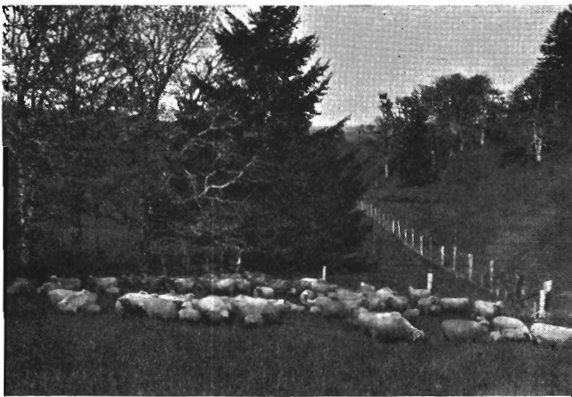


# Lamb Marketing Investigations in Western Oregon



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## SUMMARY

1. Western Oregon lambs topped the market in May and June.
2. Few Western Oregon farm lambs were good enough to top the market after July 1.
3. Western Oregon farm lambs marketed later than the middle of July meet competition from range section.
4. Lambs weighing from 60 to 80 pounds brought top price if fat.
5. Milk-fat lambs at Easter time usually command a fancy price.
6. Lamb prices are usually highest during the early spring months and gradually decline from then until fall.
7. Forty-seven percent of the lambs were thin and brought \$1.85 per hundred less than lambs in a desirable condition.
8. Nine and one-tenth percent of the lambs were heavy and brought \$2.75 less per hundred than lambs of desirable weight and condition.
9. Four percent of the lambs were scrubs and brought \$4.14 per hundred less than lambs in good condition.
10. Seven percent of the lambs were long tailed and bucky and brought \$2.50 per hundred less than good lambs.
11. San Francisco and Los Angeles offer a desirable outlet for Western Oregon early lambs. Their requirements are essentially the same as those at Portland.
12. Western Oregon lambs did not hold up satisfactorily in Chicago shipments.
13. Feeder lambs from Western Oregon so far have had no satisfactory outlet.
14. On a crowded market buyers discriminate severely against off-type and off-quality lambs, while the same objections are often overlooked when the supply is small and demand keen.

# Lamb Marketing Investigations in Western Oregon

H. A. LINDGREN and E. L. POTTER

The object of this study was to determine in what way the type of lambs being produced by the sheepmen of Western Oregon could be modified better to suit the market and bring more profit to the producer—in other words, to determine the possibility of a more accurate coordination between the demand of the consumers and the possibilities of the producer.

The investigator visited the Portland market seasonally and in addition has made two visits to San Francisco and one each to the Los Angeles



Fig. 1. Prime market lambs fitted for show.

and Chicago markets at a time when Oregon lambs were being received. The types and classes of lambs were studied, together with the prices received, paying particular attention to the following points:

- (a) Thin lambs or such as were not fat enough to sell to advantage.
- (b) Lambs of inferior breeding.
- (c) Lambs too young to be properly finished.
- (d) Lambs that were too large.
- (e) Lambs not docked or castrated.

The numbers in these classes and their selling prices were compared with the numbers and prices received for good lambs. These facts were considered along with cost of production on the farm, as well as the problems of the producer in preparing the lambs for market.

This bulletin deals entirely with the marketing of Western Oregon lambs. Before taking up the discussion of the various phases of the study, Table I will give a statistical picture of the classification of the receipts as made by the investigator.

TABLE I. LAMB RECEIPTS AT NORTH PORTLAND  
During 9 visits covering a period of 19 months.

Date of visit	Desirable condition		Thin		Heavy		Scrub		Too young		Long tail or bucky	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
November 14-27 .....	.....	.....	472	80	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	118	20
April 4-28 .....	135	40	178	53	22	7	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
April 25-28 .....	134	60	23	10	68	30	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....	.....
May 21-28 .....	403	56	208	29	36	5	.....	.....	.....	.....	72	10
June 18-28 .....	280	35	477	66	.....	.....	27	3.4	.....	.....	10	1.6
August 13-28 .....	105	15	420	60	84	12	70	10	.....	.....	21	3
October 8-28 .....	40	10	180	45	150	37	20	5	.....	.....	10	3
November 19-28 .....	300	71	60	14	20	5	35	8	.....	.....	10	2
June 15-29 .....	200	44	156	35	25	6	25	6	.....	.....	41	9

Note: Most of these receipts were Western Oregon lambs although some were farm lambs from other sections which could not be segregated.

