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WOOLBRANDING *of* SHEEP

How to Obtain the Best Results

By Officers of the Sheep and Wool Section

LEGISLATION to enforce the compulsory woolbranding of sheep in Western Australia was introduced at the request of farmers' organisations in 1952. It was felt that the woolbrands would serve as a means of readily establishing ownership of lost or strayed sheep and would act as a deterrent to sheep-stealers.

With the exception of registered stud animals and lambs under six months old, all sheep in the following areas must bear registered woolbrands:—

- (a) The road districts of Dundas, Esperance, Westonia and Yilgarn.
- (b) The South-West Land Division of the State.
- (c) Such parts of the Lake Grace, Merredin, Narembeen and Phillips River road districts that are outside the South-West Division.

Woolbranding of sheep outside the areas listed above is not compulsory except when the animals are moved off the run; for instance, if they are travelled, sold or offered for sale.

Observations made at a number of sale-yards indicate that many woolbrands are smudged and illegible so that much of the protection they should confer is being lost.

Sheep must be branded to conform with the regulations, and it costs just as much in time, labour and material to apply a smudgy, illegible brand as it does to do the job properly.

In this article we hope to indicate how woolbranding can be carried out so as to give the best results—clear, legible brands that are a definite advantage to the flock-owner.

BRANDING FLUIDS

The first step is to use the correct branding fluids. Under the regulations gazetted on May 25, 1955, it is an offence to use other than SI-RO-MARK scourable branding fluids which are prepared according to C.S.I.R.O. formulas and approved by that body. The word SI-RO-MARK on the container is an indication that the branding fluid measures up to these requirements.

In past years, serious losses to the wool industry have resulted from the presence in Australian clips, of wool branded with substances which could not be removed by the normal wool-scouring processes.

C.S.I.R.O. research workers recently evolved a branding fluid which can be completely removed in the scouring process. This is only marketed under the name SI-RO-MARK.

It is available in blue, red and green colours and is the only woolbranding fluid which may now be used.

No black woolbrands are permitted under the Brands Act regulations.

TYPE OF BRAND

Registered brands consist of two letters and a numeral placed in line and not joined together. The arrangement of the letters and numerals and the position of the brand are determined by the Registrar of Brands in allotting the brand to the flock-owner.

The branding tool should preferably be made from $\frac{1}{8}$ in. round iron with the letters well spaced—at least $\frac{3}{4}$ in. apart—to prevent blotching. Letters not less than 3 in. high have been shown to give clear distinct brands, and the branding tool should not measure less than 7 in. across the portion which comes in contact with the sheep.

A satisfactory branding tool can be made from 8-gauge fencing wire if the letters are carefully shaped and joints neatly brazed. Such a branding tool, if dipped directly into the fluid for each sheep will make a clear mark on the tip of the staple.

Stencil brands have proved unsatisfactory and should not be used.

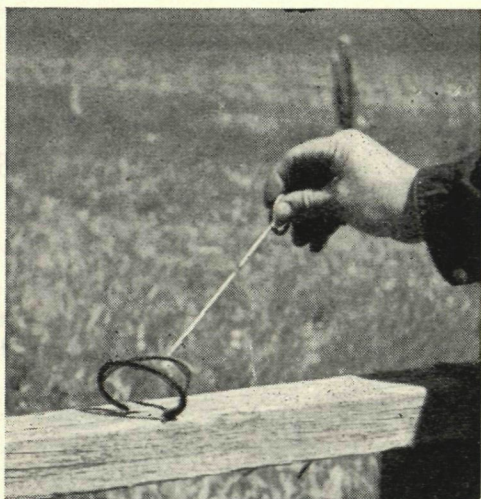


Fig. 1.—A branding tool made of $\frac{1}{8}$ in. round iron. This is a single letter "C" used in test branding and is not a registered brand

A common procedure in the past was to keep a saturated pad of felt or sheepskin pelt in the branding tin and to press the branding-iron on to this before applying it to the sheep. There is no need for any form of pad when using SI-RO-MARK. The best method is to dip the iron directly into the fluid.

APPLYING THE BRAND

Sheep can be branded with much greater ease and efficiency if they are held firmly in a narrow race.

The ideal is a race 2 ft. 6 in. wide situated near the counting-out pens but a

drafting-race, if long enough, is fairly satisfactory and is certainly preferable to chasing sheep around a yard.

Apart from branding, a narrow race is always useful on a farm for mouthing, culling and general inspection work.

Watch the brands carefully and check any faults as they occur. Pack the sheep well into the race so that they cannot move far; make sure that the branding tool carries plenty of fluid; apply it with a quick, firm pressure and remove cleanly without smudging.

For convenience in branding, start at the top end of the race and work down to the other end. As soon as the sheep in the race are all branded, release them immediately so that they do not smudge one another's brands.

Correct application, which is so important for satisfactory branding, involves the following steps:—

- (1) Shake the can before use.
- (2) If the fluid is too thick, warm gently by standing near the shearing engine or by placing in a can of hot water.
- (3) Apply by dipping the iron directly into the fluid.
- (4) To prevent rubbing of the brand do not keep the sheep penned after branding.

After each day's branding is completed, clean the branding tools thoroughly, pour any surplus fluid back into the container and replace the lid firmly.



Fig. 2.—This photograph of sheep newly branded with the test brand, shows how the $\frac{1}{8}$ in. iron gives a clear brand with an impression about $\frac{1}{2}$ in. thick