

MARKETING THE OKLAHOMA WOOL CLIP

By

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Extension Economist, Marketing



COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS

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WOOL OUTLOOK

In considering the outlook for wool, the following factors must be considered:

1. Supply of grease wool in warehouses and on farms.
2. Supply of scoured wool at mills.
3. Supply of woolen cloth and goods unsold to the public.
4. Grades and quality of wool in storage along with the demand for these grades.
5. Current crop prospects—number of sheep, condition of sheep.
6. Price of wool and other substitutes in relation to the tariff.
7. Foreign supply of wool.
8. Buying power of consumers demand.
9. Tariff and other influences.

CURRENT OUTLOOK

Sheep and lamb numbers in this country were curtailed during 1934 because of the severe drouth. The number on farms in the United States January 1, 1935, was 49,766,000 head, the reduction in number from the year earlier being 3,000,000 head, according to estimates by the United States crops and markets report.

The number of sheep and lambs on farms in Oklahoma on January 1, 1935 was estimated at 354,000 head compared with 183,000 head a year earlier (Crop estimate figures do not agree with U. S. Census figure for the same year). The increase in numbers in Oklahoma was quite general throughout the state with some concentration of feeder lambs on wheat pastures in the wheat belt.

The general trend of the sheep industry in Oklahoma is reflected in the following figures:

NUMBER AND VALUE OF SHEEP ON FARMS IN OKLAHOMA 1910 to 1935, Inclusive.* (U. S. Census)

Year	Farms Reporting	Number of Sheep	Valuation Dollars
1910	880	62,472	253,864
1920	2,720	105,370	1,123,033
1925	1,948	62,108	512,350
1930	4,284	221,616	1,407,401
1935	5,177	308,568	1,049,131

* U. S. Census, January 1, of each year.

Mill consumption increased to 1923 levels in Europe and the United States during the period April to November, 1935. Domestic prices on most grades increased in the United States during the period to near importation levels. (Tariff 32 cents per pound scoured wool basis.) With the increase in supplies of finished goods and the relatively high price

of wool, it seems unlikely that mill consumption in 1936 will be maintained at its present level.

Stocks of wool in the United States are very low and it appears probable that increased importations will be needed to meet the demand. United States consumption for the first 10 months of 1935 was 248,600,000 pounds on a scoured basis, compared with 127,000,000 pounds for the same period in 1934. Imports of combing and clothing wool during this period into the United States were 19,271,000 pounds, and imports of carpet wool 145,319,000 pounds. In the same period in 1934, about the same amount of combing and clothing wool was imported but the importations of carpet wool were 78,796,000 pounds.

With the small carry-over of 1935 wools despite the probability of smaller consumption in 1936, wool should move out actively at moderate prices.

Wool, Combing and Clothing: Production, Net Imports, and Consumption, United States, 1900 to Date.

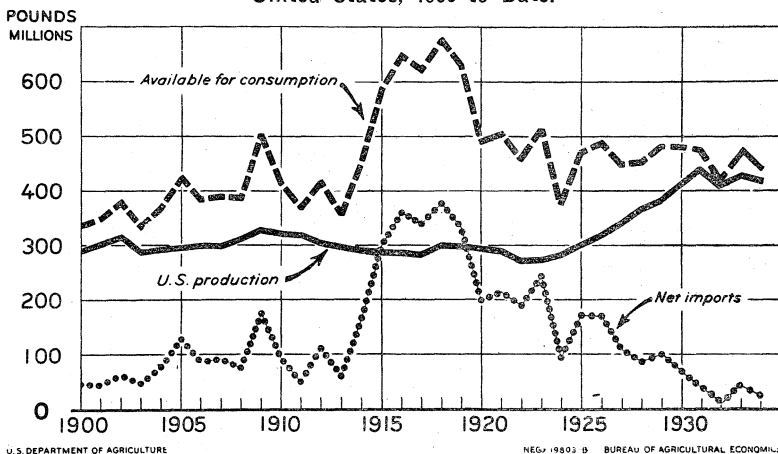


Fig. 1. The marked increase in wool production in this country since 1922, has greatly reduced import requirements. Out of about 400,000,000 pounds of combing and clothing wool consumed in the United States during 1932 about 15,000,000 pounds were imported. The business depression was also an important factor in the reduction in imports from 1930 to 1932. Imports increased considerably in 1933, but were again reduced in 1934.

