

Some Keys: Good Ram, Flushing, High Lamb Output, Controlled Feeding, Health Care

Why Robert Herr, Dorset Breeder, Keeps Urging Farmers to Try Sheep

"A ram really makes the difference and I think you can afford to pay more for one."

The comment was made by Robert Herr, Narvon RD2, shortly before the Pennsylvania Keystone Show and Sale at Harrisburg July 10. At the sale, one of Herr's Dorset rams was judged reserve breed champion and sold for \$530, the highest price for any of the 203 animals sold at the sale.

Herr's own flock, ram was sired by the highest selling ram of the Dorset breed, a \$2,000 ram sold by North Carolina State College.

His current ram was champion at Staunton, Virginia, and at the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

Herr's flock is a breeding

flock. He sells many of his animals to other sheepmen as 'foundation stock. That's one of the reasons he needs a quality ram — to maintain the high quality in his flock year after year.

Urges Sheep Production

Because his sheep are consistently among top award winners in local and state shows, Herr's flock is one of the best known sheep flocks in the area.

But aside from winning at shows, Herr is perhaps best known among farmers as an advocate of producing sheep. While nationally and locally sheep have been declining in relative importance as a livestock enterprise, Herr thinks this shouldn't be the case. He thinks sheep can be a highly



These are some of the lambs which the Herrs will enter in show competition during the next few months. Note that the lambs have been sheared, except for the legs. Wool on the legs doesn't grow very fast and it's

necessary to leave this wool on at this point in order to fit them out properly, reports Mrs. Herr, who is credited by her husband with being an outstanding sheep fitter.



Elizabeth and Barbara show off the Herrs' ewe lambs which will be a year old in September.

The Polled Dorsets

While Dorsets normally have horns, all of the Robert Herr flock is polled except one foundation ewe which was kept because she drops good lambs.

Dorset literature explains that the polled strain of the Dorset originated at North Carolina State College, Raleigh, N.C.

The polled Dorset apparently resulted from a mutation which occurred in the purebred Dorset flock maintained by the college. A mutation is an accidental change in the gene or genes that affect a particular trait, such as horns.

After the first polled Dorsets were obtained at the College, research and testing were carried out for seven years in order to assure a strong foundation from which a polled strain of Dorset could be propagated. In 1956, the Continental Dorset Club accepted the first applications for registry.

The first sale of animals from the College flock occurred in 1958 when 15 rigidly selected rams were sold to Dorset breeders in 11 States. Interest in the new strain of Dorsets has spread from coast to coast and has definitely established the polled animals as part of the breed. Except for the absence of horns, they are identical to horned Dorsets, according to the breed information.



The Herr family stands near a large cherry tree on their small farm, with the sheep in the background. They are: left to right, Robert; Barbara (front); Elizabeth;

Margaret (front); Karen Serafin, State College, a friend visiting Elizabeth; Mrs. (Betty) Herr, and Christian.

profitable enterprise, particularly on rocky and hilly land not suitable for intensive crop farming.

He thinks sheep can be adapted to many types of farm programs, kept small for the part-

time farmer or enlarged into a full-time operation, adapted to a purebred breeding flock program or changed to a crossbred commercial operation.

The Herr operation is relatively small, emphasizing primarily sale of breeding stock. He has a full-time job as teacher of the elementary ag program in the Eastern Lancaster County School District, a program for sixth grade students.

By buying all his feed and hay, and using rotational grazing, Herr feels he can easily support his 50 head flock on his 17 acres. With the homestead, a pond, creek and some woods, he has about 12 acres of pasture.

He emphasized that this ground is rocky and hilly, not suited to intensive farming like most of the better farm areas in Lancaster County. He believes that grazing sheep is about the best use that can be made of the land.

Herr stresses that one of the main reasons he likes sheep is that "it's something the whole family can do." He considers his wife, Betty, a very accomplished sheep producer.

The Herr children — Elizabeth, 12; Christian, 9; Barbara, 8, and Margaret, 4 — all have sheep and the whole family joins in show events. Show

some responsibilities with the days are family days.

Besides an outstanding ram, Herr believes there are many other factors in making a successful sheep program.

Intensive Lambing

Herr explained that the economics of producing lamb in this country, including rising costs, as well as the large influx of foreign lamb, makes it increasingly vital to increase return from the flock, through such means as increasing the number of lambs per year and hitting the top market.

One of the most important needs in the industry, he believes, is an accelerated lambing program.

Most sheepmen get lambs once a year. Herr's flock lambs every eight months, making it possible to get three lambings every two years, or a 50 per cent increase over the normal flock operator.

"As the hog people have been doing for years and as the dairy people do, it's a matter of keeping the animals pregnant all the time," Herr explained.

This intensive breeding program is one of the key reasons he specializes in Dorsets. Dorsets are one of the few breeds which can be used for out of

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These are some of the Herrs' older Dorset ewes grazing, with the farm pond in the background. The ewe on the right is the only

horned animal in the flock. She has been kept because she produces good lambs.