

SHEEP PRODUCTION IN CANADA

Sheep production in Canada has changed considerably in the last twenty years. In Eastern Canada, it has gone from a very large number of flocks to a relatively limited number of larger commercial flocks. In Western Canada, the change has been from ranch flocks numbering in the thousands to farm-type flocks which, although larger than those in Eastern Canada, are nevertheless quite similar in feeding and management practices. This evolution has been brought about because of a change in the need for sheep. Originally they were kept for wool, while today they are raised primarily for meat with wool being a by-product.

The number of sheep has decreased steadily at the rate of close to 5% per year up to two years ago. Since then a substantial increase has been recorded. The trends in numbers have been the same in all parts of Canada, with the result that there are about 20,000 flocks left with a total of somewhat less than a million sheep.

While there are herd books registering some twenty breeds of sheep, pure breeding is limited to a small number of breeders. The majority of them have commercial flocks based on breed crosses.

Lambings are very seasonal, being concentrated around the months of March and April. Consequently, marketings are heaviest in the fall, at which time prices decrease remarkably. A relative recent demand is expressed by the Toronto and Montreal markets for lambs of 35 to 45 pounds live weight. Prices varying from 60¢ to \$1.00 a pound are quite common, and the market could absorb a much larger number of such lambs.

Lamb consumption varies from 3 to 4 pounds per capita, 80% of which is imported from Australia and New Zealand. Wool is also imported in large part, the Canadian

production supplying hardly 10% of requirements.

There is research under way in the major areas which are likely to double or triple the efficiency of production of sheep, and thereby the net income which it can provide. The experiments bear mostly on increasing the number of lambs born per ewe, on obtaining year-round lambings, and on defining the feeding regimes required by an intensive system of production.

While sheep production has shown a major decline in past years, there are serious efforts under way to make it again a prosperous and popular livestock production. Modern techniques are available which should provide the means of revitalizing the industry.

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