The farm price of wool in December, 1933, was 24.2 cents compared with 18.5 cents per pound December, 1934. The parity price for wool December 15, 1935 was 22 cents per pound.

WOOL

Function: Wool protects the sheep from the elements. Examination of a fiber of wool under the microscope shows that the cells making up the fiber point outward from the skin, and serve to keep out foreign substances, such as dirt and chaff. Sheep with dense oily fleeces are less subject to colds than those having more open fleeces. Wool is a non-conductor of heat and hence protects the animal against variations in temperature. Dense and oily wool prevents moisture from entering, and consequently affords more protection than open loose wool.

PERCENT CHANGE IN NUMBER OF SHEEP AND LAMBS 1930 TO 1935 *

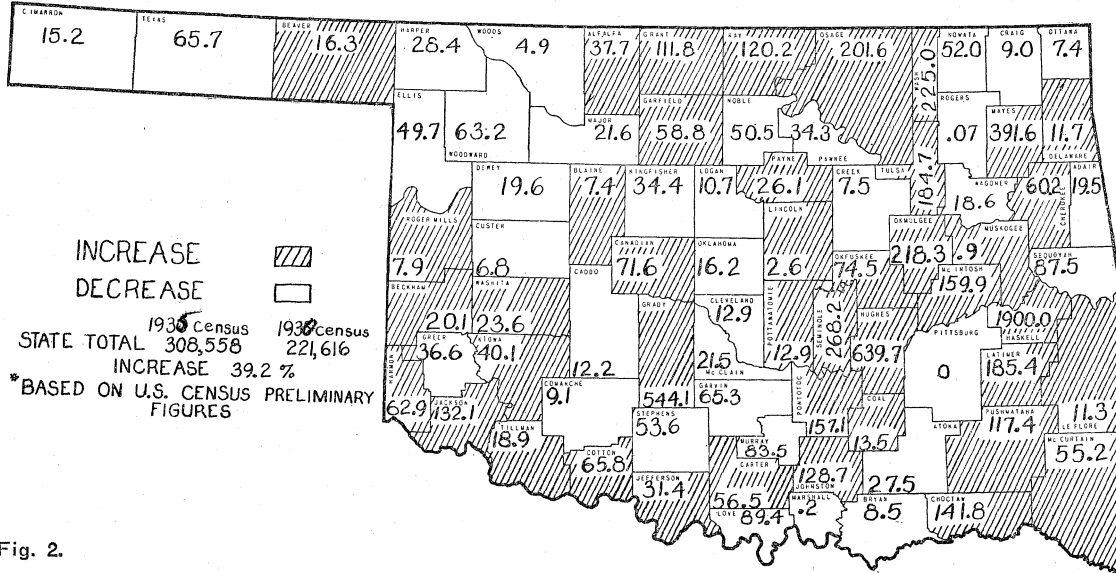


Fig. 2.

Structure: Wool and hair are similar in structure in many respects. Both grow from hair follicles in the skin and are nourished in the same way. Both consist of epithelial (protection or skin cells) cells arranged in three layers. The chief difference is in the outer layer. In hair these cells are rather rounded in form and smooth along the edges, while in wool they tend to be pointed and irregular. In hair, the over-lapping cells (like shingles on a roof) are attached to the upper layer up to the very margin of the cell, while in wool they are free for about 2/3 of their length, and they turn slightly outward. This difference gives hair the property of stiffness, and wool, flexibility. This flexibility in wool terminology is called "felting property." (1) Wool fibers are usually smaller in diameter and are more wavy. The coarser classes of wool have more of the characteristics of hair than the finer classes. The breeds of sheep exhibit marked variation in length, fineness and density of wool. Density varies from 6000 to 25,000 fibers per square inch of skin, (2) (3) fineness from five to fourteen ten-thousandths of an inch in diameter and length attained in 12 months growth from one to fifteen inches or more. Usually the finer wools are the shortest in length. There is usually some variation in the quality of wool produced on the different portions of the sheep's body.

