

THE COMPLETE FARMER

Robert Brown

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Of Sheep

Sheep are not only a very useful creature, but very profitable too, and will be kept and fatted upon much worse land than any of the former stock; and therefore they are by some preferr'd before any other sort of cattle. The best breed for fine wool is Hereford and Worcestershire; but they are a small black-faced sheep that bear but a little burthen. Warwick, Leicester, Buckingham, and Northamptonshire bear a large-boned sheep of the best shape and deepest staple: Lincolnshire in the salt marshes breeds the largest sheep, but not the best wool, tho' they are lately much amended in their breed. Yorkshire, and so northwards, bear sheep of big bone, but their wool is rough and hairy. Wales bears a hardy small sheep that hath the worst wool, tho' the best tasted flesh. Sheep, as well as other cattle, should be bought from a worse land to bring on to a better, and see that they be big boned, and have a soft greasy well curled close wool, for such sheep bear the best burthen, and are always most esteemed by the butcher.

For the choice of sheep for breed, see that the ram be young, and that his skin be of the same colour with his wool; because the lambs will be of the same colour with his skin; that he be of a large, long body, his forehead broad, round, and well-rising, his eyes cheerful and large, his nostrils straight and short, &c. The polled sheep (that is sheep without horns) are reckoned the best breeders, because the ewes yeau the poled lamb with the least danger, and because so much less of the nourishment goes into the horns. An ewe should have her neck large and upright, bending like a horse's, her back broad, buttocks round, thick tail, small legs, but short, clean, and nimble; the wool thick and deep, covering her all over; and to know whether they are found or not, see that none of the wool be wanting, that their gums be red, teeth white and even, the brisket-skin red, the eye-strings ruddy, the felt loose, the wool fast, the breath sweet, and the feet not hot; for if they are rotten, the eyes are pale and dark, the gums white, the wool easy to come off, the teeth yellow and foul, and when dead you may see the belly full of water, the liver putrefy'd, the fat yellow, and the flesh moist and waterish; as for their age two years old is the best age to have sheep at; and for them to take ram at where they prove with lamb before; you ought to sell the lamb as soon as 'tis convenient, which is commonly about October; because suckling of the lamb too long will weaken them too much. They will bear good lambs till they are seven years old. In order to know which, when a sheep is one shear, as they call it, they will have two broad teeth before; when two shear, four; when three shear, six; when four shear eight; and after that their mouths will begin to break.

For land to breed sheep on, it is observed that fat pasture breeds strait, tall sheep; and hills and short pastures breed square ones, woods and mountains small and slender sheep; but the best for all sheep are new plowed-up land, and all dry grounds; and so on the contrary, all wet moist lands are bad, especially such as are overflowed, and soiled with sand and dirt, except the salt marshes, the saltness of which makes amends for their moisture, any thing of salt by reason of its drying quality, being of great advantage to sheep.

As for the time of putting the rams to the ewes, you must consider at what time of the spring your grass will be fit to maintain them and their lambs, and whether you have turnips to do it with till your grass comes; for many times both ewes and lambs are killed for want of keeping; or the lambs very often stunted with their growth, which is once they get will be a very great hindrance to them, and a long time before they will recover it; and therefore as an ewe goes twenty weeks with lamb, you may easily calculate the time for her, to take ram in; but the best time for them to yeau is in April, except where you have very forward grass, or turnips, or that your sheep or field-sheep, where you have not inclosures to keep them; then it will be necessary to have them yeau in January or February, that the lambs may be strong before May-day to follow the ewes over the fallows and water-furrows: but then lambs that come so early must have a great deal of care taken of them, and so must all other lambs at their first falling, else while they are weak, the crows and magpies will be apt to pick out their eyes; if you save the grass and weeds that grow in the lands that you design to sallow in winter, that is from Christmas, and turn your ewes and lambs into them in March, if you have a mild winter, it will be a great help to them.

If you turn sheep into wheat or rye to feed, let it not be too rank before you put them into it, lest it make them scowr.

Your ewes that are big, and other cattle should be kept but bare; because it is very dangerous for them to be fat at the time of bringing forth her young, except only for about a fortnight or three weeks before, then they may be pretty well kept to get them a little into heart.

As to the weaning of lambs, in some places they never sever the lambs from their dams, especially in the best pasture where the ram goes constantly with the ewes; because the ewe when she goes to ram again will go dry, and wean the lamb herself; and likewise in unsound pasture they reckon it the best for lambs to run with the ewes, because they seldom rot while they suck, except they want suck; and in such cases it is much better to sell them to the butchers; but they that have found pastures may wean them at sixteen or eighteen weeks old, if they find it inconvenient to let them run longer, but if you suspect a rot among your sheep, Mr. Moor says that if you wean your lambs about June or earlier, it has been found one of the best remedies to preserve both sheep and lambs.

About Michaelmas you should separate the male from the female, and having chosen out the best, those which you design for rams put by themselves, the rest geld, that are not gelt already; because the best time of doing it is while they are very young.

