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MARKETING ASPECTS OF TEXAS LAMB FEEDING

Lamb feeding offers an alternative enterprise for many Texas farmers, according to Jarvis E. Miller and Alton W. Tieken, both formerly with the Department of Agricultural Economics and Sociology at Texas A. & M. College. With production of grain sorghums increasing rapidly in the State and the market price declining, farmers are looking for profitable uses for their grain.

A study of the lamb procurement and marketing practices of 40 Texas lamb feeders indicates that lamb feeding affords an opportunity for utilizing some grain sorghums. The size of feeding operations in the study varied widely, ranging from 250 head to several thousand. The average number was slightly more than 2,000 head. Most of the feeders had been fattening lambs for several years.

The greatest number of lamb feeders in Texas are in the southern part of the Rolling Plains and West Cross Timbers type-of-farming areas in Coleman, Brown, and Comanche Counties. However, most of the farmers and ranchers in this region feed rather limited numbers of lambs. Large-scale feeders are located in scattered areas throughout northwest and southwest Texas.

Lamb feeding in the State is a seasonal operation, following very closely the production patterns of range sheep. Feeder lambs usually move to market in the late summer and early fall, although a few are marketed in the winter and spring. Feeder lambs generally are available earlier in Texas than in the other western states because of climatic conditions.

The persons interviewed in the Texas A. & M. study gave a variety of reasons for feeding lambs, but the majority stated that lamb feeding was usually more profitable than other feeding enterprises. Other reasons included (1) ease of handling the operation, (2) personal preferences, and (3) need for diversification.

Even though Texas is a major producer of feeder lambs, very few of the feeders were raising their own animals. Most of the animals were purchased within the State. In addition to regular public markets, such as terminal stockyards and auction markets, feeder lambs may be bought directly from ranchers or purchased through an order buyer or commission man operating in the area.

Nearly all of the feeders in the Texas A. & M. study were feeding either Rambouillet or Rambouillet-cross lambs. These types of lambs were preferred mainly because of their high wool value and the plentiful supply of such animals. Ninety percent desired woolled feeder lambs, while the remainder preferred shorn lambs. Those who wanted the woolled lambs planned to shear them during the feeding period. The average feeder lamb weight preferred was 63 pounds.

Texas lamb feeders can market their fat lambs in several ways. They can sell them at the feed lot to a packer buyer or a local buyer. Moreover, they can ship them to a terminal market, such as Fort Worth or San Antonio, or they can sell them through an auction market.

A number of factors influence the decisions of feeders as to where to market fat lambs.

Among these are the number and quality of lambs ready for sale, the location of feed lots, the operator's confidence in his own bargaining ability, his ability to stand risk, and the number and level of price bids received at the feed lot.

An important consideration for lamb feeders is the date on which to sell. This decision depends on such factors as the ages and weights of the lambs, current and expected prices, and feed supplies. Of the feeders in the study, one-half reported that the ages and weights of the lambs were the most important factor in deciding when to sell, one-third said that price behavior was the major determinant, and one-sixth stated that the available feed supply was the principal consideration. One-fourth of the feeders reported that they received outside advice regarding the sale of their lambs. Three-fourths of these received advice from commission firms.

Dried Honey

Dried honey—a new product resulting from a drying process developed by United States Department of Agriculture research engineers—enables bakers and candymakers to use this wholesome sweetener to a greater extent than ever before.

When reconstituted with water, dried honey has substantially the same flavor as fresh liquid honey. In addition, its free-flowing granular form provides new convenience and economy in handling. This new product is expected to increase the use of honey, especially in baking. The stickiness of liquid honey and its tendency to crystallize have limited its use by bakers. Dried honey also may be used in packaged baking mixes.

Tests show that dried honey will retain its flavor and color for at least a year at normal room temperatures.

Machinery Efficiency for Increased Farm Profits

The efficiency with which machinery is used can substantially affect farm profits, according to Cecil Parker, Extension Farm Management Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Mr. Parker points out that every farm operator should know the cost of owning and operating machinery. If he does not, he is in a poor position to determine how to increase the efficiency of his machinery.

Fixed costs—such as depreciation, interest on investment, insurance, taxes, and housing—may represent the largest expense associated with owning machinery. If the farm is large enough, however, these costs may be small on a per acre basis.

Repair and maintenance may involve a large cash outlay. High cost for these items may result from poor-quality machinery, abuse of the equipment, operating the machinery over rough terrain, or a combination of these.

The specialist says that other factors which affect machinery efficiency include:

1. *Substitution of machinery for labor.* Whether or not substitution is wise depends on the relative costs of machinery and labor.

2. *Return on investment.* Capital invested in machinery and equipment might yield a greater return if it were invested in some other phase of the farm business.

3. *Availability.* If machinery is not available when needed, lower yields and reduced quality of farm products may result.

4. *Farm size, type of work to be performed, and the possibility of having the machine operations done on a custom basis.*

Mr. Parker points out that good farm machinery records are the only way to keep an account of costs and thus improve efficiency.

Protective, Decorative Coatings From Starch

Protective and decorative coatings for glass, metal, or wood have been prepared experimentally by United States Department of Agriculture chemists from dialdehyde starch—a product obtained from wheat, corn, and sorghums.

In tests at the USDA's Agricultural Research Service at Peoria, Illinois, the chemists found that the best of the starch derivatives formed a

coating on glass that provided high resistance to boiling water for as long as 10 hours. Moreover, the coating remained undamaged after a long period of immersion in acetone, dilute sulfuric acid, or ethyl alcohol.

The new development is the third major advance in applied research on dialdehyde starch in less than 2 years. Studies in 1959 showed the direct adaptability of this material in industry — as a binder or cementing agent, as an additive to paper, and as a tanning agent for leather. In addition, an improvement was made in the process for producing dialdehyde starch economically. In early 1960, USDA scientists developed a process for adding the starch to paper pulp to increase the wet strength of paper.

Some Sorghums Better for Swine

According to trials at the Oklahoma Agricultural Experiment Station, some grain sorghum varieties are definitely better than others in swine rations. The studies show that swine eat some varieties in preference to others and some varieties produce better gains than others.

In taste trials where swine had access to a choice of six varieties of grain sorghums, RS 610 was preferred to the other five varieties in the test. Kafir 44-14 was preferred next and was consumed in preference to Redlan, Amak B12, Dekalb F62a, and Darset.

When these varieties were fed individually with a protein and mineral and vitamin supplement, differences in rate of gain were small and rather inconsistent. However, in terms of feed required per unit of gain, Darset was inferior to the other varieties tested. The pigs fed Darset required 29 pounds more feed per 100 pounds of gain than was required, on the average, for the other five varieties.

In relating values of the different sorghum varieties, Darset was worth only 87 percent as much as Kafir 44-14. The other varieties ranged from 95 percent to 99 percent of the value of Kafir 44-14.

All grain sorghum varieties used in the Oklahoma feeding trials were grown on the same field, and planting seed was from certified seed stock.

New Grass Variety

Foundation seed for Premier, a new variety of sideoats grama, were released to Texas certified seed growers in the spring of 1960 by the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station. Seed should be available through commercial channels for general planting in 1961, reports the Texas Agricultural Extension Service.

Because of its ability to grow and produce seed under restricted moisture conditions, Premier is superior to commercial strains of sideoats grama which are currently available. In a limited number of tests, more seed has been produced by the new variety than by the commercial strains of Coronado, Uvalde, and Vaughn. A desirable characteristic of Premier is its tendency to retain its spikes after maturity, thereby permitting all of the seed to reach full maturity before harvest.

Another advantage of Premier is the forage it produces. The stout, upright stems produce an abundance of long, broad leaves. Moreover, Premier seed germinate readily, and the seedlings develop into mature plants in approximately 120 days.

No major problems were observed concerning Premier's susceptibility to insects and disease. Some leaf and stem rust has been observed at all test locations, but the degree of infection was no greater than with recognized commercial strains.

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The new grass variety is recommended for the area bounded by Lubbock, Sonora, Stephenville, and Marfa, Texas. It should be planted in sandy loam, loam, or clay loam soils at the rate of 1 pound of pure live seed per acre. Premier should be seeded in the early spring, and competitive plants should be controlled by spraying or mowing.

Scales Better Than Guessing

Shannon Carpenter, Area Extension Dairy Specialist with the Texas Agricultural Extension Service, reports that many times he has heard dairy farmers remark that they did not need to keep milk records because they could guess the amount of milk each cow gave, but he has had serious doubts about this professed ability.

In order to determine the accuracy with which milk weight was guessed, the dairy specialist set up a guessing test at the Tyler Experiment Station. In the test, 10 men guessed 104 times at the production of 35 different cows.

Only twice in 104 guesses did the estimated weight agree exactly with the scale weight. Fifty-nine of the guesses were over by as much as 11 percent, and 43 were under by 8 percent. Although the total milk production guessed was only 2 percent more than the actual scale weight, the range in guesses of 8 percent under to 11 percent over would make it impossible to feed cows correctly by estimating milk weights.

Results of the Tyler test strengthened Mr. Carpenter's conviction that dairymen who do a good job of feeding cows by guess could do a better job with scales.

East Texas Forest Fires Down

During 1960, the number of forest fires in east Texas declined 18 percent, and the acreage burned decreased 43 percent, according to Dr. A. D. Folweiler, Director of the Texas Forest Service. However, estimated damage to improved property and timber showed a reduction of only 13 percent.

Careless burning of debris, including household trash and field stubble, resulted in nearly one-half of all forest fires in the Texas piney

woods in 1960. Incendiarism rose 28 percent over the preceding year and was the second major fire cause. Fires caused by smokers ranked third but showed an almost 50-percent reduction from 1959. Other fire causes, in order of decreasing rank, were woodland operation, railroads, and campers.

Relocation of three lookout towers and the erection of six new towers in northeast Texas are expected to increase the Forest Service's efficiency in the early detection and suppression of fires in the future. However, Dr. Folweiler points out that "primary responsibility for the prevention of disastrous forest fires has always been and will continue to be with the person who carelessly uses an open flame out of doors."

Artificial Lights May Have Adverse Effects on Young Laying Hens

Scientists with the United States Department of Agriculture have found that lengthening the daylight hours by artificial lighting to increase laying of young hens may actually reduce egg production if the birds are too young when exposed to the extra light.

Experiments showed that pullets exposed to lengthened days (in this study, 16-hour days) from birth to 20 weeks of age began laying 7 to 10 days later than similar birds exposed to normal daylight, which ranged from 10 to 12 hours during the period. The birds which received artificial light laid an average of seven to eight fewer eggs during the 51-week test period.

White Leghorn pullets were used in the experiments. The two groups of layers differed only slightly in mortality, live weight, feed consumption, and egg weight.

Medical costs per person in this country are more than 1.5 times greater for older farm families than for the younger ones, points out the United States Department of Agriculture. A nationwide survey by the USDA and the United States Bureau of the Census indicates that medical costs for farm families in which the operators were 65 years of age or older averaged \$92 a year per person, while costs of all other farm families averaged \$59.