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The Practice of Flushing Ewes

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SUMMARY:

RESULTS obtained from flushing experiments conducted at the Ruakura Animal Research Station during the 1949 and 1950 seasons were presented. These experiments were carried out in order to obtain information upon the following questions:—

- (1) Do ewes that are flushed come into season any earlier?
- (2) Does flushing affect the percentage of dry ewes?
- (3) Do flushed ewes that get in lamb produce more twins than those that have not been flushed?
- (4) Does flushing lead to a more or less concentrated lambing?
- (5) How long should ewes be flushed before the rams are put out?
- (6) How long should flushing be continued after the rams are put out?
- (7) Does flushing affect the death rate among lambs that are born?
- (8) What sort of result can be expected from a properly executed flushing programme?

Evidence was presented which showed that ewes which are flushed tend to have their first heat of the breeding season just a little sooner than do ewes which have not been flushed. The effect was, however, of such small magnitude as to be of little or no practical significance. Ewes which had been flushed, proved rather more difficult to get in lamb, returning to the rams more frequently. As a result, the mean lambing date was somewhat later for flushed ewes, and the lambing rather less concentrated. As a result of this situation, it was further shown that a higher proportion of barren ewes might be expected under conditions where rams are allowed to remain with the ewes for a definitely restricted tupping period. Flushing was shown to result in a considerably higher proportion of twins being obtained from those ewes which lambed. A period of flushing even as short as one week was shown to be beneficial in this connection but a flushing period of 4-5 weeks was necessary in order to obtain the best results. Certain limited evidence was presented which suggested that the beneficial effect of flushing may persist for approximately a fortnight after the flushing process is discontinued. The neo-natal mortality rate among lambs from flushed ewes was shown to be higher than among those from unflushed ewes. This was the result of a higher death rate among lambs born as twins, which were obtained in great numbers from ewes which had been flushed. Analysis of the data presented indicated that a properly conducted flushing programme may be expected to result in a lambing percentage, 20% higher than that obtained when no flushing is practised.

Discussion

Mr. LAMBOURNE: Would it be more profitable to carry as many ewes as possible and cull out those not breeding at an early date, rather than to flush a smaller number of ewes?

Dr. WALLACE: That is a difficult question to answer precisely. There would probably be a very poor market for the barren and late lambing ewes which you propose to cull early—even if you were successful in identifying such ewes. I doubt if the lambing percentage from the ewes wintered under such a system would be as high as from a flock of flushed ewes in which no culling was practised.

Dr. McMEEKAN: How can dry ewes be pushed out at an early date?

Dr. FILMER: Such a practice would result in a lower percentage of twins, and with deaths about a 90% lambing would result as against 114%

Professor CABELL. What was the nature of the feed?

Dr. WALLACE: The ewes were run on peat land which was cleared about 20-25 years ago, and the pasture has not been renewed since that time. The pasture was by no means really first class. In addition to ryegrass and white clover, there was quite a lot of yorkshire fog and browntop. Some paddocks were closed in mid-January, and these were used until new growth in the autumn provided feed in the other paddocks.