

SUFFOLK SHEEP.

S. R. SHERWOOD.

THAT which first attracts one in the Suffolk sheep is its thoroughbred appearance. The head, the legs below the knee and hocks are bare of wool and covered with fine, jet-black, glossy (not mossy) hair. The face is long, with a fine muzzle, especially in the ewe—indicative of a good breeder and milker. The eye is bright and full, the ears are thin, silky and alert, not drooping. When in full fleece the sheep bears a wealth of fine, dense wool, not shading off into dark wool or hair but clearly defined from the black head and legs and noted for its pure whiteness, fineness, elasticity and strength. The whole carriage is alert, showing stamina and quality. Indicative of the latter is the fine but strong, flat, clean bone of the leg. The skin is fine, soft and pink.

History and Progress.—The breed originated by the mating of the native horned ewes of Norfolk with Southdown rams. This is recorded by Arthur Young in his *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Suffolk* published in 1797; and the famous Coke of Norfolk was one who made the experiment. The resulting cross was immediately recognised as a fine butcher's sheep and soon became popular in East Anglia. By process of further crossing and selection a fixed type was evolved, and the Suffolk has been recognised as a pure breed since 1810. In 1886 all interests were united by the formation of the Suffolk Sheep Society and systematic keeping of records, and the breed quickly made its mark among the other breeds of Great Britain.

The annual carcass competitions of the London Smithfield Club are the supreme test of the meat-producing value of the various British breeds, and the results are of world-wide importance. The primary aim of the Club is "To encourage the selection and breeding of the best and most useful animals for the production of meat and to test their capabilities in respect to early maturity." At that Show in 1890 the first prize Suffolk wethers showed the highest percentage of carcass to gross live weight of any breed, and from that time onwards the breed has made steady and uninterrupted progress and has a record of successes in those competitions as mutton producers which to-day place it ahead of all other British breeds. Since the commencement of the competitions Suffolks and Suffolk crosses have won half the championships and reserves for championship; Suffolk lambs have, since 1900, won two-thirds of all the prizes in the short-wool lamb class; and Suffolks crossed with no less than ten different breeds have won half the total awards in the crossbred classes.

Factors in Improvement.—One of the first steps taken to bring about the improvement of the breed, and at that time a unique one, was the institution of flock competitions. Breeding flocks compete for challenge cups according to their size. The Bristol champion challenge cup is awarded each year for the best flock in the competition and another cup for the best ewe lambs. All flocks are inspected prior to first registration and every fourth year subsequently. This has done a very great deal to raise and maintain the general standard. No sheep is recognised as a purebred Suffolk unless it has the Society's registered mark and registered flock number of breeder tattooed in the left ear.

Popularity.—From the first the Suffolk has given evidence of its value as a good coloniser. As early as 1895, rams, lambs and ewes bred in France won first and special prizes at the Boulogne Agricultural Society's Show in open competition with other breeds. Reports from Canada and North America, Australasia, Chile, Peru, Brazil, South Africa and other places all testify to the remarkable way in which this breed adapts itself to its environment. Its adaptability to varying soils and climates—due to its inherent hardiness—is exemplified in the way it has spread over the whole of the British Isles, there being to-day registered flocks in no less than fifty-four counties. The Society's show and sale record points to the lively interest exhibited in these sheep all over the country; not only at the

Royal, the Highland, the Royal Ulster, Royal Dublin and leading County shows is this breed strongly represented, but in competition with other breeds at smaller shows and sales all over the country the Suffolk holds its own and its excellence for crossing purposes is evidenced.

The high level of prices for the general run of Suffolk sheep is probably unexcelled by any other breed. At the four principal lamb sales in 1920, 6,013 ewe lambs averaged £5 18s. 4d. with a top price of £40 per head for twenty. The 5,723 two-tooth ewes sold at the three principal ewe sales averaged £10 6s. 9d. with a top price of £61 per head for ten, while 1,800 older ewes averaged from £8 to £14. At the five principal sales of ram lambs, 1,255 averaged £22 9s. 6d. with a top price of £399. In 1921 Suffolks shared with all breeds in the general drop in values, but the keenness of the interest is unabated and new flocks are continually being established.

The following facts are indicative of the way the Suffolk has been taken up by Scottish breeders and graziers. Ten years ago one solitary registered flock held the field in the North; to-day, from Yorkshire northwards to the Cromarty-Firth, there are nearly 40 registered flocks and every promise of extension. Scotsmen are among the principal buyers at the Society's sales, in 1919 taking ram lambs at 135, 200 and 390 guineas, and in 1920 at 105, 150, 190, 200, 210 and 250 guineas. That these prices have not been given in vain is proved by the success of Scottish flocks in show and sale yard. The exhibit of Suffolk sheep at the Highland Society's Show is one of high merit, while those who have ventured to send South to the Royal and Smithfield Shows have taken high positions. At the Kelso ram sales in 1920, 361 Suffolk ram lambs, mostly bred in Scotland, averaged £22 16s. 7d. with a top price of £170. One-quarter of the whole of the awards won by Suffolk crosses at Smithfield have been won by Suffolk-Cheviot crosses from the North, while from August onwards Suffolk crosses frequently top the northern lamb sales. Suffolks and Suffolk crosses have won the championship eight times and reserve for championship seven times at the Scottish National Fat Stock Show. In 1919 Suffolks and Suffolk crosses were champions at Smithfield, Edinburgh and York. In Ireland the breed also does well: there are to-day registered flocks in 13 counties, and though they do not realise such high prices as in Great Britain they might do so if breeders brought them out in as good a condition and in show form. A few recognise



FIG. 1.—Suffolk Ewe Tegs, 17 months old, in full Fleece.

