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A STUDY OF LABOUR SAVING TECHNIQUES

ON NORTH ISLAND SHEEP FARMS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

		<u>Page</u>
CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Characteristics of the North Island Sheep Farm Labour Problem	1
1.2	Objectives of the Study	2
1.3	Thesis Outline	2
CHAPTER 2	SHEEP FARMING IN THE NORTH ISLAND	4
2.1	Introduction	4
2.2	Analysis of the Industry	4
2.2.1	Ownership and Management	5
2.2.2	Size and Location of Sheep Farms	6
2.2.3	Stock Characteristics	7
2.2.4	Sheep Policies	9
2.2.5	Sheep Farm Operations and Labour Requirements	10
2.3	Changes in North Island Sheep Farming	11
2.3.1	Flock Characteristics	12
2.3.2	Farm Labour	13
2.3.3	Farm Machinery and Equipment	14
2.3.4	Regional Development	15
2.3.5	Innovations on Farms	17
2.4	Summary	20
CHAPTER 3	THE FARM SURVEY AS A RESEARCH METHOD	21
3.1	Farm Management	
3.2	Farm Management Research Methods	22
3.2.1	Methodological Research	22
3.2.2	Empirical Research	23
3.3	Farm Surveys and Farm Management Research	24

	<u>Page</u>	
3.3.1	Motivation for a Farm Survey	25
3.3.2	Types of Farm Surveys	26
3.3.2.1	Descriptive Surveys	26
3.3.2.2	Features of Descriptive Surveys	26
3.3.2.3	Interview Surveys	27
3.3.2.4	Features of Interview Surveys	28
3.3.3	Summary	31
3.4	A Survey of Labour Saving Techniques	31
3.4.1	Exploratory Survey	32
3.4.2	Revised Farm Survey	32
3.4.3	Revisiting and Collection of Financial Data	33
3.5	The Survey Method	33
3.5.1	Location and Selection of Farms	33
3.5.2	Interviewing Procedures	34
3.6	Reflections on the Farm Survey	36
3.6.1	Data Collection	36
3.6.2	Evaluation	37
3.7	Summary	37
CHAPTER 4	LABOUR UTILISATION AND MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS	38
4.1	Introduction	38
4.2	Factor/Product Relationship	38
4.3	Subsidiary Aspects Concerning Labour Utilisation and Management Systems	41
4.3.1	Desirable Features of a Management System	42
4.3.2	Substitutes for Permanent Labour	43
4.3.3	Motivation of Labour	44
4.3.4	Under-employment of Labour	46

		<u>Page</u>
	4.4 Summary	47
CHAPTER	5 LABOUR SAVING TECHNIQUES	49
	5.1 Introduction	49
	5.1.1 Theoretical Orientation	49
	5.1.2 Scope of the Chapter	49
	5.1.3 Pattern of Discussion	51
	5.2 Management	51
	5.2.1 Introduction	51
	5.2.2 A labour Saving Management Approach	52
	5.2.2.1 Planning	52
	5.2.2.2 Organisation	53
	5.2.2.3 Evaluation of the Management Approach	54
	5.2.3 Labour Saving Management Aids	55
	5.2.3.1 Map Marking	55
	5.2.3.2 Blackboard	55
	5.2.3.3 The Use of Mirrors in Woolsheds	56
	5.2.3.4 The Use of Sheep Dogs	56
	5.2.3.5 Complete Musters	57
	5.3 Mobility	57
	5.3.1 Introduction	57
	5.3.2 Use of the Perendale Sheep Breed	58
	5.3.2.1 Discussion	58
	5.3.2.2 Farm Survey Data	59
	5.3.2.2.1 Secondary Flocks	59
	5.3.2.2.2 Complete Flocks	62
	5.3.2.3 Evaluation	65
	5.3.3 Access Race	66
	5.3.3.1 Discussion	66

