors, also interrupted cell growth in hair roots. This caused test subjects including sheep, to lose their hair temporarily, a finding that renewed Dolnick's long-standing interest in putting chemical defleecing on a practical basis.

The process is not as unnatural as it sounds. American buffalo, for example, lose big clumps of long winter hair each spring; angora rabbits are conventionally dehaired by plucking without chemicals; and most sheepmen know individual cases of partial fleece loss in sheep after severe illness, parasitism, or grazing on shrubs containing chemicals which act like those being tested by Dolnick.

In these tests, a typical com-

pound was given to sheep by mouth or injection in doses ranging from 2 milligrams (mg.) to 41 mg. per pound of body weight. The highest level was fatal; levels below 27 mg. caused no apparent harm, and even the lowest levels caused wool to loosen reasonably well. With the most effective dose about 14 mg., undesirable side effects have not been detected.

Further studies are necessary to determine whether chemical defleecing is economically practical and whether it causes chemical residues in the meat, alters wool growth or quality, or harms fleecless sheep exposed to heat or cold. Drug choice, dosage, or time of treatment may need adjustment. If such problems are uncovered, Still, Dolnick thinks defleecing may help relieve the labor shortage and price squeeze now plaguing the sheep industry.

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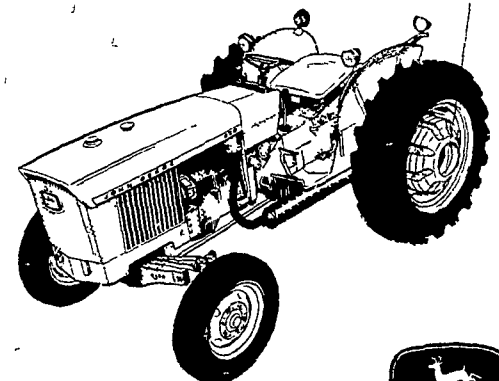
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