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C. A. McNABB
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LIVE STOCK.

SHEEP INDUSTRY.

Address by W. L. English before the 3rd Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma Board of Agriculture, Guthrie, Okla., Jan. 16-18, 1906.

I am greatly interested in the sheep industry in Oklahoma, and came down here more to hear Professor Craig talk on sheep than for any other purpose, for he is one of the best posted, and most interesting sheep talkers in the Southwest. Now that I am called upon to speak in his place I feel his absence more keenly than ever.

I am very sorry that the sheep industry is in the neglected condition that we find it to-day in Oklahoma. There is less interest taken in sheep than any other kind of live stock kept on the farm, and my mission will be to endeavor to create an interest in our little woolly friends, in the minds of those present, with the hopes that you may go home and spread the gospel of sheep raising to those of your neighbors who were fortunate enough to escape the necessity of listening to me talk. I hope that if you are interested in sheep—and what farmer is not?—that I will say nothing to dull that interest, although I fear I can say nothing that will arouse the interest of those who care nothing for sheep. I will confine my few remarks on this subject mostly to sheep raising in Oklahoma, touching upon the adaptability of this section of country, to the line of farming that includes in its list of live stock, a small flock of sheep.

Sheep raising is one of the oldest agricultural pursuits known to mankind, and their care and propagation has been one of the largest sources of income from agricultural lands, the world over from time immemorial. Sheep can and do adapt themselves to every condition of climate and environment found in lands inhabited by man from the frozen Greenlands to the scorching plains of the Sahara Desert. No class of live stock in the hands of the farmer will compare with the sheep, in the ease and rapidity with which they adapt themselves to new surroundings or respond to good care and intelligent breeding. They are especially susceptible of improvement through grading and wonderful changes can be brought about in the most ordinary flock, in a very short time by the use of pure bred sires of a marked prepotency and vigor.

The traveler in the old countries is impressed by the importance of the sheep industry in those lands. Sheep farms are found close together and of large size, with great numbers of sheep on them. In Scotland, profitable agriculture would be impossible without sheep, and great

areas of land that would lapse into a wilderness without sheep, is made fertile, and the farmers made prosperous through sheep raising. Long experience has taught these farmers that without sheep they could not farm successfully. I trust that the time may never come to Oklahoma, when her farmers will be compelled to resort to sheep raising to make a living and maintain soil fertility, but I do hope that the Oklahoma farmer will see the advantage of keeping a small flock of sheep on his farm, and profit by the experience of his English cousin enough to secure a breed that is a good producer of mutton, as well as wool.

In America, sheep farming as a business, is but little understood except in the West where they are kept in large flocks, and run on the open range. On the small farms, sheep are a side issue, kept in some hillside weed patch, fed on refuse in winter, and sold off when prices are low and bought up again when high prices seem to make them profitable, given scant care and no encouragement, yet in spite of neglect and ill treatment, they have proven themselves worthy of a high place in American agriculture. In America to-day, the sheep is essentially a dweller of the range, the mountain and the desert, kept nearly altogether for its fleece and only those breeds handled that yield a large return of fleece without regard to mutton producing properties. Free grass on the western ranges and the general healthfulness of sheep in the dry regions have had a bad influence on sheep raising in the eastern states, Ohio and Michigan being the only ones that handle sheep in any considerable numbers. Ohio having about 2,000,000 and Michigan about 1,200,000, while Montana alone has 5,576,000 and Wyoming, New Mexico and Idaho over 3,000,000 each. Let us pause just here long enough to compare these figures with the statistics from Oklahoma in regard to the number of sheep in the two territories. In 1890 the number of sheep in both Territories was 16,565; in 1900 it was 81,685; January 1st, 1906, 85,659, an increase of only 3,974 in six years. Unless we do something to accelerate our rate of increase I fear it will be some time before we will become world renowned as a sheep producing country.

The natural conditions found in most parts of Oklahoma are almost ideal for the successful growing of sheep. In no place in the United States, can be found such an abundance of good pure water, a climate more perfectly adapted to the requirements of the sheep raiser, or a greater variety of grasses and forage to feed them on. Shade we have in abundance in most parts of the Territory, a soil dry enough to cause foot-rot to be a thing unknown, scab and the kindred diseases that sheep fall heir to, and that proves to be such a drawback to their profitable raising in a great many places, have never invaded our borders. True this is largely because we have had such a few sheep within our borders, and there is no doubt but that with the introduction of a large number of sheep into Oklahoma, we would find disease introduced also,

but this should cause no one to hesitate for a moment about buying sheep, for scientific study and research have developed methods of handling diseases of sheep in such a way as to cause them to be feared no longer. Scabies, the scourge of the sheepmen in times past, has become, through the introduction of the dipping vat, a thing to be laughed at. Where thousands died of this dread disease yearly only a short time ago, to-day it is practically unknown. Copper Sulphate has almost driven foot-rot out of business on a large scale, and the thing to do now, is to give the sheep a chance to show what they can do for themselves.