Good wool is true in structure, uniform in fineness, strong, not excessive in yolk and comparatively clean. (4)

The structure of wool is said to be good when we find an absence of "off-colored" fibers and kemps (fibers of hair-like nature) which are objectionable because the fibers are brittle and do not take dye well. The fleece is **uniform** when all the fibers from the different parts of the body of the sheep are comparatively of the same diameter and length. Sudden changes in the condition of the sheep are reflected in the strength of the wool. Animals in good health and on a balanced wool-producing ration have a tendency to produce strong wool. (5) During periods of sickness or under-nourishment of an animal, the wool produced has a tendency to be weak and will break off at this point during spinning. **Condition**, which depends on the amount of yolk and foreign material in the wool, is very important in determining its value. An excessive amount of yolk results in a high shrinkage from scouring. A certain amount of yolk is necessary to keep the wool fibers in good condition. Sweating of the sheep or delayed clipping results in an unusual amount of yolk being deposited in the wool. Dirt, sand, cockle burs, sand burs, straw, etc., add to the weight of the fleece, and therefore detract from its value.

MARKET VALUE OF WOOL

Diameter of Fiber (grade): Until recently wool in the United States was almost entirely sold on a "blood" basis. These grade names are: Fine, one-half blood, three-eighths blood, quarter blood, low quarter blood, common, and braid. The Merino fleece is considered the standard and it rates in the fine grade. The other grades are based on a per cent of Merino "blood" in the sheep producing the fleece. The wool in these grades may come from sheep with no Merino blood but their wool compares with that of the wool of various Merino crosses. Foreign wool

1 Benton, Alva. That property in wool which causes the fibers to lock together when subjected to heat, moisture, alkali, and friction. "Wool Marketing," North Dakota Experiment Station Bulletin No. 252, Page 43.

2 Hultz, Fred S., and Alexander, M. A. "Studies with Hampshire Sheep." Wyoming Experiment Station Bulletin 178, Page 22, 1931.

3 Hultz, Fred S., and Paschal, Leo J. "Wool Studies with Rambouillet Sheep." Wyoming Experiment Station Bulletin 174, Page 19, 1930.

4 Coffey, W. C., "Productive Sheep Husbandry," 1918, Chapters 5 and 35.

5 "Feeds and Feeding." Henry and Morrison, 1923, Page 111.

producing countries do not use this system of grading and a uniform system in commerce seemed desirable. After many trials and revision of the temporary grades covering a period of nearly twenty years, the United States Department of Agriculture adopted a combination system of grades using the "count" system (6) plus the "blood" designation. This system is now in general use, and is indicated in Table I. Table IV indicates the per cent of the different grades secured from several popular breeds of sheep kept at the Oklahoma A. & M. College in 1933.

Length of Fiber (class) or (Sub-grade): The wool trade recognizes length of fiber as one of the factors in determining wool value. The longer wools are known as staple (or combing) wools and have greater use and consequently higher values than the shorter or clothing wools of the same grade. The staple wools are used in the manufacture of worsted yarns used in the weaving of worsted goods. The clothing wools being shorter, are not adapted to this use, but are suitable for the manufacture of woolen yarns used in the weaving of woolen goods. In the worsted yarns, the fibers are laid parallel but in the woolen yarns, the fibers are matted and criss-crossed. Short fibered wool is also used in making felts. Table I indicates the recognized class and the length of fiber of each class.(7)