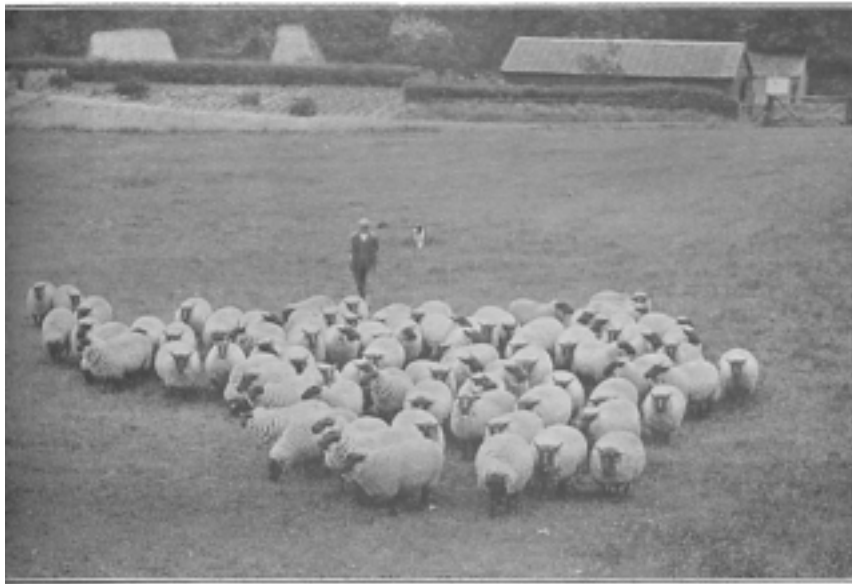


FIG. 2.—Suffolk Ewe Tegs, 17 months old.

the necessity of doing this and reap the reward—both as a good advertisement and also in prize money and sales—but as a rule they are not “done” well enough.

It is reasonable to believe that the Suffolk would not have spread as it has done nor won such success in competition with other breeds were it not for the combination of fine qualities it possesses. Its hardiness is proved by its success as a coloniser. In point of early maturity, well-grazed hoggets, under usual farming conditions, at the age of 8 to 10 months yield 78 to 84 lb. of dressed carcass, and the leading position maintained in the Smithfield carcass tests as above detailed is proof positive of it. The fecundity of the Suffolk, due to its Norfolk ancestry, is proverbial. As a New South Wales breeder well puts it :

“The beauty of this breed (I am referring to its bank account beauty) is that it produces both quantity and quality. My experience has been that single lambs are unusual, twins usual and triplets not uncommon.”

The average for all registered flocks for 33 years is 133.01 per cent. of lambs reared.

Wool.—The fleece as described above spins 56's in Bradford counts. Mr. W. T. Ritch, Technical Instructor, American Wool Improvement Association, writing on January 15th, 1921, says :

“Your samples of Suffolk wool, both ewe and hogget, are the best types of medium Down wools which I have tested during the past ten years, either in Australasia, South Africa, South America, Canada or the United States. The length is good, the character excellent and the density is wonderful, while the colour, strength and elasticity leave nothing to be desired in Down wool.”

Writing again on February 14th after testing the second prize fleece at the Darlington Royal Show, he says :

“The crimp and lustre is good enough to satisfy the most fastidious judge of Down wool.”

Mr. J. Thomson Stephen, wool expert, Leicester, writing in the *Mark Lane Express*, December 1st, 1919, said :

“The various crosses of Suffolk sheep yield fleeces of grand character. Suffolk rams are very impressive in imparting their characteristic, to the wool of the sheep with which they are crossed. During the wool sales, where fine wools of the highest character in the kingdom are shown, a very large proportion were half-breds by Suffolk rams. I made a very careful inspection of these half-bred Suffolk lots, and in every instance they commanded the top prices of the day. They produce yarns of what is known as 57 to 58 counts, and these are the very qualities most in favour for all the finest grades of sound and durable hosiery fabrics.”

In the opinion of Mr. S. B. Hollings, a Bradford wool expert :

“A Suffolk fleece possesses exceedingly good, sound commercial characteristics. The quality is good 56's, the staple is nice length, sound and altogether ideal for hosiery purposes. So long as such fleeces are grown there will always be a healthy market, for wool of this character is more appreciated to-day than ever.”

The average yield of Suffolk wool (washed) is for flock ewes from $5\frac{1}{2}$ lb. to 6 lb., and for shearling ewes first clip 7 lb. per head. The fleeces of sheep that are extra well done will weigh slightly more. It is among the top price wools in Great Britain to-day.

