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The instructor demonstrates before interested trainees, showing how to control the handpiece in finishing off the last hind leg

SHEARING SCHOOLS

A Successful Innovation

By W. L. McGARRY, Sheep and Wool Adviser, J. REILLY, Sheep and Wool Instructor, and M. BUTLER, Shearing Instructor

TO assist in overcoming the shortage of skilled shearers—which has become a major problem in the State's sheep and wool industry—the Department of Agriculture conducted a series of 14-day instructional courses in shearing at Fremantle during 1954. A total of 57 trainees passed through the shearing schools and all of these received engagements as learner shearers during the 1954 season—in fact applications for the services of the learners exceeded the number available.

Due to various reasons the quantity of shearing labour available in Western Australia, particularly in the agricultural areas, has not kept pace with the rapid increase in the sheep population. This has meant that in many cases farmers were compelled to shear their sheep earlier, or later, than was desirable in order to fit in with the shearers' itineraries.

The following figures show the rapid increase in sheep numbers which has taken place in the agricultural areas.

Season	Number
1949-50	7,974,810
1950-51	8,931,302

1951-52	9,748,432
1952-53	10,311,827
1953-54	10,745,322

It will be seen that during the past five seasons there has been an increase of over three million sheep and it is expected that this tendency will be maintained, necessitating even more shearing labour in future years.

The shearing schools were made possible by the ready co-operation of Elder Smith and Company Limited, who made their shearing shed and plant available, also the willing assistance of a wholesale butcher who supplied the sheep. It is worth re-



1.—Instruction in grinding combs and cutters. 2.—Demonstrating the correct setting of the handpiece. 3.—A lesson in shearing. 4.—A trainee grinding a cutter under supervision. 5.—A second week trainee in action. 6.—Beginners at an early stage of training.

cording also that these schools were instituted with the full approval of the Australian Workers' Union who have co-operated to the fullest extent in establishing the schools on a practical basis.

More applications than could be handled were received from would-be shearers, among whom were included farmers' sons, rural workers and city youths all over the age of 17. The applicants were interviewed and those considered most suitable were allotted to various schools in groups of six to each school. Each group was given instruction under actual shearing shed conditions between the hours of 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. each day for a period of two weeks.

At the commencement of the course, the trainees were instructed in the correct setting up and maintenance of handpieces. They were instructed in the elementary principles of correct shearing technique and were given partly-shorn sheep to complete, in order to enable them to acquire some degree of control of the handpieces and the sheep. Later instruction included the shearing of different parts of the sheep, until eventually the trainees were able to complete the shearing of a sheep without assistance.

At the commencement of the second week of the course it was noticed that most of the trainees were commencing to gain confidence but it was still necessary for them to be supervised and corrected. Towards the conclusion of the course the trainees, although under constant supervision, were encouraged to become more self-reliant in preparation for their entry into sheds as learner shearers.

Special emphasis was placed on teaching the trainees how to control and bring the sheep into the correct positions for shearing, and the importance of developing a good style was also stressed. They were instructed how to fill and keep the comb on the skin and how to run the handpiece in a free flowing manner so as to remove the maximum amount of wool with the minimum number of "blows," thus avoiding ridging and second cuts. Trainees were also taught how to crutch sheep correctly and were given instruction in grinding combs and cutters.

It was realised that these short instructional courses were not sufficient to turn out accomplished shearers, but the purpose

of the school was to ensure that when trainees completed their courses they would have a grounding in shearing sufficient to qualify them to take learners' pens, and with constant practice they should eventually develop into skilled tradesmen.

The schools were a qualified success and woolgrowers, in the main, were quite satisfied with the work performed by these learners—so much so that the Department has been officially requested to continue the instructional schools during 1955.

HORMONES CHANGE VINEYARD PRACTICE

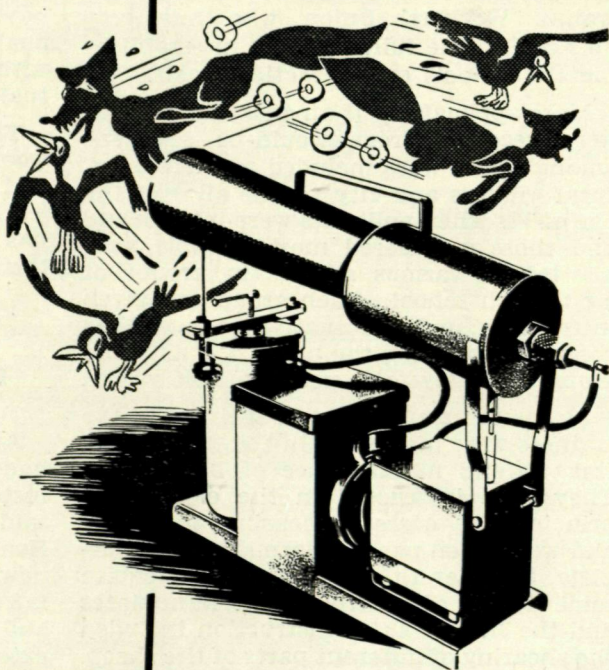
At least 95% of this year's currant crop had been set by spraying with hormones instead of by the old practice of cincturing, said the Minister for Agriculture (Mr. E. K. Hoar) recently. It is estimated that the new method saves labour to the value of £18,000 usually associated with cincturing and is likely to increase production to the extent of £50,000 each year.

He said that the success of the work was a tribute both to the officers of the Department of Agriculture, particularly Mr. L. T. Jones, who had developed safe and effective methods of using the hormone, and to the vignerons who had shown their receptiveness to new practices by the rapidity with which they had introduced hormone spraying following field demonstrations.

The Minister went on to say that it was particularly pleasing to find also that hormone spraying gave promise of more vigorous vine growth. The Department of Agriculture had investigated many aspects of declining vigour of currant vines for many years and had reached the conclusion that it was associated with inadequate root growth. Cincturing had undoubtedly interfered with root development and the fact that it could now be avoided by substituting hormone spraying promised better vines and better yields.

The provision of increased facilities as a result of the establishment of the Upper Swan Research Station enabled more detailed investigations to be conducted and some of these are already in progress. He felt sure that the investigations at the new station would result in increasing benefits to vignerons throughout the whole State.

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