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Lambing Performance of Finn Crossbred Ewes

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Progress Report

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Increased prolificacy of our domestic ewe flock offers one potential means of increased production per ewe unit. Utilization of a known littering breed, such as the Finnsheep, in a crossbreeding program on the ewe side offers an opportunity to increase the lamb drop from our domestic breeds.

Results of studies at South Dakota State University utilizing Finn crossbred ewes are reported in this paper.

Experimental Procedure

Seventy-five grade Columbia and Suffolk x Columbia ewes were randomly assigned to be mated to a Finn or Suffolk ram in the fall of 1970, 1971 and 1972 to produce one-half Finn or Suffolk crossbred ewes. In addition, a small number of one-fourth Finn crossbred ewes were produced from mating one-half Finn-Columbia rams on Targhee and Suffolk x Targhee ewe lambs and from the mating of Suffolk rams on the one-half Finn ewes produced in 1972.

Lambing results are available for the one-half Finn crossbred ewes in 1972 and 1973 and for the one-fourth Finn crossbred ewes in 1973. Ewes were exposed to Suffolk rams for 34 days to lamb first at 12 months of age. For their second lambing, they were mated to Columbia rams.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of lambing performance at 12 months of age. Little difference was noted in the percent ewes that lambed between the various groups. However, in all comparisons of lambing percentage, either on the basis of ewes exposed or lambing, Finn crossbred ewes excelled the Suffolk crossbred control ewes. In 1973 one-fourth Finn ewes were intermediate to one-half Finn and Suffolk crossbreds in lambing performance. The 1972 data show Finn crossbred ewes produced lambs that were lighter at birth, weaning and market time.

Lambing performance at 24 months of age favored the Finn crossbred ewes (table 2). Lambing percent for ewes exposed was 150 for one-half Finn crossbred ewes vs. 114 for the control Suffolk ewes. Average fleece weights were 6.3 and 6.4 pounds for the Finn and Suffolk crossbred ewes, respectively. Additional production data will be reported as they become available.

Table 1. Lambing Performance of Finn Crossbred Ewes at 12 Months of Age

Breed of ewe	One-half Finn crossbred		One-fourth Finn crossbred	Control--Suffolk crossbred	
Year	1972	1973	1973	1972	1973
Number of ewes exposed	20	21	13	24	24
Number of ewes lambing	13	15	9	16	18
Percent ewes lambing	65	71	69	67	75
Number of lambs born	18	27	12	18	21
Lambing percent					
Ewes exposed	90	129	92	75	86
Ewes lambing	138	180	133	113	117
Average birth wt., lb.[a]	6.0			9.8	
Average weaning wt., lb.[a]	31.6			33.3	
Average wt., Sept. 18, 1972, lb.[a]	86.2			90.3	

[a] Ewe lambs only.

Table 2. Lambing Performance of Finn Crossbred Ewes at 24 Months of Age, 1973[a]

Breed of ewe	One-half Finn crossbred	Control--Suffolk crossbred
Number of ewes exposed	18	22
Number of ewes lambing	15	20
Percent ewes lambing	83	91
No. of lambs born	27	25
Lambing percent		
Ewes exposed	150	114
Ewes lambing	180	125

[a] Second lamb crop.