

Producing Quality Wool Is Sheer Pleasure For Platts

BY GINGER SECRIST MYERS
Adams Co. Correspondent

GETTYSBURG — You can't pull the wool over Charles and Barbara Platt's eyes. If you do, they're sure to scrutinize it and then tell you its quality. Charles and Barbara (Bobbie) Platt, Belmont Ridge Farm, located just north of Gettysburg, know what good wool is and how to produce a champion fleece. This is evidenced by their numerous show wins and highlighted by their most recent success. The Platts captured both the coveted grand champion fleece trophy and the champion purebred farm flock fleece awards last month at the Keystone International Livestock Exposition in Harrisburg. They also exhibited the champion and reserve champion fleeces at the York Interstate Fair Wool Show.

Bobbie acknowledged that the grand champion fleece award was particularly gratifying for two reasons. First, the purebred Merino ram, Thunderbolt, that produced the fleece from his May shearing, represents their own breeding on both sides of his pedigree. And second, Thunderbolt's sire, Super Ram, also owned by the Platts, won this same distinction at the Keystone in 1983. Super Ram is also the sire of the Platt's well campaigned purebred Merino ewe, Blossom, who was champion ewe at the 1985 Farm Show, the Shippensburg Fair, York Fair and at the Keystone International Livestock Expo that same year. KILE was the largest Merino show in the county in 1985.

Neither Charles nor Barbara grew up counting sheep. They met as graduate students at Ohio State University while both pursuing advanced degrees in research psychology. They moved to the Gettysburg area in 1957 when Charles accepted a teaching position on the Gettysburg College faculty having acquired a small farm just north of town, the Platts contacted the Adams County Extension Service for ideas on how to best utilize their acreage. Agent Jared Tyson suggested they try either beef or sheep.

The Platts chose sheep and in 1976 they purchased their first Shropshire ewes. A year later some Merinos were added. The Platts chose these two breeds on the advice of specialists at Ohio State University. Explains Bobbie, "For money-in to money-out, you can't beat a Shropshire x Merino cross. The Merinos are year-round breeders and will cross well with the Shrops for today's market. It's an excellent cross for commercial

lamb producers."

Although they have tried this type of crossbreeding for freezerlambs, the Platts keep very strict purebred herds in both breeds for show purposes. They now run 98 breeding sheep on their 28 acres.

The Platts prize their Merinos for their heavy fleece and high quality wool. Bobbie noted that the production of a champion fleece is the combination of good genetics paired with meticulous management.

Using Thunderbolt's champion fleece as a reference, Bobbie pointed out that a good fleece must have a fine fiber texture, to make it soft; lots of crimp, for fiber length; it must be strong, to withstand spinning and processing, and it must have good color. Platt explained that sheep who have worms or have suffered from a high fever produce wool fibers that can be easily broken when stretched. It takes healthy sheep to produce strong wool fibers.

Also, during show season the Platts take great care not to let their Merinos get rained on. Bobbie explained that the lanolin layer on the top of their fleece protects it from dirt and other foreign material that might work down into the fleece. If the fleece gets wet, the lanolin layer will crack and bunch, allowing dirt and stains to mar the fleece and to change the quality of the fiber.

Charles and Bobbie have gained their expertise from years of reading and studying sheep articles, attending educational programs, from seeking out counsel from the vet and other respected breeders, and from spending time on the show circuit.

While the Platts enjoy showing for the camaraderie with other breeders, Bobbie does lament the change in exhibitors' attitudes in the last few years. She believes strongly that, "What is going on in the showing has little to do with what's going on in the sheep industry today. Showing has taken on a 'win at all cost' attitude, and, because of this emphasis on win, win, win, showing is beginning to do more harm than good for the industry."

However, the Platts aren't ready to pack away their tack boxes yet. While planning to do fewer shows than in the past, they still relish their annual visits with show friends and those times when their own homebred stock tops the other competition. Producing that champion fleece, and doing it their way, is a challenge the Platts will always welcome.



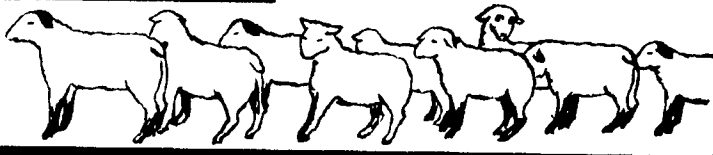
Charles Platt feeds his flock of Merino ewes at Belmont Ridge Farm. The Platts emphasize that sheep require as much management as other livestock.