		<u>Page</u>
5.3.3.2	Farm Survey Data	66
5.3.3.3	Evaluation	68
5.3.4	Additional Sheep Yards	69
5.3.4.1	Discussion	69
5.3.4.2	Farm Survey Data	69
5.3.4.3	Evaluation	71
5.3.5	Grouping Ewes for Lambing	73
5.3.5.1	Discussion	73
5.3.5.2	Farm Survey Data	74
5.3.5.3	Evaluation	76
5.3.6	Second Shearing	78
5.3.6.1	Discussion	78
5.3.6.2	Farm Survey Data	79
5.3.6.3	Evaluation	81
5.3.7	Farm Tracking	88
5.3.7.1	Discussion	88
5.3.7.2	Farm Survey Data	89
5.3.7.3	Evaluation	89
5.3.8	Farm Transport	90
5.3.8.1	Discussion	90
5.3.8.2	Farm Survey Data	90
5.3.8.3	Evaluation	93
5.4	Saving Labour during Farm Operations	96
5.4.1	Introduction	96
5.4.2	Controlled Ewe Nutrition	96
5.4.2.1	Discussion	96
5.4.2.2	Farm Survey Data	98
5.4.2.3	Evaluation	101

5.4.3	Concentrated Lambing Technique	102
5.4.3.1	Discussion	102
5.4.3.2	Farm Survey Data	102
5.4.3.3	Evaluation	104
5.4.4	Dagging	108
5.4.4.1	Discussion	108
5.4.4.2	Farm Survey Data	108
5.4.4.3	Evaluation	110
5.4.5	Footrot Control	112
5.4.5.1	Discussion	112
5.4.5.2	Farm Survey Data	114
5.4.5.3	Evaluation	115
5.4.6	Docking	117
5.4.6.1	Discussion	117
5.4.6.2	Farm Survey Data	118
5.4.6.3	Evaluation	120
5.5	Chapter Summary	121
CHAPTER 6	FARMS WITH HIGH NUMBERS OF BREEDING EWES PER PERMANENT LABOUR UNIT	122
6.1	Physical Description	122
6.1.1	Location	122
6.1.2	Sheep Policy	122
6.1.3	Physical Features of the Farms	123
6.1.4	Farm Labour	124
6.1.5	Facilities and Equipment	124
6.1.6	Stock Wintered	131
6.2	Management of the Farms	131

	<u>Page</u>
6.2.1	The Farmers 131
6.2.2	Management 132
6.2.3	Husbandry Practices 132
6.2.3.1	Tupping 134
6.2.3.2	Wintering 134
6.2.3.3	Lambing 136
6.2.3.4	Post Lambing Management 137
6.2.3.5	Pasture Management 139
6.3	A Review of the Sixteen Farms 142
6.3.1	Attitude 143
6.3.2	Farm Mobility 144
6.3.3	Simplicity 145
6.4	Case Farm Studies 146
6.4.1	Relative Profitability 147
6.4.1.1	Basis of Comparison 147
6.4.1.2	Accuracy of Comparison 149
6.4.2	Case Farm 1 154
6.4.2.1	Farm 159
6.4.2.2	Farmer 155
6.4.2.3	Labour 155
6.4.2.4	Stock 155
6.4.2.5	Management 155
6.4.2.6	Management System 156
6.4.2.7	Main Contributing Factors 158
6.4.2.8	Financial Summary 159
6.4.2.9	Alternative Labour Policy 159
6.4.3	Case Farm 6 162

6.4.3.1.	Farm	162
6.4.3.2	Farmer	163
6.4.3.3	Labour	163
6.4.3.4	Stock	163
6.4.3.5	Management	163
6.4.3.6	Management System	164
6.4.3.7	Main Contributing Factors	165
6.4.3.8	Financial Summary	166
6.4.3.9	Alternative Labour Policy	166
6.4.4	Case Farm 10	168
6.4.4.1	Farm	168
6.4.4.2	Farmer	169
6.4.4.3	Labour	169
6.4.4.4	Stock	169
6.4.4.5	Management	170
6.4.4.6	Management System	171
6.4.4.7	Main Contributing Factors	171
6.4.4.8	Financial Summary	172
6.4.4.9	Alternative Labour Policy	172
6.4.5	Case Farm 11	174
6.4.5.1	Farm	174
6.4.5.2	Farmer	175
6.4.5.3	Labour	175
6.4.5.4	Stock	175
6.4.5.5	Management	176
6.4.5.6	Management System	177
6.4.5.7	Main Contributing Factors	178

