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978-1-108-03716-7 - The Farmer's Calendar: Containing the Business Necessary to be Performed on Various Kinds of Farms during Every Month of the Year

Arthur Young

Excerpt

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THE
FARMER'S CALENDAR.

JANUARY.

SHEEP.

IN this month ewes of some breeds of sheep will lamb. Great care ought to be taken of them: till then they seldom want turnips; most farmers having grass either in whole fields, kept walks, or in borders, &c. sufficient for lean-stock till they are near lambing, when they should have turnips regularly given them. If the land be not dry, the best method is to draw the turnips, and cart them to a dry pasture, and there bait the sheep on them twice a day, observing well, that they eat clean, and make no waste; which is not a bad rule for ascertaining the quantity necessary. In this way, the turnip crop goes the farthest. On dry soils, the best way, for the sake of manuring for barley, is to eat the crop on the land, hurdling off a certain quantity for the flock; and, as fast as they eat pretty clean, to remove the hurdles farther. This method saves much trouble, and is highly improving to the land; but it should be practised

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SHEEP.

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only on lands that are dry, otherwise the sheep poach, and do mischief. The crop will not go quite so far as if drawn and laid in a grass field; for the sheep dung, and stale, and trample on many of the roots after they are begun, which occasions some waste: nor is there any loss of manure in carting them, only it is left, in one instance, on the arable field, and, in the other, on the grass one. No improvement can be greater than this of feeding the sheep with turnips. On whatever land they are given, the benefit is always very great.

It is further to be observed, that many sheep are fattened on turnips, particularly wethers; in which system of husbandry many of the turnips are wasted, if you have not two flocks, one lean, to follow the fattening sheep, and to eat up their leavings; for sheep will not eat clean in fattening.

In very wet weather, storms, or deep snows, the sheep and lambs should be baited on hay. Some farmers drive them to hay-stacks, which shelter and feed them, but it is wasteful. Others give the hay in moveable racks; and allow a certain quantity every day. It is an excellent method, to allow them in their racks a small quantity of hay daily while on turnips, let the weather be good or bad: but this is not absolutely necessary.

In some parts of the kingdom, the best farmers give their ewes and lambs in this month bran and oats, or oil-cake, in troughs, while they are feeding
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FOLDING SHEEP.

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on turnips; but it must be a good breed, for such a practice to repay.

FOLDING SHEEP.

In respect of folding, a very great change has taken place on inclosed farms in the practice of the best farmers, especially in Norfolk. They are now fully convinced, that it is an unprofitable practice, except where the openness of downs and common fields renders it necessary for the purpose of confinement. The number of sheep that may be kept on a farm without folding, is much greater than can be supported with it. This is a very essential point. There is a deduction from the farmer's profit, in the injury done by folding to both ewe and lamb, which has been estimated by experienced judges, at from 2s. 6d. to 4s. per ewe; so that a farmer should consider well, before he determines to follow a practice, which, from a multitude of observations, is pronounced unprofitable. Mr. Bakewell used to call it robbing Peter to pay Paul. The arguments now used in its defence are not satisfactory: it is contended, that if sheep be not folded, they will draw under hedges, &c. for shelter in bad weather; if so, they ought to be allowed to do it, for more would be lost in such cases by forcing the sheep from shelter, than the value of their fold. Where this practice takes place, good shepherds will, in case of rain, get up in the night and let their flocks out of fold, knowing the consequence of confinement on arable land in wet weather. The instinct of these animals will

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conduct them much better than our reason, not only where to fly for shelter, but also for choosing their own time to go to rest, and to feed in the morning. These they vary according to seasons and weather; but folding prevents it, and forces them to a regularity never called for by the weather.

When I began first to entertain doubts of the propriety of folding sheep on any farms in which they can be kept to certain fields in the night without that practice, I desired earnestly to try some experiments that might throw more light on the question than it was possible for reason to do; but to effect this comparatively, was very difficult, as the trial I wished for was such, as should carry some positive conviction with it. I have not been able to effect it fully; but the trials I have made, may not be found destitute of power to throw some light on this interesting question. I am perfectly persuaded, that it would have been impossible for me to have kept on the same land, nearly such a stock in one parcel with folding. I do not conceive that the fields would have carried three-fourths so managed. Four drivings in a day make them trample much food, disquiet the sheep, and transfer the choice of their hours of feeding and rest from themselves to the shepherd and his boy. While lambs are young they are injured by this, and the ewes are liable to be hurried and heated; all which are objects that should weigh in the question. When sheep are kept in numerous parcels, it is not
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only driving to and from fold that affects them, but they are, in fact, driving about in a sort of march all day long, when the strongest have too great an advantage, and the flock divides into the head and the tail of it, by which means one part of them must trample the food to be eaten by another. All this points the very reverse of their remaining perfectly quiet in small parcels.

But the question turns on the benefit to be reaped by the fold ; for if that be great enough to compensate for the loss by such circumstances, the practice may not be condemned.

I believe the reason why farmers are such warm advocates for folding, arises from the power it gives them of sacrificing the grass lands of a farm to the arable part of it. Their object is corn, by which they can carry off a farm whatever improvement they bring to it. Grass improved is profit to the landlord in future ; and tenants are too apt to think, that this is done at their expence. They do not at all regard impoverishing a grass field in order to improve a ploughed one ; and I need not observe, that every sort of sheep-walk is thus impoverished ; so that ancient walks, which have been sheep-pastured perhaps for five centuries, are no better at present than they ever were before ; whereas most fields sheep-fed, without folding from them, are in a constant state of amelioration : this leads me to remark the effect I observed on several of my own fields.