BREEDS OF SHEEP ADAPTED TO OKLAHOMA CONDITIONS.

Any of the breeds of sheep will thrive in Oklahoma, but in starting the foundation of a flock, it is well to take into consideration not only the market demands, but also the natural habits and requirements of the animals themselves. As was said in the beginning, sheep will adapt themselves to almost any condition, and yet it will be found much more profitable in starting a flock to select a breed that has been developed under conditions somewhat similar to those that will be found on your farm. For instance, the Merino breed of sheep originated in Spain, so long ago that history gives us no record of their origin. They were kept in very large flocks and grazed on scant pastures, in mountainous districts, in hot, dry climates. The sheep known in this country as native, which by the way is a misnomer, as we have no sheep native to America, are the descendants of the Spanish sheep brought to Mexico by the Spaniards in the days of Cortez. These sheep still retain the habits of their ancestors, and are kept in large flocks in the western mountain regions, grazing over large areas of scant herbage, sustaining themselves and often growing fat where an English bred sheep would starve to death in a very short time. On the other hand, long periods of such usage have caused them to be very small in form, and of very little use as a mutton producing sheep, in fact, no attention whatever, was paid to the mutton producing properties of the sheep, as there was no demand in those countries for mutton, wool being the only thing for which they were raised. It has been proven beyond a doubt that these same sheep can be made to produce a good mutton carcass of light weight by careful feeding and in a very few years a good mutton and wool producing flock can be produced by crossing Merinos with rams of some of the mutton breeds, such as Shropshire, Cotswold or South-down, the only question being, can you afford to wait for these results, or will it pay you better to secure a breed that is ready to serve your purpose at once. There is not the least shadow of a doubt in my mind, but that to make a success of sheep raising in Oklahoma, you must handle a breed that will not only produce a good yield of wool each year, but one that will fatten readily and turn out a plump carcass of

good weight and form. There is this against the Merino sheep on the average Oklahoma farm; they are roving in disposition and do not stand confinement as well as the English breeds.

It is much easier in this country to secure a start from Merino stock than from any other breed, since they are much cheaper in price, and can be secured in large numbers from the adjoining states of Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado. While it is necessary to go to some of the northern states to secure sheep of the mutton breeds, many people are adopting the plan of buying ewes of the Merino stock and sending north for rams of the mutton breeds to cross on these ewes. Where it is the intention to keep grade sheep, this is, no doubt, as good a method as can be followed, as the Merino blood thus introduced often gives a flock the vigor and vitality necessary to withstand the rough usage usually accorded them in a new country.

Sheep are divided into three classes known as fine, medium and long wool. In nearly all cases the longer and coarser the wool, the larger and heavier the breed. To the fine wooled class belong the Merino, Delaine and Rambouillets. These are not classed as mutton sheep, although the lambs of these breeds are sold in large numbers for slaughter purposes. To the next class belongs the English bred sheep of medium length wool and mutton carcass. To this class belong the following breeds; Shropshire, Southdown, Hampshires and Oxfords; any one of these breeds would prove successful in Oklahoma, but the one that is perhaps best adapted to our conditions and the easiest to secure, since there are more individuals of this breed in America, than of all the other medium wools, is the Shropshire. This sheep makes an excellent cross with the Merino, is very prolific, carries remarkably good fleece, is ideal in form from a mutton standpoint, and is altogether, perhaps, the most popular breed of sheep in the world to-day, at least, it has the largest number of registered breeders. Shropshire sheep were recognized as a distinct breed in England in 1853, and since that time have been reared in small flocks under soil and climatic conditions much similar to those found in Oklahoma. A farmer entering into the sheep raising business could do no better than to start with this breed.

Of the long wooled breeds, we have the following; Cotswold, Leicesters and Dorsets, all of English origin and all found in this country. Although with the exception of the Cotswold very few of pure blood are found in America, most of them having come from Canada, and have been kept under conditions that make them unfit for use in this climate. The Cotswolds have been used in great numbers to cross on the Merinos of Montana, and other western states, and for this purpose they have proven themselves to be perfectly fitted in those cooler regions, but I am a little doubtful of their being so successful here, although where kept in very small flocks in the southern states, they have given first class satisfaction.

Secretary Coburn in answer to the question as to what was the principal discouragement with which the sheep industry had to contend, said "dogs", and you will no doubt find the same trouble in Oklahoma. There seems to be no way of curing a dog of sheep killing, once he has acquired the habit, about the only thing there remains to do is to kill the dog. A great many states have laws on this subject, that make it possible for the sheepman to secure a reasonable compensation for sheep killed in this way, but no such law is provided for Oklahoma, and until there is, the only thing for the shepherd to do is to provide a good fold that will, in a measure at least, prevent the dogs from getting at the flock at night, and using a shot gun freely whenever it becomes necessary.

