

Marylanders' fleece sheep at shearing school

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Sheep-shearing time in Maryland coincides closely with the state's tobacco market auction season, which opened this year on April 10 and is scheduled to run through May 31.

Every year the animal science department and the Cooperative Extension Service at the University of Maryland, sponsors a two-day sheep-shearing school on the College Park campus in early April. This helps to assure a supply of trained novices to supplement the cadre of custom shearers throughout the state.

This year's dates were April 12 and 13. There were 35 students in attendance.

Supervising the shearing school was Dr. Emory C. Leffel, Extension sheep production specialist and professor of animal science in the College of Agriculture. He was assisted by Dr. Edwin E. Goodwin, associate professor of animal science, who is an Extension specialist in both horses and sheep. Dr. Goodwin ran the sheep-shearing school in earlier years.

Also assisting was David L. Greene, an Extension agricultural science agent at Westminster (Carroll County). A 1964 graduate of the University of Maryland, Greene was once one of Dr. Leffel's students in animal science classes.

Dr. Leffel notes that a major objective in shearing sheep is to preserve the wool fiber length; to shear close to the skin and avoid second cuts in the fleece.

Another objective is to obtain a fleece that can be tied, graded, and sorted — in other words, to keep the fleece intact.

"If we accomplish these objectives without injury to the sheep, we have made progress in learning how to shear," the Maryland specialist declared in a recent conversation.

He noted that most shearing cuts are not serious enough to warrant medication. "Beginners rarely cut sheep badly," he remarked.

"But keep a suture needle and thread handy in case you do make a deep gash," he advised. "And, in warm weather, apply livestock spray to keep flies off any wound."

Most wool comes from ewes (adult female sheep). And, Dr. Leffel reported, many commercial producers now favor shearing just before the ewes drop their lambs in early Spring. Often, this means shearing in January.

However, Leffel thinks that the traditional April-May season best suits the typical part-time producer and small flock situation commonly found here in Maryland and throughout the Northeast.

He mentioned that "tagging" is a common practice that can serve as a compromise between early and late shearing. This involves trimming off the least valuable parts of the fleece — in the crotch and behind the shoulders — which tend



Shearing schools have been set up throughout the United States to teach the art.

to become caked with urine and manure.

Ewes are often "tagged" just prior to breeding or lambing. And feeder lambs are sometimes "tagged" when placed in a feedlot.

Most wool in the Old Line State is marketed nowadays through the Maryland Wool Pool, held each year in June. This year's dates are June 20 and 21, at the state fairground in Timonium.

The type of shearing commonly practiced in Maryland — and most of the U.S. — is the Australian method, generally regarded

as the most humane. Mexican-style shearing, often done in Texas, involves rough handling that is not appropriate for pregnant ewes. With this method, three of the animal's legs are tied.

Australians are generally recognized as the world's fastest shearers. And perhaps they have to be, since that "down-under" Commonwealth nation has the world's largest sheep population, by far.

A good Australian shearer is reportedly able to shear 400 sheep in an eight to 10-

hour day, if he has catchers bringing the sheep to him.

In the western U.S., a good shearer with one catcher can shear about half that number in a similar period.

But top U.S. competitors at the national sheep-shearing contest can usually shear a ewe in less than two minutes. That event is held each year in late January in conjunction with the National Western Livestock Show at Denver, Colo. Judging is based on both speed and quality of the shearing.

New AFBF radio program seeks to answer consumer questions

WASHINGTON - Consumer information is the purpose of a new five-minute, tape-recorded program produced each week by the American Farm Bureau Federation. Joe Fields, director of broadcast services, serves as interviewer and Sue Palmore, communications director for consumer concerns, as the interviewee. The program is called "Checkout Line."

Each program features—factually and concisely—a topic of consumer interest. Programs already produced have been on nitrites, computer pricing, where the food dollar goes and dairy import inspections.

A new taped-message is available each Thursday at 5 p.m. EDT. The five-minute program contains two public

service announcements, which local stations may adapt to their own programming needs. Interested stations may get the "Checkout Line" phone number from their state Farm Bureau office.

Listeners inspired with a question are invited to send it to: P.O. Box 104, Washington, D.C. 20004.

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