

SHEEP RAISING

Sheep furnish one of the most nutritious of foods, and for sanitary reasons, for economy and durability their wool makes the best clothing material. Yet wool growing, though very profitable, is one of the least well developed industries in this country. The total number of sheep in all the States is estimated under 60,000,000, and trade returns indicate that this is considerably under the total needed to supply wool for our mills.

The principal sheep States are Montana, Wyoming, New Mexico, Idaho and Colorado, with over twenty million; California and Oregon with five million; Ohio, four million, and Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Missouri and Kentucky, together, about six and a half million; and the big States of Texas, Pennsylvania and New York five million more. A glance at these States and figures will show that the greater portion of the sheep of this country are grown along the great mountain ranges of the West. Here they alternate their grazing between the level lands at the base of the mountain pastures.

Great "bands," as the flocks are always called there, are driven annually as summer comes on into the government reserves in Wyoming, Oregon and California. This, with the open government ranges on the plains, gives grazing to produce over half of the "clip" of the United States, and makes the business under such conditions exceedingly profitable. Wool can be grown in these sections as advantageously as in Australia.

While wool growing occupies the great West, the flock masters of the East pay equal attention to furnishing mutton for the city markets.

Under present conditions, the production of mutton will continue to be profitable, and should be, in some of its branches, one of the important rural industries of our older and more populous States.

The present distribution of mutton sheep, as shown in a Department of Agriculture report, is more general than ever before. They have invaded the pastures so long sacred to the development of the American Merino in Vermont and the strongholds of Merino breeding in New York, Ohio and Michigan. They have nearly driven out the fine wool competition in Indiana and Illinois, and taken possession of sheep pasturage on the meat-producing prairies of the Missouri valley. This movement has long been in progress.

In the recent period of depression, when growers would fain have ceased to think of sheep as a wool-bearing animal, the mutton sheep hastened its migration to the ranges of the Rocky Mountains; and essayed the muttonizing of Merino flocks by cross breeding. So active and persistent was this effort to get some profit from meat, where wool failed to pay the cost of shearing and growing, that in the entire range of country thirty per cent of flocks were of mutton breeds. The same authority thinks that in the farming States seventy, and perhaps eighty, per cent of the wool is from sheep in which the blood of the English breeds predominates. This would indicate a nearly equal division of the Merino and English races in the United States.