

# Psalm is special to Mt. Joy shepherd

BY LAURA ENGLAND

MT. JOY — For one Lancaster County farmer, the Bible hymn, Psalm 23, has a special, double meaning.

Beginning with "The Lord is my shepherd," the psalm emphasizes the devotion that William Longenecker, R2 Mt. Joy, has towards his religious work as a pastor. And it is because of his religious work, Longenecker said, that he, himself, became a "shepherd" and is raising commercial sheep.

"I've been a pastor for 14 years," he said, "but I wanted to keep my hands in farming. Raising sheep was the way to go to farm and do church work at the same time."

The ninth of 10 children, Longenecker and his wife, Peggy, and children Tom, 17, and Kathy, 13, currently raise over 300 sheep on their 62 acres. This includes a mixture of 285 Suffolk, Hampshire and Dorset ewes, with the remaining flock consisting of market lambs and eight rams.

Longenecker got his introduction to sheep farming in 1940 when his father, William S., bought about 80 feeder lambs "just to try them out." Up until that time, the Longeneckers were raising steers and hogs.

The sheep venture, however, wasn't that successful and didn't last for long.

"We lost about half the lambs, probably due to parasites,"



Over 250 ewes compliment the country setting of the William Longenecker sheep farm in Mt. Joy, Lancaster County.

Longenecker said. "We then bought about 40 ewes." Twenty-four years went by



Bill Longenecker uses a wool paint to mark the breeding date on his sheep. This ewe, marked 8 - 10, was bred Oct. 10.



Suffolks, Hampshires and Dorsetts, alike, are at home on the Longenecker farm where they enjoy a diet of hay, pasture grass and some grain.

before Longenecker decided to give sheep another try. During that time, he received a psychology degree in 1951 from Elizabethtown College, had spent a year at Bethany Seminary in

Chicago, and had followed his father's footsteps by farming the family farm.

Like his father, he continued to raise steers and hogs and for a while raised 3,000 laying hens. Because of an interest in church and missionary work, he saw advantages in raising sheep.

To purchase his first flock in 1964, Longenecker set out to get a financial loan but not without some hesitation on the part of the credit corporation. The loan officer, Longenecker recalled, contacted former extension agent Max Smith and asked if it was safe to give a loan for sheep.

Longenecker got his loan and purchased a flock of 75 Western ewes and has since continued to raise and market sheep year round.

In raising sheep, Longenecker said it's important to "play the markets" and keep up-to-date on market prices and trends.

"When I go to the markets," he said, "I stay there until my sheep are sold. This way, you get to know the buyers, and they get to know you."

"By building up your own reputation, you can get more money for your sheep."

To break even in the sheep business today, Longenecker said

he needs about 60 cents per pound. With market prices higher this fall, he said he's been hitting the low 60's when he had been selling most for 54 cents per pound.

"I got 68 cents per pound for one lamb that weighed 80 pounds," he said. "That's not bad for a heavy lamb when you're used to getting 40 to 50 cents per pound."

The whole thing behind the sheep business, Longenecker said, is marketing. Markets will vary depending on the mood of the buyers, he added, and you have to be at the right market at the right time.

Markets also want lambs year-round, and this is why Longenecker staggers his breeding program. Ewes are bred to lamb between January and May. Doing this, he said, does involve more labor, but he finds it beneficial in terms of marketing.

"If you breed ewes to lamb during a two-week spread, you do save on labor," he said, "but then your lambs are ready for market at the same time."

To work under these lambing conditions, Longenecker said he adjusts his schedule to what's needed. "It pays to be there," he said. "You can lose 15 to 20 percent



Ewes and market lambs feed from round hay feeders placed inside the barn.

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