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Sheep Health Under Intensive Programs
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Changes in a livestock enterprise that intensify the operation will minimize some disease and parasite problems but may increase others. The animal health program must be geared to meet such changes. Some recommendations can be made on the basis of experience and research with sheep, while others may need to be predicted from experience gained from other livestock operations.

The elevated slatted platform that has been accepted for use in some intensive livestock operations is being used to a certain extent in sheep research. A system of management developed at the Dixon Springs Agricultural Center, Simpson, Illinois, to produce lambs free of gastrointestinal nematodes was reported at the 1964 annual Sheep Day. This system places the animals in a different environment from that of conventional management systems and increases the populations in a given area. This more intensive operation involves the following procedures:

1. The ewe flock is treated with chemotherapeutic agents at periodic intervals to reduce parasite infestation.
2. Before the lamb nurses, the ewe is shorn and the udder is thoroughly washed.
3. The ewe and the lamb are put on an elevated slatted platform as soon as lamb has nursed.
4. The lambs are weaned at about 6 weeks of age by removing the ewes from the platform.

With this system, lambs free of gastrointestinal nematodes have been produced from parasite-infected ewes. Very few respiratory infections have been noted even though the weather was rather severe while the lambs were quite young; however, on occasion the platforms were skirted in order to minimize the updraft. Diarrheas of bacterial origin have not been a problem.

Feet and Legs

Conformation of feet has generally been normal even though some animals have remained on the platform until they were 8 months old. Rarely have the animals been seen to walk down on their pasterns. Occasionally they will not adapt to the confinement on elevated platforms and will show symptoms of tenderness of the feet and/or legs. Such animals will generally remain down and must be made to move about. They eat and drink

very little. The result is very poor performance or possibly loss of the lamb. The cause of this problem is not known.

Lambs raised in this way will have baby lamb anemia unless corrective measures are taken. Supplemental iron should be injected or given as a free-choice oral iron mixture. Anemia occurs rather quickly in young nursing lambs, and losses may be quite high unless iron is supplied.

While this system eliminates the gastrointestinal nematode problem, it appears to accent the coccidiosis problem. This parasitic condition is due to contamination of feed and/or water by fecal material from infected carrier animals. The problem needs further study, but it conceivably could be solved by better design of equipment.

Several ewes have been observed to have injured teats. This injury is probably caused by the more dense population.

In an intensive system of livestock management, manure accumulating under the platforms may attract a heavy fly population. Larvadical treatment of the manure, frequent cleaning, spraying, or collection of manure in a pit will help to combat the fly buildup.

The possibility of an outbreak of infectious ovine, ecthyma should be checked carefully, particularly in the young, susceptible lambs. This disease will occur usually sooner or later, and a vaccination program should be initiated at first detection of the condition. If the disease is allowed to go unchecked, the result will be not only a reduction in growth rate of lambs, but also an udder infection in the ewes, causing mastitis.

Over Eating Disease

Entertoxemia is not always a problem in all sheep enterprises, but it will probably appear soonest and be most severe in operations seeking to get maximum performance in the shortest time. Vaccination with *Clostridium perfringens* type C and D toxoid of ewes prior to lambing and of lambs at weaning time will minimize this problem.

With the intensification of livestock enterprises generally comes the need for continuous use of facilities. Continued use will tend to increase the hazard of infections, which may be overlooked since they were not a problem in extensive operations. Bacterial populations will increase rapidly. Chronic respiratory and enteric conditions decrease performance and may cause death. Losses due to these infections will increase with each new group of lambs unless corrective measures are taken. The solution to this problem is to keep the facilities free of livestock for 2 or 3 weeks 3 to 4 times each year. During this "break," the facilities should be thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.

Maintaining the health of animals in an intensive sheep operation presents some problems, but it is generally thought that they can be solved by following a program of strict sanitation, thorough disinfection, and good management.