TABLE I
Wool Grades and Grade Subdivisions

Grade—64's, 70's, 80's (Fine)
Sub-grade—(Strictly combing—over 2 inches. (French combing— $1\frac{1}{4}$ to 2 inches. (Clothing—under $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
Grade—58's, 60's ($\frac{1}{2}$ blood)
Sub-grade—(Strictly combing—over $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. (French combing— $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. (Clothing—under $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches.
Grade—56's ($\frac{3}{8}$ blood)
Sub-grade—(Strictly combing—over $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. (French combing— $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. (Clothing—under $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Grade—48's, 50's ($\frac{1}{4}$ blood)
Sub-grade—(Strictly combing—over $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. (French combing— $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. (Clothing—under $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches.
Grade—46's (low $\frac{1}{4}$ blood)
Sub-grade—(Strictly combing—over 3 inches. (French combing—2 to 3 inches. (Clothing—under 2 inches.
Grade—44's (Common)
Sub-grade—(No subdivisions).
Grade—36's, 40's (braid)
Sub-grade—(No subdivisions)

⁶ The Count System is based upon the number of hanks or "skeins" of yarn (one hank is 560 yards of wool yarn) which can be obtained from a pound of scoured wool. The wool producing eighty hanks of yarn is designated as 80's., etc.

⁷ Hultz, Fred S., and Hill, John A. "Range Sheep and Wool." Chapter 16, Page 240, 1931. John Wiley & Company.

Lines: Within each grade and sub-grade, lines are set up having minor characteristics. The chief points are brightness, soil coloring and shrinkage percentages. Each grade has from two to ten lines, each of which are very important and meet certain definite commercial specifications.

Shrinkage: Shrinkage is the loss in weight when wool is scoured; i. e., the removal of grease, dirt, etc. (8) (9) Shrinkages of Oklahoma wool in 1935 varied from 39 per cent to 75 per cent for respective lines. In general, when breeds of sheep are kept under exactly the same environment, we find that fine wool fleeces have a higher shrinkage per cent than the medium wool breeds. There is a tendency for wool from western Oklahoma to have a higher shrinkage than eastern Oklahoma wool, because of the scant growth of vegetation on the west side of the state. Dirt and dust are more readily picked up and a larger per cent remains in a part of the fleece.

Foreign Matter: Foreign matter as burs, chaff, seeds, paint, jute or sisal twine, are objectionable because they cannot be removed in the ordinary scouring process and they do not take dye easily. The wool needs to be treated with heat and sulphuric acid in order to eliminate these impurities. The process weakens the wool and thus lowers its use value. Every precaution should be used in feeding and ranging the sheep to prevent these impurities from accumulating in the wool.

RESULTS OF OKLAHOMA FARMERS SELLING ON GRADE THROUGH THE MIDWEST WOOL GROWERS ASSOCIATION

The Midwest Wool Growers Association is a cooperative association organized by growers in 1930 for the purpose of orderly marketing the wool of interested producers in Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas and parts of Texas. The association has handled the following amounts of wool from Oklahoma since organization:

1930	260,080 pounds
1931	426,232 pounds
1932	481,382 pounds
1933	298,579 pounds
1934	494,027 pounds
1935	536,956 pounds

The grower shipments in 1935 were received from sixty-eight counties. The Midwest Wool Growers Association is one of many regional wool cooperatives covering all wool producing states and marketing their wool through the National Wool Marketing Corporation of Boston.

⁸ George T. Willingmyre and Lloyd A. Woods. "Wool Scouring Tests Aid in Ascertaining Value of Grease Wool." Year Book of Agriculture, 1927, Pages 713 to 717.

⁹ Hardy, J. I. "Wool Yield and Fleece Density can be Measured by Simplified Method." Year Book of Agriculture, 1934, Pages 378 to 380.