I attended, through the course of a summer,

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many gentlemen over my fields, with a view to examine whether the sheep had seemed to have rested only on spots, to the too great manuring of such ; or, on the contrary, to have distributed themselves more equally ; and it was a pleasure to find, that they seemed generally to have spread in every part, if not quite equally, at least nearly so. The improved countenance of several old lays fed in the same manner, when examined in autumn, convinced me as well as my bailiff, that the ground had been unquestionably improved considerably. Those fields had carried a very bad appearance for some years, but they were, after sheep-feeding, of a rich verdure, and as full of worm-casts as if they had been dunged. I rolled them heavily in November, but they soon became rough again by worms, and demanded much rolling in spring. They had afterwards a greener and more fertile appearance by far than ever they wore before.

The whole of this circumstance, the value of which I shall be able to appreciate in the trials of future years, belongs to this method of dividing flocks, to the exclusion of folding. The fold is valuable, but so is the improvement of the grass land, and may, for what I know, nearly equal it : when, in addition, we include the greater number of sheep that can be kept, and the favour done to them by letting them alone, there remains, in my mind, no further doubt of the fact.

It is common to hear flock-farmers in open countries say, they have not the power to manage so.

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This may be very true, upon the major part of the farms, but such have often many inclosures, in which this management might be applied without difficulty.

But if we suppose folding to be the system pursued, I may remark, that the farmers in those parts of the kingdom which understand it best, do not extend it so far as they might; they give over folding in November or December, whereas it may certainly be carried on through the whole winter with profit; even supposing that the practice is *necessary*: on those farms which have a perfectly dry gravelly pasture or two, it is advisable to fold all winter on such dry grass land. It must not be attempted on moist arable land, nor on moist grass land; but on dry pastures. The safety to the sheep is greater, and the benefit to the grass an object. There is another method of gaining all the benefit of folding, quite through the winter, and on all soils; this is, to confine them at night in a sheep-yard, well and regularly littered with straw, stubble, or fern; by which means you keep your flock warm and healthy in bad seasons; and at the same time raise a surprizing quantity of dung: so great a quantity, if you have plenty of litter, that the profit will be better than folding on the land. A great improvement in this method, would be giving the sheep all their food (except their pasture) in such yard; viz. hay and turnips; for which purpose they may be brought up not only at night, but also at noon, to be baited; but if their pasture be

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FARM-YARD.

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at a distance, they should then, instead of baiting at noon, come to the yard earlier in the evening, and go out later in the morning. This is a practice which cannot be too much recommended; for so warm a lodging is a great matter to young lambs, and will tend much to forward their growth; the sheep will also be kept in good health; and, what is a point of consequence to all farms, the quantity of dung raised will be very great. If this method is pursued through the months of December, January, February, March, and April, with plenty of litter, 100 sheep will make a dunghill of at least 60 loads of excellent stuff, which will amply manure two acres of land: whereas 100 sheep folded (supposing the grass dry enough) will not in that time equally manure one acre.

SHEEP IN ROUEN.

Such ewes as have lambed before, and in this month, should be drawn off from the flock, and put into rouen in inclosed farms, to give early lamb; but this remark is not applicable to flock-farms, where the grand support is the turnip crop. On such, the rouen should be preserved till the period of distress arrives, when turnips are done, and forward grasses not ready.

FARM-YARD.

In this month a strict attention should be given to the cattle in the yard or yards; those I mean which run loose there. Care should be taken to have them regularly supplied with straw, if that be the food, and that they have always water at command,

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mand. The threshers should be so proportioned to the stock of lean cattle, as to make the straw last just through the winter. Take good care also to keep the yard well littered from the stacks of straw, stubble, fern, &c. raised in autumn, so that the cattle may always lye perfectly dry and clean. Their health requires this attention; which should, at any rate, be given, were it merely for raising large quantities of manure.

STRAW.

While it is noted, that if the cattle are fed with straw, it should be done with certain necessary attentions, it would be an omission not to remark, that the best farmers in Norfolk are generally agreed that cattle should eat no straw, unless it be cut into chaff mixed with hay; but, on the contrary, that they should be fed with something better, and have the straw thrown under them, to be trodden into dung: and I am much inclined to believe, that in most, if not in all cases, this maxim will prove a just one. The common cases of straw-feeding are, of cows, young cattle, or black cattle just bought in, and not yet put to fattening. With regard to cows, the food is certainly insufficient, and lets them down so much in flesh, that when they calve, and are expected to yield productively, they lose a considerable time, and that, perhaps, the most valuable, in getting again into flesh, before they give their usual quantity of milk; but if they have been well and sufficiently wintered, they are

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BEAN-STRAW.

[JAN.

are half summered, and yield at once adequately. For young cattle, it is still worse management ; for their growth is stunted, and they never recover it. Black cattle from poor mountains had better be put to straw than any other stock ; but here again care must be taken that the system be not deranged by it. If well fed, and the beasts be not large, they may be cleared off between harvest and the end of November ; but if they are wintered on straw, this may not be effected, and the farmer may be forced to put himself to the expence of corn or oil-cake, to feed beasts not of a size to pay well enough for those articles. The evil is less if he has plenty of turnip or cabbage, but for these he may have other applications. In so far as regards the quality of the farm-yard dung, all this reasoning becomes still more forcible ; for from straw-fed cattle, the farmer will, at the end of winter, find perhaps a large heap, of so poor a quality, that it will go but a little way in manuring his fields ; whereas, one load of dung made by fat or well fed cattle, will be equal to two or three of it.

The proper food for cows in this month is cut chaff, one half hay and the other half straw, with a good bait of turnips or cabbages. For young cattle, the same chaff, and as much cabbage as they will eat ; and the same, or turnips, for black cattle.

BEAN-STRAW.

“ Bean-straw, if well harvested, forms a very
 “ hearty and nutritious diet for cattle in the winter
 “ time,