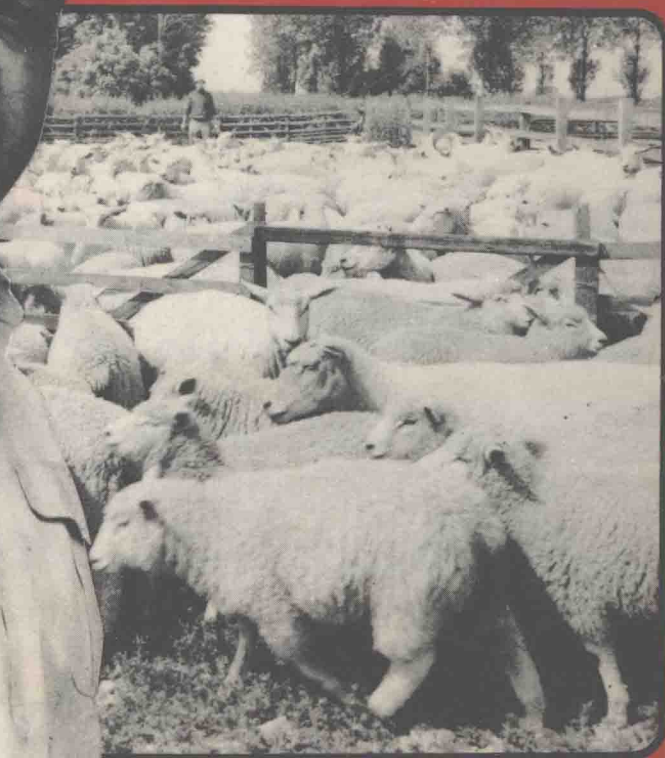


INTENSIVE

SHEEP

MANAGEMENT



Henry Fell

INTENSIVE SHEEP MANAGEMENT

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Professor Robert Boutflour CBE, MSc, Principal of the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, from 1931 until 1958. 'Bobby', as he was known with the greatest affection by all who knew him, and by many who did not, had the greatest influence on my life in farming. I had the privilege to be one of his students and, later, to work with him. I shall always be grateful to him for his inspiration and for his kindness to me personally. I hope that he would have approved of this book.

INTENSIVE SHEEP MANAGEMENT

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*'I thanke God and ever shall,
It is the Shepe hath payed for all'.*

This inscription was engraved in 1485, upon his dining room window by one Master John Barton, Merchant of the Staple of Calais and Squire of Holme by Newark. A self-made man, his sheep had brought him wealth and prosperity. They enabled him to build his many gabled stone Manor House and to extend and furnish his local Parish Church, to great effect.

FOREWORD

by Professor J. M. M. CUNNINGHAM, CBE, B Sc, PhD,
FI Biol, FRSE,

Director of Hill Farming Research Organisation

OVER SEVERAL decades agriculture has been one of our most successful industries. This can be attributed partly to the acceptance of new ideas, techniques and methods, all of which have contributed to improvements in efficiency and productivity. In this regard sheep production has tended to be less progressive so that it has become increasingly less competitive and has diminished in importance, particularly in lowland areas.

Sheep farming has been much in need of men who know and accept those traditional practices which should endure, identify those which should be modified and recognise those which should be discarded.

This book is the testimony of such a man. It is a lucid distillation of the knowledge and experience of a farmer who has advanced the art, science and practice of sheep husbandry. Presented here is an account of the difficulties and problems of intensifying sheep production, of the solutions found, the systems developed and success achieved. Contributing to this have been new ideas and practices in breeding, grazing management, disease control, forage use and feeding of sheep. Effective systems are dependent on deploying the skills and qualities of the right men and the appropriate equipment with efficient organisation throughout the annual cycle of events all towards satisfying a chosen market. This authoritative analysis of sheep production illustrates why intensification is no longer a theoretical abstraction but is a practical possibility yielding returns competitive with other farm enterprises.