In addition to the material gathered at the time of each visit to the market, the scale tickets for May, June, and July in 1929 were tabulated in the following form. The top price was determined from the government reports. Prices within 50¢ of top were considered as top in making the tabulation. During June and July the Portland top lamb price is influenced to a certain extent by the Mt. Adams lambs from Washington. These lambs are carefully sorted at the ranch and therefore command top price when brought to market. In making this table, therefore, the Mt. Adams lambs were not included. During May and June of 1929, however, lambs from Coos county, Oregon, were sorted just as the Mt. Adams lambs were, and as a result they sold equally as well, if not better than Mt. Adams lambs. This would indicate that careful sorting of our Western Oregon lambs would tend to increase the percentage that bring top price.

TABLE II. LAMB RECEIPTS AT PORTLAND CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO PRICE, 1929

	—May—		—June—		—July—	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Top price .....	2,902	46.3	2,206	27.5	None	
One cent below top .....	1,253	20.0	1,883	23.5	422	6.8
Two cents below top .....	1,362	21.8	1,018	12.8	1,179	19.2
Three cents below top .....	543	8.7	1,989	24.9	2,783	45.1
Four cents or more below top.....	182	3.2	910	11.2	1,787	28.9

## SUPPLY AND DEMAND AFFECT MARKET PRICE

The old law of supply and demand functions very decidedly in our lamb marketing. There are certain outstanding objections with regard to type, quality, and conditions that affect the price paid on a crowded market; while, on the other hand, when the supply is small and the demand keen these same objections are often overlooked, or at least they have less effect on the price paid. As a rule, lambs are sold at Portland without sorting. This fact made it somewhat difficult at times during the study to analyze carefully the price paid for the various grades and classes. Sorting at the market has been objected to because of the shrinkage that results. It would seem more advisable to sort at the farm prior to loading so that the lambs can be filled again to overcome the shrinkage before they are shipped.

## WESTERN OREGON LAMBS HAVE SEASONAL ADVANTAGE

The bulk of the Western Oregon lambs are ready for market during May, June, and the first part of July. This is due to the natural feed condition during that time. The Portland market takes care of the supply during the early part of this period. By the time the most of these lambs are ready, the early California crop is out of the way and the San Francisco and Los Angeles markets are ready to receive the Western Oregon lambs.

The Portland market handles a uniform supply throughout the season, supplying also the Washington cities as well as Vancouver and Victoria, B. C., with about 1,000 lambs each week.

### MARKET DEMANDS QUALITY PRODUCT AT WELL-DEFINED WEIGHTS

There is no product that depends more on its condition to obtain top prices than does lamb. Not only must it be in proper condition, but it must weigh 60 to 80 pounds at the market. This weight yields a carcass of 30 to 40 pounds, which best suits the retailer's needs, for the reason that such a carcass will produce cuts of a size that fit the requirements of the average family.

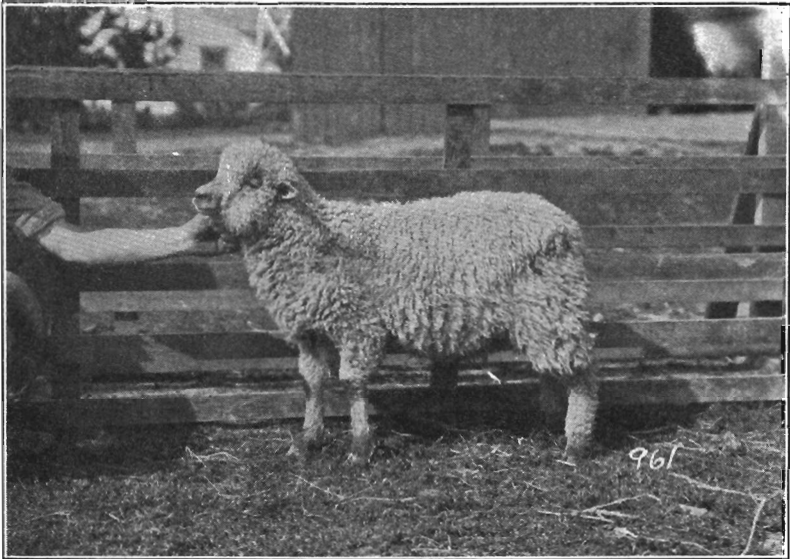


Fig. 2. An unthrifty lamb.

