

Cooperation Boosts Price Of Wool

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CONCRETE evidence of the value of cooperation in the production and marketing of farm products is shown by results of the sale of West Virginia's wool pool for 1936 of approximately 325,000 pounds, to Patterson & Company of Boston at 38 cents per pound for clean medium wool at points of assembling the local pools. Considering transportation costs, two cents per pound was secured above the Boston market on the date of sale, May 14.

For eight years, the pool has maintained the price of wool in West Virginia on a higher basis than would have prevailed had it not been for its influence. It has been of direct benefit to those who sold their wool cooperatively through the pool and to all the state's sheepmen. The average price paid for the wool sold in the pools during the past seven years has been 23.4 cents per pound for all wool.

More than 2,000,000 pounds of wool have been marketed cooperatively. Each year has brought improvement in the quality of the fleeces and the way in which they are handled and prepared for market. In the first pools, reject fleeces often exceeded 20 per cent. This year's pool graded approximately 93 per cent clear medium, indicating the progress that has been made through cooperation.

More Bids Received

More bids were received from manufacturers and brokers on the pool this year than ever before. Competition between bidders was keen. The company to whom the sale was made, handled last year's pool and two other pools in the past, making four out of eight pools and indicating that West Virginia wool pleased the buyer.

Assembling of the local pools this year from 31 counties began on May 27 and finished July 2. Demonstrations on preparing wool for market were given at each point where the wool was assembled. Farmers were given explanations in regard to reject fleeces and suggestions to improve the quality of their wool.

These demonstrations are an important part of the educational program to develop a more profitable sheep industry in West Virginia. They were made possible through the cooperation of the Agricultural Extension Service of West Virginia University and the State Department of Agriculture. Col. E. L. Shaw, extension sheep specialist for the College of Agriculture and technical advisor for the West Virginia Wool Marketing Association, was in charge, assisted by Emerson Gregory of the State Department of Agriculture.

Wool is an important product of West Virginia's farm sheep flocks. Farmers are giving more attention to the production, shearing, and marketing of wool. This increased interest is greatest in sections where medium wools are produced. Medium wool applies to fleeces of such breeds as Cheviot, Corriedale, Dorset, Shropshire, Southdown, and Hampshire. These breeds are the prin-

cipal ones used in the market lamb producing area where medium wools are grown. Approximately 20 per cent of the income from sheep in this area comes from wool.

Carelessness Expensive

In the Northern Panhandle of the state, the principal breed is the Delaine Merino which produces fine wool. In this section, the greater part of the flock income is from wool. More attention has been given to wool production and its preparation for market with the result that it was a more attractive commodity than the medium wool produced in the state before improvement as a result of cooperative marketing began.

Eight years ago, farmers in the medium wool area, organized the West

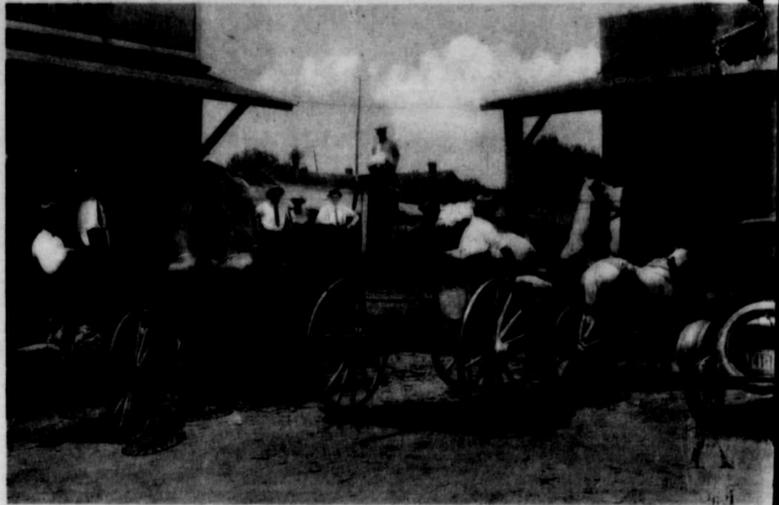


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Virginia Wool Marketing Association with the hope that through cooperative effort they could bring about improvement in the production, shearing, handling, and marketing of wool. They found that through cooperation they could offer a large volume of properly prepared medium wool that would interest large wool brokers and manufacturers. Through demonstrations of proper methods of shearing and tying, and of separating clear wool from rejects, growers were influenced to improve their wool clips. A reputation for West Virginia medium wool was soon established and better prices were obtained.