Dogs not only kill many sheep outright, but they are an enemy to them in another way by harboring certain tape worms. In one stage of their development, certain varieties of tape worm that are very destructive to sheep pass through the intestines of the dog, and this period of their life is necessary to the proper growth of the tape worm when they are dangerous to sheep, so you see that the presence of cur dogs on a farm where sheep are kept, even when they do not kill them, is to a certain extent, dangerous.

SHEEP AND WEEDS.

Out of 600 different plants classed as weeds by the Department of Agriculture, sheep are known to eat 576! Crab grass, the worst weed pest known to Oklahoma farmers, is an ideal sheep feed. There is enough crab grass growing in the corn fields of Oklahoma to fatten one hundred thousand lambs, and at the same time increase their yield of corn and add untold fertility to the soil, not to mention getting rid of the weed seed. Wild mustard, the bane of many a farm, can be gotten rid of in short order, by allowing a flock of sheep to have the run of the land. Dock and rag weeds seem to be choice morsels for the greedy sheep, and it is simply astonishing how much of a space a few sheep can clear of these troublesome weeds, in a very short time. Sand burs may be made the major part of a sheep's diet during the season that they are growing and making trouble for the farmer. Cockle burs, if taken in time, can be eradicated by sheep pasturing, although it will not do to put sheep into a field containing matured cockle burs, if the wool is to be used for anything in particular. Thistles of all kinds are relished by sheep and very few of them are to be seen on farms where sheep are kept. Farmers spend whole seasons fighting some troublesome weed that could be gotten rid of in a short time by allowing sheep to run on the land. Not only get rid of the weeds, but make them a source of profit to themselves by turning them into wool and mutton, and add to the soil, through the manure, fertility that will have to be purchased some time in the future.

Weedy pastures or those over run with brush can soon be cleaned up by making the fences sheep tight and allowing them to run with the other stock. Fence corners and roadsides where sheep run soon have the appearance of well kept lawns. This very absence of weeds and unsightly grass has an elevating tendency, causing the farmer to take more pride in his farm, and strive the harder to have it well kept and orderly. If you are not able to build fences where ever you wish to keep your sheep you had better, by far, have the boys herding them in the fields, than to have them out pulling the weeds by hand. If you get the sheep they will soon enable you to build the necessary fences. There is no class of live stock kept on the farm that is as interesting as sheep, none that yield the returns for the money invested, and none that is as hopelessly neglected. It is my earnest hope that within the next few years, we may find Oklahoma farms stocked with well kept, happy flocks for that will mean prosperity for the farmer, and interest and encouragement for the farmer's boys.

DISCUSSION.

MR. AIKINS: I have a great regard for my friend English, but when he attacks the dogs, I object. I think the dog is one of the best friends a man has. My judgment is that the dog which kills sheep is not responsible for it. I believe the dog that kills sheep has sometime had lamb forced upon him. I do claim that they work together and are profitable if you get the right kind of dog.

MEMBER. In regard to sheep and weeds. I was greatly troubled with rag weed. I found that some of my neighbors had no rag weed. A German who lived near me said, "Why don't you get some sheep, they will keep the weeds down." I did so and put them in with the cows and they worked all right. My neighbor has a small flock of sheep of perhaps twenty or thirty head and I find that he has no weeds. He put his sheep right into the wheat field and they stayed there until harvest and did not disturb anything but the short stuff in the field. If they eat any wheat it is only a very little. Do not, I beg you, exterminate the dogs, but make a man pay if his dog kills a sheep.

MR. ENGLISH: I did not mean by what I said to have it apply to all dogs. We could get Scotch Collies and put them all over this country and they would be invaluable. But I could find a thousand dogs right around here which are absolutely worthless.

MR. BARNES: After coming to Oklahoma I had not raised any sheep until one day I was in El Reno and I heard a lamb bleat. I could not rest until I had hunted it up. I asked the owner what his object was in keeping sheep. He said, "Well, they cost me very little and net me forty per cent on investment." I like sheep, but you have to have a fence by which you can take care of them. The barbed wire fence is a

poor thing for your sheep. I am very fond of mutton, but I do not like sheep to eat. If you are slow about taking the intestines out you have "sheep" to eat, but if you do it right you have "mutton." In Ohio every owner of a dog is obliged to pay the dog tax, one dollar, if he does not the dog is killed.

In regard to the variety: My opinion is that the Southdown or the Leicester are better for our needs and uses than the Merino. The Merino has a fine grade of wool, but their constitution is not as good as some others. I used the Leicester ram in making a cross of sheep.
