Improving the Fertility of Merino Flocks.

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On previous occasions, attention has been drawn to the low fertility in many Merino flocks, and the rôle played by the young Merino ewe in connexion with the poor lamb crops obtained in many parts of the country as a result, largely, of bad management.

The very best methods of management and treatment may be employed, but these, alone, cannot be expected to improve hereditary sterility or low fertility. All that good management and treatment can do is to enable the animal to produce what it has inherited. Since fertility is bound up with genetics, it is essential that the point should be borne in mind when selection or culling takes place.

Unfortunately, however, it is usually very difficult to determine whether or not the Merino flock-ewe, in the early stages of her growth, is suffering from hereditary sterility or low fertility, because it is practically impossible, under field conditions, to keep such ewes under sufficiently close observation to determine whether they have been served by a ram, whether they have aborted or thrown a dead lamb, etc.

Consequently, the owner is not in a position to inspect his flock with sufficient thoroughness every year in order to determine which ewes have failed to lamb. Even though a ewe may have failed to lamb for two or more consecutive years the owner may still find it difficult to decide whether or not she is to be culled, especially when she is a fine animal in prime condition, which is usually the case when she has not reared a lamb. The tendency in such cases is to give the ewe "another chance", and in the absence of a system of marking, she gets many "chances".

The culling of inferior breeders is therefore of primary economic importance, as the owner has to consider, not only the direct annual loss in lambs resulting from such breeding stock, but also the possibility that the ewe-lambs of ewes which have had so many "chances", may have inherited the faults of their dams, with the result that the fecundity of the whole flock is gradually lowered.

Special Ear-marking of Inferior Breeders.

In order to eliminate the inferior breeders, the general and annual practice should be to give all ewes that do not lamb regularly, or those that do not rear their lambs, a distinctive mark from which it would be possible to tell whether a ewe has reared less than two lambs or whether she has lambed less than twice during three consecutive years. A good method is to use a code mark indicating the year skipped by the ewe or the one during which she had failed to rear her lamb. A suitable code is best worked out by the farmer himself with due regard, of course, to his ordinary ear-marks.

The following are examples of such a code:

(a) The owner's ordinary ear-mark.

Left ear. Right ear.

(b) Method of ear-marking in respect of years skipped or during which the ewe failed to rear her lamb.

Left ear. Right ear.

Each mark shows the last figure of the year skipped by the ewe or during which she failed to rear her lamb.

If the ewe failed to lamb in 1936, 1938 and 1939; or in 1946, 1948 and 1949 she would carry the following ear-marks:

Left ear. Right ear.

If the ewe failed to rear her lamb during 1938, 1940 and 1941; or during 1948, 1949 and 1951 she would be marked as follows:

The farmer could thus, at his discretion, decide whether or not the ewe is to be culled.

In conclusion it is desired to point out that the best lamb crops can be obtained only when both the ewes and rams are fertile, when the conditions under which they are kept conform to the nutritional requirements for production and reproduction, and when the management is good and the animals are healthy and free from internal as well as external parasites.

Sale of Penguin Eggs.

It is notified for general information that penguin eggs, collected from certain Government Islands, will be available for sale direct from the Division of Government Guano Islands, Capetown. It is expected that eggs will be available for delivery as from 15 March 1939.

Eggs are to be packed in boxes containing 50 and 100 each, and are offered for sale at 10s. 6d. and £1. Is. per box, respectively. Delivery can be taken at the Division's stores, Malagas Buildings, Bree Street, Capetown, or, if desired, the Division will forward eggs by rail at purchaser's risk, carriage forward.

Orders for penguin eggs must be accompanied by remittances, and will be accepted as from 1 March 1939. Payment for repeat orders during the season will not be accepted, but repeat orders will be booked provisionally and will be executed when supplies are available.

The allocation of available supplies is entirely under the control of the Superintendent. Orders will be executed strictly in rotation, according to the date of receipt, but no order exceeding five boxes will be booked for any one delivery. Supplies being limited, and delivery from the Islands not being regular, no definite or complete order can be assured.

Particulars and further information will be supplied on application to the Superintendent, Government Guano Islands, P.O. Box 251, Capetown.

Lucerne in South Africa.

Lucerne in South Africa (Bulletin No. 170), by Dr. H. W. Turpin and D. W. McKellar, contains the latest information on all aspects of lucerne cultivation in South Africa, based on experiments carried out at the Grootfontein School of Agriculture. It also contains two further contributions on Insect Pests (by Dr. Bernard Smit) and Lucerne Diseases (by Geo. Gill). This bulletin is obtainable from the Editor, Department of Agriculture and Forestry, Pretoria. Price 5d. per copy, prepaid.

Science Bulletin No. 144. (Price 3d.)

"An Economic Study of Deciduous Fruit Farming in the Western Cape Province, 1931-1934", by Drs. Tomlinson and G. P. van Wyk. Obtainable from the Principal, Stellenbosch-Elshenburg College of Agriculture of the University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch.