

Short Grass Ranchers Hope To Attain Status Their Ewes Enjoy

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MERTZON — It is well accepted in the short grass country that the 1966 model ewe isn't nearly so self-sufficient as her grandmother of a few years ago. This conclusion stems from the obvious fact that jet age sheep can't survive on a daily handout of a few kernels of corn for protein supplement and sprinkling of cobweeds and tumbleweed foliage as the roughage requirement.

Nevertheless these modern ewes continue to deserve being described as genuine sheep. For example, they have retained and improved upon this basic trait, being stubborn; their talent to eat whatever poisonous plant that is at its peak of toxicity; and their ability to go on living until they've consumed five or six dollars worth of feed.

There is a question as to whether the men owning and caring for these often ungrateful creatures are progressing as fast as their charges. General opinion is that sheep are well abreast of this age of pampered livestock while their owners and herdsman have barely stayed current with standards of the mid-thirties. A number of facts can be given to substantiate this belief. Probably the best evidence rests in the dietary habits of the two contrasted subjects; the sheep feasting on all-winter rations comparable to the feedstuff once reserved for carriage horses of royalty; and the ranchers doing their best to find a cheap substitute for their daily fare of beans and cornbread.

Also to be considered is the amount of attention accorded the ailments of each. As possibly already known, in years such as this when the sheep market is strong, an almost toothless old nellie can develop a slight nasal drip and before nightfall her blood stream will be loaded with various antibiotics of the quality usually reserved for winners of the Kentucky derby. But a sheep person can stumble around town for weeks at a time, snorting and sneezing, suffering the last throes of the Consumptive Dead Sea Pox, and for all the sympathy or free medical attention he receives, he might as well have taken his troubles to the senior medical officer of a prison hospital.

Undoubtedly sheep are gaining the upper hand. The rancher is nothing more than a physician to what is fast becoming a spoiled addict of the feed sack.

However, all hope is not lost. There are still scattered about in the roughs and brush a few old fashioned sisters that refuse to be brought under the new order. And there remain some outdated ranchers who don't mind kicking them out the gate in the fall and allowing the balance of nature to determine how many are left in the spring.

And in any case, the old ewe still has a long way to go before she compares with the biggest four-legged moocher of them all, that prima donna of the grasslands — the mother cow.