Flock Forum

by
Clair Engle

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The Selenium Connection

The old adage, "If a little bit is good, more is better," certainly lacks credence when treating a selenium deficiency problem. With approved practical methods of supplementing rations with selenium and vitamin E, and with prescribed use of selenium-vitamin E injectables available, we have the tools to prevent white muscle disease. However we continue to receive reports of lamb losses. Some losses due to deficiency of selenium-vitamin E, some following injections of the prescription, and other reports of lame, poor-doing lambs following intramuscular injections.

Even though much is still unknown as to how they function it is well established that vitamin E and selenium are required nutrients which prevent white muscle disease. It appears the disease may be caused by a deficiency of either nutrient, or both, and each has a sparing effect on the other.

Response to Selenium Supplements

Several factors influence the need for or the toxicity of selenium supplements. Young lambs, prior to consuming much creep feed, appear to be more susceptible to a deficiency and to toxicity than older sheep. Also, tissues of twin lambs contain about one-half as much selenium at birth as the tissues of single lambs. Only small amounts of selenium are transported across the placenta to the fetus. Selenium appears to be more efficiently transported across the mammary gland than across the placenta. Therefore the newborn lamb is primarily dependent on its dam's milk for selenium and vitamin E.

It has been shown also that animals deficient in selenium and

vitamin E are more susceptible to selenium poisoning. Selenium deficient sheep absorb more selenium than sheep that have had adequate selenium in their ration. The absorption of selenium from injections is approximately twice as much as from oral doses. These absorption differences could very well be reasons why losses have been reported as lambs were being treated to prevent the disease. Free-choice of a trace mineral salt mix with 30 ppm selenium seems to provide adequate selenium plasma levels in the ewe and reduces the chances of selenium toxicosis due to occasional treatments.

Another interesting result is that sheep on low-protein diets (less than 7 percent), absorb more selenium from their feed than sheep on higher protein rations. Therefore, sheep (ewes) maintained on a recommended protein level (11 to 14 percent) are less susceptible to selenium toxicosis.

Deficiency or Toxicity?

The symptoms of acute selenium toxicosis closely resemble those of white muscle disease due to a vitamin E-selenium deficiency. These include weakness, stiffness (usually hind leg or legs), difficult breathing, and a reluctance to stand to nurse. A few lambs die quickly while others hang on and

eventually pass on from a respiratory infection. In necropsy, white necrotic lesions can usually be observed in heart, diaphragm and skeletal muscle, and in prolonged cases excess fluid is generally found in the lung tissue.

Most cases of acute toxicosis in lambs have occurred as a result of accidentally, or in some instances, purposely injecting excessive amounts of selenium. Available selenium-vitamin E injectables vary in the concentration of selenium. If the producer injects 1.0 ml of the concentrated product, the lamb would receive 5.0 mg of selenium. It is very important to double check the concentration of selenium in the product to be used and never inject newborn lambs with more than 1.0 mg of selenium.

Prior to the approval of adding selenium to the ration, injectable selenium-vitamin E was the most common method used to prevent white muscle disease. Many producers injected ewes the last two weeks of pregnancy, the lamb in the lambing pen and again 2 to 3 weeks later. How many of you now include selenium in the ration and mineral mix and still continue the injection sequence? If so, you just might be seeing selenium toxicity symptoms rather than a deficiency problem. Remember there is not much difference.

All things normal nutritionally, experimental data indicates that ewes free-choice a trace mineral salt containing 30 ppm selenium will usually maintain an adequate level of plasma selenium and will produce milk with sufficient selenium. Creep rations can be fortified by adding 1/4 pound of the recommended selenium salt mix (30 ppm) to 100 pounds of creep ration. This will bring the ration selenium level up to 0.1 ppm.

Taking the mentioned information into consideration, it appears the most practical and economical method for supplying selenium is through a free-choice trace mineral salt mix with 30 ppm of selenium in conjunction with vitamin E supplements.

Injection Recommendations
Instructions for selenium-

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Barbara Platt and Thunderbolt, the Platt's homebred Merino ram that produced the grand champion fleece at the Keystone International this year.

LIVESTOCK LATEST