Coupled with an account of the British sheep industry, its structure, systems of production and role, is a look beyond our shores to remind us of the international significance of sheep. Since sheep meat is far from being in surplus in the European Economic Community, and wool will inevitably be increasingly valued as artificial fibres increase in cost, the outlook for sheep farming in Great Britain is undoubtedly more optimistic.

This book should become part of the standard equipment of

those already in sheep production. It should be compulsory reading for those starting a sheep enterprise and will illuminate the thinking and present a vision of the potential of sheep which others have neither realised nor considered exists.

Henry Fell has already had a considerable impact on contemporary thought and practice in sheep husbandry and this book will deservedly extend it. His mentor of earlier days—Bobby Boutflour—would have been immeasurably delighted.

PREFACE

MANY TIMES during the months when I have been writing this book, I have asked myself the question, 'Why am I doing it?' Sometimes the question has been asked out of sheer curiosity; sometimes, I hope, out of humility; and not infrequently, when the words refused to flow, out of sheer frustration. Whatever the reason, it is a question which demands an answer.

Of course, there is no one simple reason. But high on the list is my conviction that the sheep industry which, at several points in history contributed mightily to the richness of the Kingdom of Britain, could do so again. During my lifetime, sheep production in these islands has always played a subordinate role; an important one, but subordinate nonetheless, to the overriding political need to import food on the cheap from the low cost areas of the world. Such a set of circumstances tends to have a deadening effect on the initiative and original thinking of those who find their livelihood within the industry. We are now, I believe, passing out of this phase, and the potential for expansion and development which lies ahead of us is considerable.

I, together with many others, have struggled along during this period. Many were the times when I was tempted to give up. There must, I said to myself, be quicker ways to profit. The fact that I did not do so is more credit to an inborn obstinacy, coupled to an acute distaste for giving up something which I have started, than to anything else. In the process, I learnt a very great deal. Some of it through my own efforts. A very great deal from others. I am tempted to believe that what I have learnt over 20 years is perhaps worth passing on. This, however, is not a text book written for students, although I hope it may be read by many of those who are preparing themselves for a career in agriculture. It does, I hope, contain much solid fact. It also contains much of my own thinking, and I have not been afraid to expose that. It will, I am sure, irritate some; others will disagree profoundly. It is, I trust, not too pretentious to believe that it will stimulate many, who on their own farms are already greatly experienced with sheep, to thinking deeply how they can proceed further.

I have chosen to include two chapters which may, at first sight, seem not to fit the overall pattern. One each on the sheep industries to be found in France and the United States. I have done so because I believe these two countries have great sheep potential and whose future will certainly be intertwined with our own. I have drawn upon my own experiences in France, a country of which I have some knowledge and for which I have some considerable affection. In the case of America, I have asked Dr Clair Terrill, of US Department of Agriculture, Beltsville, Maryland, to contribute this chapter. I have great respect for his knowledge of sheep farming the other side of the Atlantic and I am grateful to him for his help.

It is, then, a book intended for all those who share my interest in this most adaptable of all our farm animals. One which, in its different breeds, can turn the barest mountain to profit, or be found as an integral part of the farming system on some of the richest land in Britain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE AUTHOR'S NAME appears on the flysheet, and if credit is due, to him it is given. Any author knows full well, however, that he is but one among many who have made the work what it is. To all those who have so willingly, over the years, helped, inspired and supported me, I say a very sincere word of thanks.

In particular, I would mention those who have worked for me at Worlaby. Whether as foreman, shepherds, or tractor drivers, without their hard work and loyalty, nothing would have been achieved. In these times of industrial insanity, we, in farming, are indeed fortunate.

Then, a book has to be typed. That is quite a job, even if my handwriting were good, which it is not. The fact is that it was done cheerfully on top of her normal work load by my secretary, Mrs Jean Winstanley. To her, a special thank you.

And most of all to my wife, who has supported a most difficult husband with great patience and love.