TABLE II
TOTAL MARKETINGS OF WOOL BY GRADES FOR OKLAHOMA (10)

Grade	Total lbs. for State 1935	Per cent in Each Grade		
		1933	1934	1935
¼ Staple	102,562	21.64	30.03	19.10
⅜ Staple	129,405	12.25	14.03	24.09
⅝ Clothing	1,051	7.38	7.04	.19
½ Staple	35,574	1.87	2.64	6.67
½ Clothing	14,892	2.58	2.42	2.77
Fine Staple	62,635	2.78	5.09	11.66
Fine Clothing	121,234	13.20	16.02	22.57
Burry Medium	26,810	23.20	11.83	4.99
Burry Fine & Halfblood	16,634	8.06	3.95	3.09
Low Quarter, Common & Braid	5,645	4.68	2.22	1.05
Black & Gray (All)	3,842	.60	.87	.71
Dead Wool (All)	2,271	.	.	.
Mohair	8,035	1.76	3.86	3.09
All Others	6,366	.	.	.
TOTAL	536,956	.	.	.

¹⁰Records of Oklahoma growers to Midwest Wool Marketing Association, Kansas City, Missouri.

TABLE III
**IMPROVEMENT IN GRADE OF OKLAHOMA WOOL EXPRESSED
 IN PER CENT OF TOTAL SHIPMENTS
 FOR THE THREE YEARS**

GRADE	YEAR		
	1933	1934	1935
Staple Wool	38.54	51.79	61.47
Clothing Wool	23.16	25.48	25.54
Below grade and burry	38.31	22.73	12.93
Total per cent	100	100	100

From an examination of Chart 1 and Tables II and III, it is apparent that there has been a substantial improvement in the quality of wool delivered to the association by members in 1935 over 1934 or 1933. The tonnage shipped to the association in 1935 was 7.7 per cent larger than in 1934, which was the association's best year up to that date.

While the per cent of burry and "off grade" wool is lower for the state in 1935 than for the previous year, there are certain counties where a large per cent of the wool is of the burry grades. Burs seem to be more prevalent on the east side of the state than on the west side although certain counties in the west show a startling predominance. Producers in these areas should use every effort to eliminate the burs since

Comparative Percentages of Total Shipments of Wool Show Improvement of Grades in Oklahoma

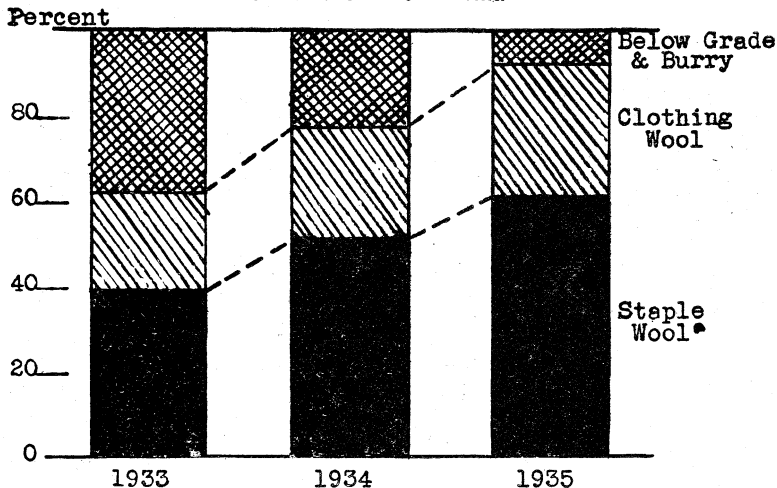


Fig. 3.—Table III and Fig. 3 show that Staple Wool increased 13 per cent in 1934 over 1933 and that a continued increase of 9.7 per cent was made in 1935.

BRIEF DISCUSSION OF EACH GRADE IN 1935 SHIPMENTS

1. $\frac{1}{4}$ Staple. A desirable "current market demand" grade, as reflected by price, for Oklahoma growers. This grade is usually secured these reduce the value 30 to 50 cents per fleece.

from sheep with Shropshire and Hampshire breeding, one of the largest profitable grades shipped by Oklahoma growers in 1935. Growers should strive for a larger per cent of their fleeces in this grade. "Line 75" predominated in this grade.