### EASTER LAMBS COMMAND A FANCY PRICE

The milk-fat lambs at Easter time are the first of the season in the Northwest, and for that reason they command a premium at the Portland market. Not only do they sell at a better price, but they have a tendency to stimulate the price on all lambs at that time. There has been in the past a limited number of these early lambs in the Northwest. In California, however, the early lambs are in season at that time of the year. In Western Oregon feed and climatic conditions are somewhat of a limiting factor in Easter lamb production, although the Easter demand affords an oppor-



tunity well worth while for the man situated so that he can produce early lambs.

TABLE III. AVERAGE TOP PRICE FOR LAMBS BY MONTHS AND YEARS AT NORTH PORTLAND

	1929	1928	1927	1926	1925	1924	1923	1922	1921	Average
January .....	14.12	12.75	11.75	15.00	16.00	11.50	12.87	9.75	10.00	12.63
February .....	16.00	13.12	12.75	13.50	16.50	13.00	13.62	11.00	9.00	13.18
March .....	16.00	14.37	13.75	12.87	16.87	14.32	14.00	13.00	8.12	13.70
April .....	15.50	15.00	14.50	14.50	15.50	13.92	13.00	14.50	8.00	13.82
May .....	14.37	14.00	13.50	13.25	13.25	11.75	12.00	12.00	7.37	12.39
June .....	13.12	12.50	12.75	12.50	11.50	10.75	10.75	10.00	6.87	11.30
July .....	12.50	12.62	12.25	11.50	12.25	10.87	10.75	10.00	6.82	11.06
August .....	12.00	12.25	11.50	11.75	12.50	10.87	10.37	10.00	6.62	10.87
September .....	11.50	12.37	11.50	12.25	12.75	11.25	10.50	10.75	6.50	11.04
October .....	11.00	12.25	11.75	12.25	13.00	11.25	11.00	10.75	6.50	11.09
November .....	11.00	12.00	12.12	12.00	13.00	12.12	11.12	11.87	7.12	11.37
December .....	11.00	12.12	12.50	12.00	13.75	13.75	11.32	12.25	8.00	11.85

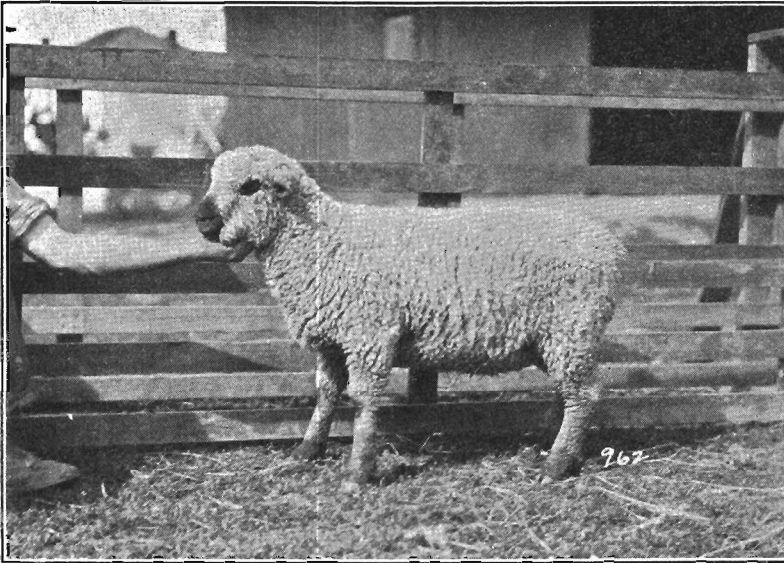


Fig. 3. A thrifty lamb.

A study of the price chart, Table III, will show that lamb prices are usually higher at the beginning of the springer lamb season.

### MILK-FAT LAMBS HAVE STRONGEST APPEAL

The lamb that has the strongest appeal to the buyer at the market is the milk-fat lamb, or in other words one that carries its baby fat. It was quite noticeable that such animals brought top price. These lambs have had sufficient milk to satisfy their needs for growth and conditioning. They

are well rounded out and free from paunchiness. Such lambs are smooth in appearance, well filled in the loin and in the leg, and are the most economical to the producer.