Management.—All the leading flock-masters retain the best ewe lambs of their own breeding, in most cases keeping considerably more than they require, for selection to make up the flock the following year, as it is impossible to tell for certain until then which will grow into the best sheep. The flock is made up a few weeks before mating, which in ram breeding flocks commences August 7th. The whole flock is carefully examined, all defective ewes being drafted, such as those with bad udders, delicate constitutions, unsatisfactory breeders, old and broken mouthed, etc. To facilitate this, ewes are sometimes earmarked as defective when in the lambing pen, as faults may be noticed then that might be overlooked at time of drafting. The shearling ewes are then very carefully examined to ensure that the very best are selected for making up the flock to the required number. Every year the utmost care should be taken to ensure that the flock is in a sound and healthy condition, and the ewes of as good a type and character as possible. If this is not done every year the flock will be sure to deteriorate.

The greatest care is taken in the selection of the rams. Good home-bred rams may be, and often are, used. There is much to be said in favour of this, as one knows exactly how they are bred. If and when outside blood is necessary every effort is made to secure the best without too great a consideration as to price. Ram lambs are chiefly used, but when one has proved a good sire it is used for several years.

It is advisable that the ewes should mate quickly to get a uniform lot of lambs born as early in the year as possible. The best of these are pushed on for exhibition at the shows and all the ram lambs kept going until the sales, the competition being very keen. The best of the ram lambs will weigh from 10 to

12 stone by 1st June. To ensure quick mating it is best that the ewes should not be in too high a condition. About a week before the rams are turned in the ewes should be put on good feed, nice aftermath grass or cattle-fed pasture or any fresh ground available, such as stubbles, with a fold of rape or thousand-headed kale.

It is found very beneficial if the flock can get an entire change for a short time on a farm that has been free from sheep for some time. If good, sound marshes are available that have not been sheep fed during the spring and early summer, flocks may be sent there to great advantage during the late summer and autumn, but many flock-masters have not this opportunity. About November the principal food is white turnips, with a run on stubbles, grass or heath land. A month before lambing a little trough food is given, about $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. per head of crushed oats, linseed cake and bran or malt culms mixed, to bring the ewes to the lambing pen with a plentiful supply of milk.

Some farmers have a permanent lambing yard, but it is preferable to have a fresh site yearly and as near the feed as possible. This is formed by standing two or three corn stacks on the selected site, pitching the straw to form shelter from the north and east winds. The yard is then built round this, separate pens being made for the ewes to come in as they lamb. Care is taken to see that the lambs are well mothered before turning out. When feeding white turnips before lambing, especially if it be a mild winter, the ewes should not be allowed too many; they should have a liberal allowance of hay or chaff, and if the turnips should have a disposition to run, that is, the tops shoot up, they should be horse hoed three or four days before folding to cut the tap root. During January, February and March the chief foods are white turnips, cabbage or kale, with a run out on grass, rye or early rye grasses, and if not too frosty a few mangolds thrown out. As soon as strong enough the lambs run forward through creeps, getting the pick of the food. Lamb troughs are kept in the forward fold and a little mixed trough food given, consisting of crushed linseed cake, oats and bran; if good clover hay can be spared this should be given in addition, either long or chaffed. By April there should be a plentiful supply of kale, cabbage, rape and rye grass, etc. When the lambs are young the ewes are kept generously, having 1 lb. per head daily of trough food, to keep up a good supply of milk. This is decreased as the lambs get strong and take a good supply of dry food on their own. In

May mixed clover and grasses begin to make headway. Early trifolium, rye grasses, etc., should be ready; a good store of mangolds must always be available and is an absolute necessity if the spring should prove a late one. The chief food for folding in June, July and August is tares. This should be drilled soon after harvest with a few beans or oats and a succession provided during the summer months, always with plenty of cabbage and mangolds—mangolds if possible—to last well in August. Nothing gives a better bloom to the lambs than white clover or sainfoin, but in some parts of East Anglia this latter does not flourish owing to lack of lime in the soil. August, which is usually a difficult time, must be thought of months ahead, and nothing is a more certain crop at this time than thousand-headed kale. Rape and cabbage may also be provided.

I consider late summer and September the most trying time for flock-masters; flies are insistent enemies even when sheep are carefully dipped. Lambs that are forced for sale are also apt to get feverish, breaking out with sore mouths and heads. This gives the flies their opportunity. Extreme care and attention is then necessary on the part of the shepherd, and frequently an entire change of feed is advisable. I should like to say that in many cases the ewes are docked far too short. The tail should always be left long enough to cover up and protect the parts. If this is not done and the sheep is at all feverish it again gives the fly a special opportunity, and irritation is set up causing great suffering to the ewe. Short docking should cease.

Non-ram-breeding flocks do not commence lambing until the end of February and March, and are treated in much the same way, but one does not go to the same heavy expense.

In conclusion, the management of a flock requires constant care and supervision. Much forethought must be exercised for the proper provision of food. No breed is likely to pay better than the Suffolk, which is very prolific, while none matures more quickly, and few breeds produce such good quality mutton.

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