Prior to the formation of the association, medium wool produced in the state was generally in disrepute with buyers. It has been conservatively estimated that carelessness in handling wool and preparing it for market cost medium wool growers from \$75,000 to \$100,000 or more a year.

The principal reason for the loss was the inclusion of foreign matter in wools. Foreign matter is responsible for most rejects. Before the advent of the pool, "wool was wool," when offered for sale. Inclusion of burrs, seeds, chaff, dirt, dry and wet manure, tags and dead,



Progress and profits have been recorded since the day these West Virginia farmers took their wool to this assembly point, when one of the first pools opened.

black and gray wools along with wool free from these defects apparently made no difference to the buyers. Nor did many growers who took pains to produce a clean, well-prepared, beautiful product benefit in price, although rejects have a value of approximately 20 per cent less than clear wool.

Reject wools yield less clean fiber when scoured by the mills. Foreign matter must be removed by chemicals. This treatment often injures the fibers. Sisal or jute fibers that get into the wool, when such twine is used to tie the fleece, do not take the dyes, cause imperfections in the woven fabric, and must be removed with tweezers by expensive hand labor.

Before improvement was started, brokers and manufacturers offered a flat price for all West Virginia medium wool, which was always low enough to permit them to discount the expected rejects.

Better Quality Results

Through the West Virginia Wool Marketing Association, contracts with manufacturers of paper twine for tying wool have been made and a wide distribution of paper twine at low cost made possible. All farmers who cooperate in the pool are supplied with paper twine through their local association. Less than 100 pounds of last year's pool of 450,000 pounds were tied with other than paper twine, and practically all the wool was tied.

The problem of burry wool is rapidly being solved. On farm after farm, the burrs are being cut. On other farms, sheep are not permitted to run on burr-infested pastures. Some growers report that they run their sheep on large tracts where they can never hope to control burrs. In general, these men cheerfully accept the penalty of having the burry wool rejected because they have had cheap pasture.

Seedy wool, or wool with a mixture of seeds, chaff, hay, straw, bark, leaves, and similar material has steadily declined. Perhaps the biggest factor in lowering the amount of seedy wool has been the building of hay racks. Many sheepmen had let their sheep run to hay

or straw stacks. When it was pointed out to them that racks for feeding roughage would eliminate seeds, straw, hay, and chaff, many farmers built racks and fenced off hay and straw stacks.

Tagging sheep before and at the time of shearing has become widely followed.

Many sheepmen had become careless at shearing time and did not tag manure locks before shearing, or make no attempt to separate such locks from the shorn fleece. Wet and foul manure locks were rolled up in the fleece at the fleece tightly packed in the wool bag along with others in similar condition. Wool was stained, at times mouldy and damp. In all cases the value was lowered.

Breeding Given Consideration

Such fleeces were thrown in the reject and the reasons given the producers. Few farmers failed to see justice of this action. In practically all cases, the clip the following year was 100 per cent as clear medium wool.

The percentage of black and gray fleeces has steadily fallen and like the percentage of cotted wool. Black and gray wool may be eliminated and there is only a restricted demand for such wools, and because the farmer discards sheep producing black or gray wool and put in their place sheep with white fleeces, it is only a question of time until rejections from the standpoint will cease. Most farmers have learned it does not pay to raise a ram or ewe with an off-color fleece when they expect to retain ewes from them in the flock.

A further effort to encourage sheepmen to improve their wool clip was made during April this year when sheep schools were held in sections of the state where the medium wool sheep population is most dense.

The program of the West Virginia Wool Marketing Association since its inception has been truly cooperative, is farmer-owned and farmer-controlled. The association serves sheepmen in general. As a result, the reputation of West Virginia wool has been enhanced and the general price level raised.

Proving the importance of the sheep industry in Webster County's general farming scheme.



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