There comes a time in the lamb's life when it does not get enough milk for its needs and soon thereafter changes, becoming paunchy, and the fleece takes on a bedraggled appearance. A lamb is seldom at its prime more than a week or two. Two of the biggest problems in connection with lamb marketing are, first, to be able to detect when this change is about to take place and, second, so to manage that the lamb reaches the desired weight at that time.

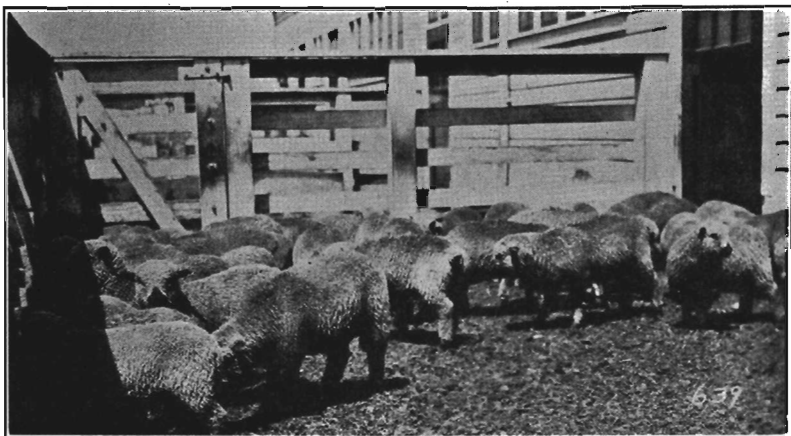


Fig. 4. Choice market lambs.

Not all of the lambs in any flock reach the prime stage at the same time. The prevailing attitude is to want to market all at the same time to save bother. Where the flock is small this attitude is especially marked. The use of trucks and trailers, however, is aiding somewhat in the solution of this problem, as the grower can usually make up a truck load from his own flock or with the assistance of his neighbors and get his lambs to market in a condition that will bring the most money. During the marketing season lambs are moving from the various communities at frequent intervals so that it is usually possible for the small grower to find outlet for his lambs without difficulty.

### PERCENTAGE OF GOOD LAMBS IS LOW

During the course of this study on the Portland market, nine visits were made to check numbers and prices. During this time 4,635 lambs were received. Of this number 1,601 or 34.5 percent were good enough to sell at top or near top prices. These brought a range in price of \$12.00 to \$16.00 per hundredweight, all of which were top or near top prices for the particular days when sold. The average price was \$13.44 per hundredweight. This figure will be used in the discussion to follow in comparison with prices paid for the lower grades.

### THIN LAMBS EXCEED NUMBER IN DESIRABLE CONDITION

Lambs in less desirable condition received during the study were 47 percent of the total number. These brought \$1.85 per hundredweight less than those in desirable condition. Many of these weighed 75 to 80 pounds. They were too large to go as feeders. These lambs had made the desired growth but had not been given sufficient feed to have the finish required for good market lambs, or their prime marketing period had passed and they were losing condition, maintaining their weight merely by growth.

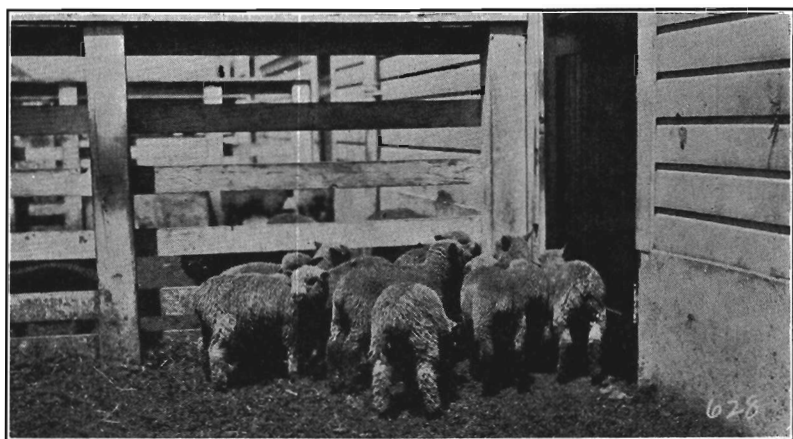


Fig. 5. Thin and off-quality lambs.

### HEAVY LAMBS ARE HARD TO SELL

There were 405 lambs out of the 4,635 that were classed as too heavy. This was 9.1 percent of the total. These brought an average of \$10.69, or \$2.75 a hundred less than those of desirable weight. These weighed 85 to 100 pounds. Although this class produced a carcass that was a little too heavy for the average trade, there is an outlet for them at a reduced price.