2. $\frac{3}{8}$ Staple. Another desirable "current market demand" grade, usually secured from Shropshires, Hampshires, Southdowns, and other medium wool breeds. Twenty four and nine hundredths per cent of the 1935 shipments fell in this grade. "Line 76" predominated.

3. $\frac{3}{8}$ Clothing. A less valuable fleece per pound because of its short fiber, usually secured from sheep with Southdown, Shropshire, or Hampshire breeding. In 1935, only .19 per cent of the shipment was in this grade.

4. **½ Blood Staple.** A less valuable fleece per pound but a heavy fleece, usually secured from medium wool (Shropshire, etc.) and western breed (Merino, etc.) crosses. "Line 109" predominating in quality.

5. **½ Blood Clothing.** A short fiber light fleece of low value per pound, secured from medium wool (Shropshire, etc.) and western breed (Merino, etc.) crosses. "Line 44" predominating in quality.

6. **Fine Staple.** The highest priced grade of wool secured from the fine wool breeds (Merino, Rambouillet, western breeding, etc.). Thirty-one per cent of the total fine wool sold in this grade. "Line 49" predominated in this grade.

7. **Fine Clothing.** Sixty per cent of the fine wool sold in this grade. The price is usually over two cents per pound less than for the fine staple grade and the fleeces some lighter in weight also. "Line 46" predominated in this grade.

8. **Burry Medium.** Four and nine tenths per cent of the total sales of wool fell into this "off grade," netting growers a low price. The low price being due to "burs," chaff, etc. In other respects this wool met the requirements of the regular medium wool grades netting producers eight to ten cents more per pound. Some grading sheets were inspected where no fleeces went into this grade, which indicates that with care a large per cent of this grade can be raised to net growers 30 to 50 cents more per fleece.

9. **Fine Burry and Halfblood.** Only 3.09 per cent of all wool sold was in this class. This was, however, nine per cent of all fine wool sold. In some counties the percentages were much greater. Flock owners should take steps to prevent this heavy tonnage from becoming infected with burs, chaff, etc., and selling at a lower price.

10. **Low Quarter and Braid.** This was a rather unimportant grade for 1935, as only 1.05 per cent of the tonnage sold fell in this grade. "Line 229" predominated in quality. Low quarter and braid wool is secured from Cotswold, Lincoln and Leicester sheep.

11 and 12. **Black, Dead, Mohair, Tags, etc.** Three and nine hundredths per cent of the wool sold in these grades which included "17 lines." The practice of separating the tags from fleeces seems to be general, which represents the adoption of an excellent practice.

WOOL MARKETING POINTERS

1. Shear as soon as the weather in the spring will permit.
2. Shear when the wool is dry and store in a dry place.
3. Shear on a clean floor or on a canvas to prevent chaff from mixing with the wool.
4. Trim "tags" and "sweat locks" from the fleeces and market them in separate bags, as these stain the other wool.
5. Fold the fleece with the skin side out and tie into a neat, secure bundle.
6. Tie all wool fleeces with paper twine or other twine made especially for tying wool.
7. Pack fleeces in wool sacks sorting out the different grades and placing them together as far as possible.

8. Sell the wool on grade.
9. Be proud of the quality of wool you are marketing.
10. Tag the fleece from the buck used in the flock so that a separate grading sheet can be secured on the fleece.
11. Marking of the Buck Fleece.

Every producer is urged to cooperate in the tagging of the buck fleece, so that a separate grading sheet can be rendered on this fleece.

The quality and quantity of wool will show up in his lamb crop. Therefore, we believe that the grading sheet on this fleece will help the grower materially in securing a more profitable grade of wool in succeeding years.

