

SHORT WOOLS

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Shed preparation of short wools such as second shear, lambs' wool and crutchings very often leaves much to be desired. Brokers and buyers are regular in their criticism of the standard of shed preparation and are particularly critical of the way in which most second shear wools are put up for sale. It always seems that the actual shearing is considered the most important shed operation, but it must be remembered that its main object is one of wool removal and that actual return from wool depends a great deal on what happens to it after it is shorn and very little on how it is shorn. In other words, most depends on preparation and classification and any mistakes made will have some effect on prices realised.

Naturally, fleece wool comprises the bulk of our clip but it is perhaps surprising to know that main-clip oddments, together with other short wools, account for some 45 per cent of our total clip weight and 40 per cent of our total clip returns. These figures may fluctuate from time to time depending on the amount of second shearing and lamb shearing practised from year to year. The following figures show the distribution of wool both in percentage weight and percentage returns averaged over a number of years for a Canterbury property carrying 2,000 ewe equivalents where normal shearing, crutching and shearing of ewe-lamb replacements is done.

	% Weight	% Return
Fleece wool	60.6	70.4
Main-clip oddments	24.1	19.7
Crutchings	7.2	4.3
Lambs' wool	8.1	5.6

It is clear that the farmer who practises normal shearing procedures receives some 30 per cent of his returns from short wools which in most cases are considered relatively unimportant and are treated as such.

In the remainder of this bulletin preparation of second shear, lambs' wool and crutchings will be discussed. Preparation of oddments from the main clip will not be dealt with since this is discussed fully in Canterbury Chamber of Commerce Agricultural Bulletin No. 269.

Second Shear Wools

Valuation differences within a clip of second-shear wool are due mainly to variations in yield and colour. Valuations on all wool are based on a "clean" price, and in fixing greasy price due allowances are made for variations in contamination with grease and dirt. Among wools comparable in all other respects, those with the higher yield are priced higher than those of lower yield. Colour of wool has an influence on price, mainly because wools that will scour white are most versatile in their dyeing potentialities. Wools that will not scour white are normally limited to the manufacture of materials darker in shade than the raw scoured wool.

Values may be influenced too by fineness and length and presence of brands, stains and dags.

The most essential task in preparing second-shear wool is to separate bright, high-yielding body wool from the lower yielding and shorter leg crutch and belly wool. These two lines can conveniently be called respectively "A" and "B" second shear. If sufficient numbers are shorn, then body wool should be divided into lines—usually only two—one containing the shorter fine wool (A Fine) and the other the longer and coarser wool (A Medium). The ease and efficiency with which this can be done will depend a very great deal on wool handling between board and table.

Although all branding materials are approved as scourable they are nevertheless still regarded with some suspicion and buyers when valuing often doubt the scourability of any colour present in wool. If brands are not picked out in the shed, their removal becomes more difficult at later stages because of the open nature of second-shear wool and the ease with which it becomes mixed. Stains and brands will form very much smaller but nevertheless distinct lines. The reason why stains and dags should be separated out should be obvious.

Lambs' Wool

This can be treated in the same manner as second shear, differences in yield and colour being first considerations. Then attention can be given to fineness and length if enough scope exists. Stains and brands have, if anything, a greater significance because of the very good colour of most lambs' wool.

Brands in lambs' wool are most undesirable; they break up readily and become distributed throughout the line. The best remedy is one of prevention, that is, avoid branding lambs that are to be shorn but if lambs have been branded then brands should be removed, if at all possible, before the lambs are shorn. However by adopting

the "no branding" attitude, much trouble can be avoided and a better sale obtained. The dark-brown and unscourable phenothiazine stain is often present in lambs' wool and this should also be removed to go with other stained wool.

Crutchings

These usually receive "short shrift" in most sheds, yet 4.3 per cent of a farmer's wool return may come from this kind of wool.

In the crutching operation a considerable amount of high-yielding body wool is shorn besides the lower-yielding wool from the legs, crutch and belly and once again divisions are made mainly on yield and colour. In fine-woolled sheep, face and topknot may also be shorn.