An 80-pound lamb at \$13.44, the price paid for the good lambs, brings the grower \$1.13 more than a 90-pound lamb at \$10.69.

### SCRUB LAMBS ARE A LOSING PROPOSITION

Four percent of the lambs received at Portland during the nine visits were of inferior breeding. These brought \$9.30 per hundred on the average, or \$4.14 per hundred less than lambs of desirable quality. These lambs were shallow bodied, weak constitutioned, low in the back, and usually thin in flesh. These are the kind that could be expected from mating ewes with poor-quality bucks. These figures indicate that poor feed is more of a problem than inferior breeding in Western Oregon.

### YOUNG LAMBS SELL HIGH IF FAT

Lambs weighing 65 pounds and in good condition often sell at a premium, especially if carrying their baby fat. Such lambs brought top price during this study.

In this study a 60-pound thin lamb as a feeder brought in that condition about 3.44¢ per pound less than the fat lambs. When feeder lambs are in demand, however, the spread in price will be somewhat less.

There are two periods when the marketing of light-weight lambs seems justifiable: first, early in the season when the price is high; second, late in the season when good feed is becoming scarce.

During the spring and summer when the Western Oregon lambs are moving to market the outlet for feeders cannot be expected to be as good as it is closer to the feeding season.

### LONG-TAILED AND BUCKY LAMBS SELL FOR LESS

Nearly 7 percent of the 4,644 receipts were in the long-tailed and bucky class. They brought \$2.50 per hundredweight less than good lambs. Bucky lamb carcasses are heavy in the neck and shoulders and light in the loin and leg. The meat from such lambs, after a certain age, is tough and stringy. Long-tailed lambs collect dirt and filth that affect their market appearance. Lambs of this class affect the uniformity of a load or pen of lambs and lessen their value. A few of this kind in a truck load or a car-load can easily affect the price received for all. Lambs sold in milk-fat condition, however, are not as a rule cut in price because of the bucks or long tails.

TABLE IV. TOTAL LAMBS RECEIVED AT NORTH PORTLAND DURING THE NINE VISITS

	Number	Percentage	Price
Desirable condition .....	1,600	34.5	\$13.44
Too thin to sell to advantage .....	2,174	47.0	11.59
Too heavy to sell to advantage .....	405	8.5	10.69
Inferior breeding .....	177	4.0	9.30
Long-tailed and bucky .....	282	6.0	10.92

### WESTERN OREGON LAMBS AT SAN FRANCISCO AND LOS ANGELES MARKETS

During 1928, figures were obtained on 9,636 Oregon lambs sent to San Francisco markets. Of this number 90 percent were considered good market lambs. These came from Western and Southern Oregon.

The lambs sent to California markets are purchased by buyers in the field and are sorted before shipping and the thin ones kept at home. The thin end is sold usually to the rape growers of the Willamette Valley.

The lambs sent to San Francisco are sold to killers in "Butcher Town" or are sent direct to the stockyards at South San Francisco.

The killers at San Francisco complained about the heavy shrinkage of Southern Oregon lambs. It was the claim of some that the shrinkage was as high as 13 pounds per lamb on the off-car basis. This, of course, affects the reputation of these lambs on the market. In checking on this on the farms it was found that the lambs are brought in without a shrink, oftentimes only a few minutes off the ewes, in a filled condition. That system, of course, necessarily results in heavy shrinkage in shipping. This has been a common practice for years in Southern Oregon, and the buyers usually bid on the lambs with that understanding.

In order to establish a standard practice and at the same time build up the reputation for these lambs, however, it would appear to be wise for the growers to allow for a 4-percent shrink in selling or to keep the lambs off feed and water for 12 hours before they are weighed. If this were done the grower, of course, would be entitled to a better price per pound for his lambs. On the other hand, the killer would be better satisfied and the reputation of the Southern Oregon lambs would be greatly improved.

San Francisco killers were of the opinion that 20 percent of the Oregon lambs received were long tailed and bucky, which they consider a serious objection. They also stated that during 1928, 30 percent of the lambs were below standard, so far as condition was concerned.

