

Three Steps Toward Progress

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by Thomas W. Wickersham

THREE DEVELOPMENTS in 1968 may affect the sheep outlook for 1969. These are:

- **Formation of an industry development program.**
- **Plans for cutability grading of lambs.**
- **Changes in processing and merchandising.**

Industry Development Program

In 1968 the sheep and wool industry unified under the "Sheep Industry Development Program." It is too early to assess the effectiveness of 1968 accomplishments in this program. But for the first time there seems to be a willingness of many industry groups to work together.

The program involves specifically an arrangement between the Federal Extension Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture and the American Sheep Producers' Council to sponsor two major efforts. One program is beamed at producers, the other at the markets.

Professional people were employed in each of these areas to assemble, evaluate and disseminate relevant research which could be applied immediately to help solve the industry's most urgent problems.

On the production side, five conferences have been held throughout the nation covering genetics, physiology of reproduction, health and disease, nutrition and feeding, and general management. The information compiled on these topics for the conference will be assembled to provide a recommended program of sheep production based on the most relevant research and the best available information.

The group working on marketing problems has taken a different approach. They have been gathering data and studying research, and will make a report of their findings early in 1969.

Cutability Grades

USDA yield or cutability grades for lambs and carcasses have been proposed. These grades would reflect value differences in lambs and carcasses based on a predicted yield of retail cuts. This grade would be in addition to the quality grades already in use.

If adopted, the cutability grades could help producers know what kind of lamb to produce and the proper degree of finish. Producers of higher cutability lambs would be rewarded for the better lambs and the whole industry should move toward production of "consumer preferred lamb." This should increase effective demand.

Cutability grading was proposed by the USDA and the proposal is now under study by that agency following publication in the Federal Register.

Processing and Merchandising

Changes in processing and merchandising of lamb are being considered. At least one large processor is studying the feasibility of breaking lamb at the plant and shipping cuts instead of carcasses. Other processors are studying the feasibility of using frozen lamb to make lamb available the year around. The willingness of processors and merchandisers to explore innovations in this area adds encouragement to the industry's outlook.

Considering all these factors, the outlook may be better than previously believed for an industry whose production is consumed at an average level of only about 4 pounds per person.

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