The best time of shearing sheep is about the middle or latter end of June; because it is good for them to sweat a little in their wool before you cut it; and they must be very well washed, which is a great help to the price of your wool. Let them go two or three days after in clean, dry ground before they be shorn; in doing of which the shearer must take care not to hurt them with the point of the shears, nor yet to cut their skins, because of the flies; and see that the wool be well wound up. Some shear their lambs too, which they do close behind, but very little before, especially the first year: but before they are shorn, great care ought to be taken to tag them, as they call it, which is to clip away the wool of their tails, and behind, that the dung may not hang on it, which else will occasion them to be sore, and the flies to blow them, and fill them with maggots. Wool is commonly sold by the stone which is 14 *lb.* or the tod which is 28 *lb.* or by the pack, which is 26 stone or 364 pound.

In Gloucestershire they house their sheep every night, and litter them with clean straw, which affords a great advantage to their land by the manure, and they say makes their wool very fine.

In Middlesex and round London they buy Wayhill sheep, which are a sort of sheep bred in Hampshire, Wiltshire, &c. that lamb very early, commonly before Christmas; these lambs they keep in little pens in a house, and bring the ewes two or three times a day to them to suckle them, which quickly makes the lambs fat even in the hardest weather, especially if they have turnips to give the ewes; because the lambs are sheltered, and do not ramble about in extremity of hard weather. Where they have not turnips, some give to their ewes the finest hay, and bran, and oats, and ivy.

Some make a great improvement of their lands by folding of sheep upon them, which folds they make with hurdles so as to remove them from one place to another; and so when the sheep have dunged one place, they now place the folds and dung another by putting the sheep into them every night, which they only do in summertime, as near as they can in good weather, because folding of them is apt to make them have the rot; and care should be taken when they are let out in a morning, not to do it before the sun is risen, and then they should be drove to a good feeding-place; for being hungry they will eat anything that comes next; the not observing of which many times is a great prejudice to them, especially in moist, ill ground; but many reckon all folding of sheep to be very bad for them, particularly if storms or ill weather happen, and therefore they rather choose to stick stakes sloping in the ground, to which the sheep will come and rub themselves, and so dung and urine on those places where they stick them.

The great inconveniency which attend sheep is their being subject to the rot; which it is a hard thing to prevent, if the year prove very wet, especially in May and June, except it be in salt marshes or in broomy lands, broom being one of the best preservatives against that distemper of any thing. I have known sheep cured of the rot, when they have not been far gone with it, only by being put into broomlands. Scurvy-grass, parsley, mustard, thyme, and all other sorts of hot herbs are good for the prevention of it. Some propose to give sheep once a month, or oftener, half a handful of bay-salt, which may be of some service to them; but as the rot, red-water, and most of the distempers that sheep are subject to, proceed from too much moisture of the land they feed on, and the season of the year; so I should think that dry food at such times, and the keeping of them on dry land in wet seasons, and to give them fine hay, oats, bran, etc. (amongst which some salt might be mixed) might be the best and properest food for them to prevent these distempers. Sheep are often blind by means of their fulness of blood; to prevent which 'tis good to cut their tails, and so to empty them of their blood.

Of Goats

Goats are of advantage to be kept in rocky, barren places, where other cattle cannot get a livelihood; they will climb the highest craggy rocks to feed upon briars, bushes, heath, and other wood. And though they will feed in plain pasture yet their chief delight is in browsing upon trees, and therefore great care ought to be taken to keep them from all sorts of valuable plantations; the chief profit of them is their milk, which is esteemed the greatest nourisher of all

liquid things on which we feed (except woman's milk) and the most comfortable to the stomach; many mix it with other milk in barren countries, where they cannot keep many cows to make cheese with, for which use it does very well; their kids also are very good meat, which the best sort of them commonly produce twice a year, and two or three of them at a time; some outlandish sorts of them more. Some shear their hair to make ropes with, which will lie a long time in water without rotting, and some make particular sorts of garments of it.

The goat ought to have a large body, well-haired, great legs, upright joints, not bending, a neck plain and short, head small and slender, large horns and bending, a big eye, a long beard; and the she should have large teats, a big udder, hanging down ears, and no horns, at least very small ones.

For the ordering of them they should be kept in flocks or herds that are used and associated together, or each party will be apt to straggle from the other. They should have good shelter both from the heat in summer, and cold in winter; for they can neither endure the extremities of the one or the other, especially the shes which are with kid. The best time for the male and female to go together is about December. If you house them in winter, let them have no litter to lie on, because it is too hot for them; but let the floor be paved, that they may be kept sweet and cleanly; for they cannot endure ill favours. As for the kids they are to be ordered in all things as they order lambs.

If goats are suffered to go and choose their own food, they are such good physicians to themselves that they are seldom troubled with any inward distempers; only the un-natural excess of their lust makes them soon grow old, and so quickly become past use and profit. They are reckoned very good to lie amongst horses; the scent of them, as they say, being of great advantage to prevent the horses falling into distempers.

Robert Brown. "Chapter III—Of Sheep" and "Chapter IV—Of Goats" in *The Compleat Farmer* (London: 1759).