Los Angeles has not been buying as many Oregon lambs as has San Francisco. The conditions there are somewhat different. The per-capita consumption at Los Angeles is not as high as at San Francisco. During the 1929 season, however, more Oregon lambs than formerly were purchased for the Los Angeles trade. The condition of these was about the same as those received at San Francisco, as they were purchased in the same way.

## CHICAGO MARKET NOT SATISFACTORY FOR WESTERN OREGON LAMBS

During the summer of 1929 some Western Oregon lambs were purchased direct and shipped to Chicago. This was a new experiment and was watched with interest. The writer checked 3,000 of these as a representative shipment. These lambs were carefully sorted at the loading point so far as condition was concerned and only the fat ones loaded. They were on the road nine days. The shrinkage was 7 pounds per lamb, or about 10 percent. These lambs were sorted again at Chicago, and more than 50 percent had to be put in the feed lot for further conditioning.

So far as quality and breeding were concerned these lambs were satisfactory. The soft condition of the feed on which they were run was responsible for the heavy shrinkage. This shipment brought out the fact that lambs shipped East should be prepared for shipment by supplemental feeding prior to shipping.

The so-called native lambs in the Middle West are of the same type and quality as the Western Oregon farm lambs, and they look no better on the eastern markets than our western lambs appear on the western markets. Our Western Oregon lambs, however, are not conditioned in

such a way that they will hold up on a long haul. With the present production and the satisfactory markets in California for the surplus, moreover, it is a question whether eastern shipments should be considered.

## WESTERN OREGON LAMB PRODUCTION PROGRAM

In view of the facts brought out in the preceding discussion it is clear that the thin lamb is the big problem in Western Oregon lamb production. The season of good grass in Western Oregon lasts only from three to four months. This makes the production of fat lambs difficult, although not impossible. It is necessary, therefore, to follow a very carefully prepared plan of management throughout the year. The essentials of such a program are as follows.

1. The lambs must come early so that the bulk of them will be about 30 days ahead of the grass. This will make it possible to mature the lambs within the season of good grass.
2. In order that the lambs may come at the proper time it is necessary to flush the ewes prior to the breeding season. If the ewes are flushed the lambs will not only come earlier but there will be more lambs and they will come more nearly at the same time. Rape or clover or any other green crop that may be ready when the ewes are to be bred affords the best means of flushing. Where green pasture cannot be provided, grain is the best substitute. Since the feed is usually quite dry at breeding time a satisfactory crop of early lambs cannot be expected without flushing.
3. Before and after lambing time the ewes must be so managed that they will produce an abundance of milk. This frequently requires supplemental grain feeding before and during the lambing period and until the time the grass is good enough to maintain it.
4. The lambs must be marketed as soon as they are fat and of the proper weight. This means selling a few at a time. Successful marketing hinges on this point. It is rare that more than 50 percent of any crop of lambs are of the proper weight and finish for market at any one date, even though each lamb may be a market topper at some time during the season. Normally the lambs must be topped out at least every two weeks beginning as soon as the first are ready and extending to the time when the grass begins to dry. Those then remaining, if any, must be put on clover, rape, or grain and kept for such time as may be necessary. Under these conditions the grower cannot wait for the buyer but must see that his lambs are sold when they are ready.
5. The flock must be kept free from disease and parasites.
6. Overstocking must be avoided. Feed must be abundant especially from the beginning of lambing until the lambs are marketed.
7. The flock must be of good breeding. There are several suitable breeds, but in any case it is necessary to breed lambs of the blocky, fast growing, easy fattening type. Thrift and vigor seem to be closely associated with the ability to grow and fatten.

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If the foregoing program is followed the Western Oregon producer should be able to market 80 to 85 percent of his lambs at top prices and before the grass dries up. The remaining 15 or 20 percent that do not get fat will have to be put on rape or clover pasture or on grain and fattened as rapidly as possible in order to market them before the range lambs are ready. If this program is adhered to it will aid in stimulating lamb consumption as the product will be of higher quality and give greater satisfaction to the consumer. Such a program will also mean a larger return to the grower without materially increasing production costs. It will be noted that this program does not call for increased investment or increased feed costs. It does, however, call for a distinct increase in thought and attention on the part of the owner, and in many cases some extra labor at marketing time.

If this policy is followed consistently the percentage of top lambs can be increased from 33 percent to 80 percent. In other words, the value of 47 percent of our lambs would be increased approximately \$2.00 per head. For the entire territory under discussion this would add \$140,000.00 to the annual income.