**SECURE THESE TAGS AT THE TIME THE WOOL, TWINE
AND SACKS ARE OBTAINED**

APPENDIX TABLE IV

WOOL—FACTORS DETERMINING THE MARKET VALUE. GRADE—DIAMETER OF FIBER

FACTORS	FINE	½ BLOOD	¾ BLOOD	¼ BLOOD	¼ BLOOD LOW	COMMON	BRAID
Skein or "Hank" of yarn	64—70—80	58—60	56	48—50	46	44	36—40
Length of Combing—Inches	Over 2 in.	Over 2¼ in.	Over 2½ in.	Over 2¾ in.	Over 3 in.	No sub-grades	No sub-grades
Length of French Combing—Inches	1¾ to 2	1¼ to 2¼	1½ to 2½	1½ to 2¾	2 to 3		
Length of Clothing—Inches	Under 1¾	Under 1¼	Under 1½	Under 1½	Under 2		
Approximate Per Cent Shrinkage (Range)	57 to 75	54 to 66	43 to 58	39 to 53	Not Indicated	Not Indicated 1934	Not Indicated

A breed on the same farm under similar management conditions.

Weights: Territory wools produced in a dry climate frequently absorb moisture when shipped to a moist climate, up to 1 to 3 per cent not being uncommon. Wools from a moist climate may shrink 1 to 2 per cent when removed to a dry climate or dry period of a year.

Skein or Hank of Yarn: The number indicated in this column is the number of "skeins" of yarn received by the spinners from one pound of wool top, each skein containing 560 yards of yarn. (**Wool Top** refers to a continuous untwisted strand of the longer wool fibers straightened by combing to remove noils. After drawing and spinning it becomes worsted yarn. Wool tops are sold as an article of commerce and are an intermediate step in making worsted yarn.)

Combing: "Combing and French Combing." These grades of wool make up the staple grades. The French sub-division of the grade is the shorter lengths.

Shrinkage: The weight the raw wool loses when it is scoured, expressed in per cent of the original weight. The higher the shrink, per cent, the lower the price. Shrinkage on the 1935 shipments from Oklahoma varied from 39 to 75 per cent. Other factors being equal, the high shrinkage wools bring a lower price when sold in the grease. In other words, the price on unscoured wools is based upon their scoured basis.

TABLE V.

WOOL FROM A. & M. COLLEGE SHEEP FLOCK—1933
AVERAGE NET VALUE PER FLEECE BY BREEDS AND MARKET GRADE OF EACH FLEECE (10)

	FINE				½ BLOOD		¾ BLOOD		¼ BLOOD	LOW	BLACK	Total Number of Fleeces
	Fine Staple		Fine Clothing		Staple Clothing		Staple Clothing		Staple	Quarter		
	Line 49	Line 50	Line 45	Line 65	Line 81	Line 44	Line 76	Line 40	Line 75	Line 229	Line 228	
Rambouillet	5.75	3.58	3.87	3.46								34
Shropshire					2.45		2.88	1.86	3.15	2.66		35
Southdown					1.93	1.85	2.96	1.80				28
Hampshire							2.12	1.83	2.53	2.01	.84	13
Dorset							1.60	1.32	1.96	1.71		27
Oxford							2.13		3.04	2.79		12
	PER CENT OF FLEECES IN EACH GRADE											
Rambouillet	2.94	41.18	52.94	2.94								
Shropshire					2.85		40.00	17.14	37.14	2.85		
*Southdown					3.57	7.14	7.14	82.15				
Hampshire							23.08	15.38	46.15	7.69	7.69	
Dorset							3.7	14.81	62.96	18.52		
Oxford							16.66		16.67	66.67		

*Southdown Flock: In 1932, ½ Blood Clothing Wool predominated from this flock. Apparently a border line production flock.
 10 A. E. Darlow, Animal Husbandry Department, Oklahoma A. & M. College.

SUMMARY

	Number of Fleeces	Average Value per Fleece	Average Value per Pound	Average Weight of Fleeces
Rambouillet	34	3.81	16.48	23.04
Shropshire	35	2.79	25.81	10.79
Southdown	28	1.89	21.64	8.73
Hampshire	13	2.16	25.18	8.57
Dorset	27	1.81	25.12	7.19
Oxford	12	2.72	22.73	11.98