In picking over crutchings it is usually best to first separate stained wool, eye clips (face pieces and topknots), and particularly-coarse britch wool into separate lines and then to pick out the bulky longer-stapled bright wool, leaving on the table the short lower-yielding wool from inside the legs. This satisfactorily takes care of all factors affecting valuation. Here it may be noted that with this wool any subdivision of the brighter wool on a fineness basis is unwarranted.

Shed Procedure

The successful preparation for sale of any kind of wool clip depends on a carefully-organised work procedure. The shed labour that is available is most often quite untrained and lacks understanding of basic principles involved in good preparation. However, short wool is not difficult to handle properly providing the following are observed:

1. Board procedure

In handling short wool it is most important to make the line divisions at the earliest possible stage—this is on the shearing board with the aid of the very versatile straw broom. "B" second shear and second lambs are

first to be shorn since they come from belly, crutch and legs. As soon as they fall to the floor they should be moved away from the sheep so that the board is left clean to receive the brighter, higher-yielding body wool. Stains and dags should be separated from this belly and crutch wool and then each type cleared off the floor into conveniently placed fadges or bins. The brighter body-wool must be checked over on the table and it is important that each fleece be kept separate and as little disturbed as possible until this can be done.

During crutching some modification of this "broom sorting" is possible and is a time saver besides leading to more efficient preparation. Whatever is actually done, the most important seems to be the avoidance of making a "fruit salad" of the wool before it is finally picked over.

2. Picking up

Conventional methods of picking up are of course not satisfactory with short wools and it is best to use two boards some 20 inches long and 8 inches wide of plywood, hardboard or half-inch dressed timber. These boards are best attached to one another at one end by a strip of leather or canvas about four inches in length. It is worth emphasising again that each "fleece" should be picked up and tabled separately with as little disturbance as possible.

3. Table procedure

First it is necessary to cover the slatted table with a sacking sheet to prevent the short wools from falling through. Wool brought to the table should be checked over in a systematic manner. This advice may seem to be of the kind that is easy to write about but difficult to apply; but there is nothing further from the truth. In sorting or picking over, all wool has to be looked at and handled; there is a lot of it and unless it is done systematically a little at a time then

a surprising amount may be handled two or three times. The most efficient technique is to spread a fairly small amount of wool on the table within easy reach of the hands and do your picking, smallest quantities first, which finally leaves the sort occurring in largest amount to be gathered up completely and disposed of into bin or bale. In this way wool receives a minimum of handling, each sort can be seen easily and picking over is an easy and efficient operation.

Packing

Short wools open up more attractively when packed on the light side—300-320 pounds being ideal; wool to be binned by brokers may be packed heavier. For part bales, paper is the best thing to use as a divider between different lines. Scrim and sacking are effective but undesirable.

Utilization of Short Wools

In the main, processing of short wools is normally carried out under either the woollen or the felt processing systems, and in both of these short fibres are easily handled. Further, reasonable variations in fibre length and fineness, greater than can usually be tolerated when wool is combed, have little effect on manufacturing efficiency. The longer lambs' wool or second shear may be combed and spun into worsted yarns, and where the continental type of comb is employed, wools of very moderate length may be worsted processed.

While the better lambs' wool is very suited for high-grade hosiery yarns and fabrics, where a soft handle is desired, other short wools are used in large quantities for tweeds, blazer cloths, flannels and fabrics in which the surface is raised or when the fabric is heavily milled, as happens with heavy over-coating material.

Standard Lines for Short Wools Second Shear

1. A. Second Shear: Body wool; usually bright and high yielding.

2. B. Second Shear. Leg crutch and belly wool; dull and lower yielding than former.

3. Brands: It is important to remove these in the shed.

4. Stains: Urine stains.

Lambs' Wool

1. First Lambs: Body wool; usually bright and high yielding.

2. Second Lambs: Leg, crutch and belly wool; dull and lower yielding than former.

3. Stains: Phenothiazine and urine stains.

4. Brands: Remove if present; for preference do not brand lambs that are to be shorn.

Crutching

1. First Crutching: Bulky and bright body wool of reasonably high yield.

2. Second Crutching: Leg, crutch and belly wool; short, dull and low in yield.

3. Stains: Urine.

4. Eyeclips: Face pieces and top-knots.

5. Hairy Britch Wool.

NOTE: In larger clips "A" lines may be divided into two on the basis of length and fineness.