6.4.5.8	Financial Summary	179
6.4.5.9	Alternative Labour Policy	179
6.4.6	Case Farm 13	181
6.4.6.1	Farm	181
6.4.6.2	Farmer	182
6.4.6.3	Labour	182
6.4.6.4	Stock	182
6.4.6.5	Management	182
6.4.6.6	Management System	183
6.4.6.7	Main Contributing Factors	187
6.4.6.8	Financial Summary	185
6.4.6.9	Alternative Labour Policy	185
6.4.7	Case Farm Summary	186
CHAPTER 7	HIGH NUMBERS OF EWES PER PERMANENT LABOUR UNIT ON NORTH ISLAND SHEEP FARMS	187
7.1	Discussion of the Survey Results	187
7.2	Ten Questions on High Permanent Labour Productivity	189
7.3	Summary and Conclusions	191
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
GLOSSARY		
APPENDIX A	CONSTITUENT COUNTIES OF PRINCIPAL SHEEP FARMING REGIONS.	
APPENDIX B	DETAILS OF THE FARM SURVEY.	
APPENDIX C	DESCRIPTION OF A HYPOTHETICAL SHEEP FARM.	
APPENDIX D	PARTIAL BUDGETTING ANALYSIS.	

LIST OF TABLES

		<u>Page</u>
2.1	Description of Principal Sheep Farming Regions	7
2.2	Number of North Island Sheep and Beef Cattle	7
2.3	Changes in Flock Size and Ownership	12
2.4	Percentage of Ewes in Flock by Flock Size	13
2.5	New Zealand Sheep Farm Labour Force	14
2.6	Items of Machinery on New Zealand Sheep Farms	15
2.7	Development of the Principal Sheep Farming Regions	16
2.8	Classification of Fleece Wool Sold at Auction - North Island	18
5.1	Secondary Flocks - Summary of Farm Physical Features	59
5.2	Comparison of Production - 1966 - 67	61
5.3	Stock Wintered - Farm 46	61
5.4	Complete Perendale Flocks - Summary of Farm Physical Features	63
5.5	Stock Wintered - Farm 12	64
5.6	Physical Features of Farms Using Farm Races	67
5.7	Case Studies of the Use of Additional Sheep Yards	70
5.8	Operations Carried Out in Additional Sheep Yards	71
5.9	Time saved through the Use of Additional Yards	72
5.10	Summary of Farm Physical Features on Farms using Ram Harness	74
5.11	Harness Method - Farmer 20	75
5.12	Harness Method - Farmer 40	76
5.13	Comparison of Farm Physical Features on Two Farms Conducting Second Shearing	80
5.14	Comparative Shepherding Time - Long Woolled and Second Shorn Ewes	84
5.15	Break Even Partial Budget - Second Shearing Two Tooth Ewes	87

5.16	Break Even Partial Budget - Second Shearing Mixed Age Ewes	87
5.17	Basic Features of Types of Transport	91
5.18	Comparison of Time Taken Travelling by Six Different Methods	94
5.19	Additional Ewes Required to Break Even on Vehicle Costs	95
5.20	Summary of Farm Physical Features on Low Shepherding per Ewe Farms	99
5.21	Physical Statistics of Farm 20	103
5.22	Break Even Partial Budget - Concentrated Lambing Technique	106
5.23	Time Saved Using Concentrated Lambing Technique	107
5.24	Comparison of Time Taken for Each of Three Dagging Methods	112
5.25	Comparison of Operational Time	117
6.1	Location and Physical Description of Sixteen High Ewes per Man Farms	127
6.2	Farm Labour	128
6.3	Farm Facilities and Transport Equipment	129
6.4	Stock Wintered at 30 June, 1966	130
6.5	Farmer Age and Education Level	131
6.6	Farmers' Financial Planning and Farm Objectives	133
6.7	Sheep Breeds, Stocking Rates, Lambing Percentages and Wool Production	138
6.8	Farm Fertiliser Usage - 1965-66	139
6.9	Labour Use for Main Jobs on 17 Survey Farms	141
6.10	Farm Working Expenditure Under Two Labour Policies	150 - 51
6.11	Calculation of Farm Taxation	152
6.12	Calculation of Farm Cash Surplus	153
6.13	Basic Statistics of Farm 1 - 1965-66	154

