

Burkes Garden

"Hampshire Throne of Virginia"

By George W. Litton
County Agent

IN THE history and development of the sheep industry in Burkes Garden, the "Hampshire Throne of Virginia," various and sundry breeds of sheep were tried with varying degrees of success. Fifteen years ago these sheepmen found their ideal, the Hampshire, and settled down to a program of breeding and selecting that is making its mark by improving the quality of market lambs throughout all the sheep territory of Virginia as well as in neighboring states.

No more fitting *palace* can be found for King Hampshire than Burkes Garden, by reason of its very formation. Geologically, it was once a lake completely surrounded by mountains. The Garden Mountain and Rich Mountain meet and make a perfect inclosure save for one narrow gap which was cut through by water to effect the drainage of the former lake. Wolf Creek carries this water and empties it into New River, leaving Burkes Garden a well-drained old lake bed with deep fertile soil.

The total area is about 32,000 acres, located in the eastern section of Tazewell County, and forming a part of the boundary line between Tazewell and Bland Counties.

Farming practices in this area reduce erosion to the minimum and point to a lot of careful scientific planning. The mountainous slopes are cleared approximately half way to the top and bluegrass has, without being seeded, followed the clearing to the timber line with a dense sod.

No Droughts Here

The band of timber around the mountain top and sides serves as a natural reservoir for rains in such a way as to make a severe drought absolutely unheard of.

Hampshires in this section were started by the purchase of 100 young, thrifty Montana breeding ewes by R. M. Lawson and his sons. So ideally suited was this breed, that in six years' time the Registered Hampshire breeding ewe population had grown to approximately 300, at which figure it now stands, but with quality and breeding, through careful mating and selection, second to none.

The flock of Lawson & Sons, later taken over by R. S. Moss and his son, Joe, is the largest in the state, numbering usually 185 breeding ewes. Flocks of Alex Meek, C. J. Moss, and O. L. Davis, are also of outstanding quality, and all are on a sound breeding and improvement program. There are approximately 150 purebred ewes owned by other farmers in the Garden.

These purebred registered Hampshire breeders market their surplus breeding stock as yearlings. Normally they

R. S. Moss, a shepherd of the Lawson flock, who is also chairman of the V. P. I. board of directors.



sell 125 rams privately, on orders, and consigned to sales in various counties holding purebred ram sales.

These rams sold at prices last year averaged around \$25. These men have sent rams to eight breeders consignment sales in the past two years in counties throughout the Southwest Virginia sheep territory and were able to furnish the highest priced ram sold at each sale.



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Burkes Garden annually makes around 1,000 commercial lambs which are graded at home and shipped to the Jersey City market by the producers themselves and sold on the basis of quality. Every lamb shipped in this community organization is sired by a purebred ram. There are 37 rams used on these commercial flocks. All but two are purebred Hampshires. Ten rams are used in the stud of these purebred flocks in addition to the above mentioned, 37, which are the cream of the United States.

Careful attention is given the selection of rams to use in these purebred flocks. Recently these breeders have gone into a careful study of the correct type of sheep and the proper blood lines, and have sought out the breeders in the United States that produce rams suitable to sire rams that will please the eastern sheepmen by sireing commercial lambs of the most desirable dressed weights.

Knowing what they needed and armed with a determination to get it, these purebred breeders have paid as high as \$500 for one stud ram. In the past two years they have gone to the Ohio State Fair and made the following purchases: The First and Second Hampshire yearling winners in 1934; the First and Eighth yearling Hampshire winners in 1935; and also a lamb from the Champion Pen of Hampshire winners.

Future Objectives Set

No section of Virginia has paid so much attention to breeding truly great Hampshires as have these Burkes Garden sheepmen. They are developing two principal blood lines, namely, "Goldmine's" and "Herriod's." Recent years have seen these men make purchases from the nation's flock owners just because they know what they want and are willing to bend every effort to get it.

The chief future objectives of these Burkes Garden flock owners are to further the Hampshire breed by establishing a type that will be more efficient mortgage lifters than the long, rangy type preferred by western breeders, make a closer study of blood lines and breeding so as to offer the last word in breeding always and to insure purchasers of honest and courteous treatment in keeping with the spirit of this great Hampshire breed of sheep as it continues to rule supreme on the "Hampshire Throne of Virginia."



Yearling Hampshire rams on the R. S. Moss & Son farm. This flock produces from 60 to 85 good rams each year.



Here are the 35 best from a flock of 50 purebred ewes as selected with discriminating care by Alex Meek, well-known for his ability at culling.



Purebred ewe lambs just after weaning time. The lamb in the foreground was grand champion at the Tazewell Sheep Show.



Ewes and lambs enjoy the shade after filling up on the luscious bluegrass and white clover on this Burkes Garden pasture.



Flock of purebred sheep in their mountain pasture.



Here's a real closeup of eight massive yearling Hampshire rams.