

Sheep Management Tour Travels To Four Berks Co. Farms

BY ROBIN PHILLIPS
Berks Co. Correspondent

OLEY — Over 30 sheep and wool enthusiasts gathered in the Oley Valley last Saturday for a tour of sheep farms and a review of their management practices.

Discussions centered on current management practices to control parasite infestation in herds and feeding techniques to avoid excessive vegetation in wool. Demonstrations were conducted at each of the four farms toured as the group covered sheep hobby farms as well as farms of commercial producers.

"What is a problem in the fleece is leafy alfalfa, timothy and orchard grass seed," stated Marna Mackay, in regards to vegetation in the wool. "If you get leafy hay down there it is in to stay," she continued.

Marna and Ian Mackay operate Mac-High Sheep Farm near Boyertown. They breed purebred Romneys and maintain a herd of ten animals.

To control the vegetation in the wool that Mac-High Farm produces, the Mackays stick to feeding first cutting alfalfa which tends to be coarser. They also like a "good shiny wheat straw" for the bedding material.

"We're a crude operation, but we're efficient," Marna said, describing their management. For their operation the Mackays have found it more practical to buy their hay and pasture their land. With the pasture they feed a standard fitting ration to their sheep.

"I try to keep them as natural as possible and maintain a good worming schedule," Marna stated. The sheep are kept outside as much as possible and when they are confined, the barn is opened up to provide ample natural ventilation.

Because she likes to keep her herd outside, the Boyertown sheep farmer also tries to have all the lambs come in the springtime. "I am not a fall lamb producer. I like them all to come in the spring," she states. She cites less parasite problems and good growth on the lambs because of this.

Highlighting the tour of the Mac-High Farm were two unique ideas that Marna gave to fellow sheep breeders. "Rams need exercise," she began. To house their rams and keep them under control, the Mackays use a corral with tires flat on the ground throughout the corral. The rams must step over the tires to move around. The tires also make it difficult for a successful fight between rams. When the rams want to crash heads, they fall over the tires when attempting to run at each other. A wether is also penned with the rams for non-aggressive companionship.

Marna also displayed an item that she uses to restrain her animals when medicating or

shearing. Called the "gamble restrainer," the hard plastic tool resembles an S yoke. It is placed over the shoulder of the animal and the front legs are brought up aside of the head to fit into the curve of the yoke. A rope holds it in place and keeps the head of the animal in the center of the yoke.

After the animal was restrained, Debbie Price, special intern with the Berks County Extension Service this past summer and instrumental in organizing the tour, demonstrated how to give subcutaneous and intramuscular injections to sheep.

For subcutaneous injections a 20-gauge, one inch or three-fourth inch needle is advised. Inject under the loose skin beneath the elbow or under the neck of the sheep. There is less wool and the area is easily disinfected beneath the elbow. Intramuscular injections should be given in the front shoulder. Inject quickly and do not give more than five cc's at one spot.

Learning to determine the age of sheep was addressed at the Oley Acres Sheep Farm of Elmer Petersheim, Oley. The Petersheims raise market lambs from their mixed herd of 40 Suffolks.

Sheep producers should check the front jaws of each animal to determine the quality of the jaw of the animal and whether it will be able to survive on pasture.

"Sheep do not need grain all year," stated Clyde Myers, Berks County extension agent conducting the tour. "They are a ruminant animal," he proceeded to explain the determination of age as well as health related teeth problems. The overshot jaw, teeth jutting out over the dental pad, or the undershot jaw, teeth jutting into the dental pad, determines how well a sheep will be able to consume forage and pasture. It is a very heritable trait. Teeth should meet the dental pad.

Sheep producers should check the eight front teeth of an animal to determine the approximate age. Lambs have eight narrow incisors in the front. At 8 to 14 months of age, the two center teeth fall out and are replaced with two broad permanent teeth. At 2 years of age the next two front teeth drop out and are replaced with the larger permanent ones. At 3 years of age, the next two are replaced, and by 4 years of age a sheep will have a full set of broad permanent teeth. With advanced age, the permanent teeth wear down and spread out,

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Marna Mackay uses this leather pouch to carry supplies when lambing begins. She keeps alcohol, cotton and scissors handy in the pouch. Marna also uses a bander to dock tails. The rubber band stops circulation and causes the tail to die and drop off without an open wound. She cautioned producers to make sure the tail is clean before the band is applied.



Marna introduced a handy instrument to the group that she uses to restrain her animals when shearing or medicating. Called the "gamble restrainer" it resembles a yoke and holds the animal while being handled. She is assisted by Clyde Myers, extension agent.



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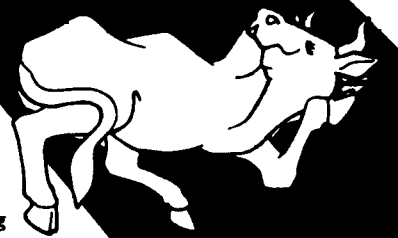
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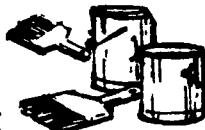
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