6.14	Partial Budget for Extra Permanent Labour on Case Farm 1	161
6.15	Basic Statistics of Farm 6 - 1965 - 66	162
6.16	Partial Budget for Extra Permanent Labour on Case Farm 6	167
6.17	Basic Statistics of Farm 10 - 1965 - 66	168
6.18	Partial Budget for Extra Permanent Labour on Case Farm 10	173
6.19	Basic Statistics of Farm 11 - 1965 - 66	174
6.20	Partial Budget for Extra Permanent Labour on Case Farm 11	180
6.21	Basic Statistics of Farm 13 - 1965 - 66	181
6.22	Partial Budget for Extra Permanent Labour on Case Farm 13	185

LIST OF FIGURES

- FIGURE 2.1 North Island - Principal Sheepfarming Regions
- 2.2 North Island - Total Sheep, Beef Cattle
- 2.3 Product Prices - Wool, Lamb, Beef.
- 2.4 North Island - Fertiliser
- 2.5 North Island - Flock Composition by Flock Size.
- 2.6 North Island - Percentage of Sheep Within Flock Sizes -
500 and over.
- 2.7 North Island - Total Sheep by Districts.
- 3.1 Location of Survey Farms
- 4.1 Factor/Product Relationships.
- 4.2 Labour Profile for a North Island Sheep Farm.
- 5.1 Concentrated Lambing Area on Farm 20.
- 5.2 End View of Dagging Race on Farm 49.
- 5.3 Diagrammatic Representation of the Operational Movements
Involved in Three Dagging Methods.
- 5.4 Permanent Docking Fence on Farm 5.
- 5.5 Portable Docking Pen on Farm 45
- 6.1 Typical Topography on Farm 1
- 6.2 Typical Topography on Farm 11

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis reports the results of a farm survey conducted to find and evaluate labour saving techniques on North Island sheep farms. The motivation for this study was the hypothesis that many sheep farmers were at least partly restricted in their farming activities because of the availability and price of farm labour.

1.1 Characteristics of the North Island Sheep Farm Labour Problem.

There are three major barriers to the profitable utilisation of labour on North Island sheep farms; - farm size, the nature of the production process, and the location of sheep farming areas. The size of the majority of sheep farms is small enough that additional permanent labour is a major input. In many cases, adding one man may mean doubling the permanent labour force.

The stock husbandry required for many operations requires a degree of familiarity and expertise on the part of farm labour. However the nature of sheep farm production produces characteristic peak demands for labour only at certain times of the year.

The location of sheep farming regions and farms may make casual and contract labour difficult to obtain. People working as employees may find rural life too insecure or lacking in social and educational amenities to stay long.

In summary, increased carrying capacity and production usually involve additional labour Capital restrictions however, and the "lumpiness" of permanent labour inputs may rule against the employment of an extra man. At the same time, considerable uncertainty may be associated with the availability of other forms of labour.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to show ways in which existing permanent labour on sheep farms can be used with maximum effectiveness. This involves a review both of total farm labour management systems and the techniques used to achieve particular jobs common to all, or at least most, management systems.

This thesis is not concerned with sociological considerations, or how to increase the labour supply available to sheep farmers.

The study is based on a farm survey. Fifty-two sheep farmers dispersed widely over the North Island were interviewed by the author. Individual techniques were inspected and evaluated. Sixteen farms, selected on the basis of high numbers of breeding ewes per permanent labour unit, formed a part of the farm survey. Labour productivity on each farm was studied in the context of a management system.

1.3 Thesis Outline

The thesis consists of six chapters. These can be divided into two parts. The first (Chapters 2, 3 and 4) is basically introductory, while the second part, (Chapters 5, 6 and 7) contains the survey results and conclusions.

Chapter 2 describes sheep farming in the North Island in general terms - sufficient to acquaint readers with the nature of sheep farming in the North Island of New Zealand, circa 1966. Chapter 3 discusses the use of farm surveys in research, and describes the farm survey conducted during this study. Chapter 4 provides a theoretical framework for the study, as well as discussing some subsidiary aspects of labour utilisation and management systems. Chapter 5 describes and evaluates a selected number of labour saving techniques studied during the farm survey.

Chapter 6 describes labour productivity in the context of the management systems of sixteen survey farms. This chapter also discusses five case farms in detail and a partial budget is calculated for an alternative labour policy on each farm. Chapter 7 contains a summary of the thesis results, and conclusions that have been drawn from them.