Irrigated Pastures for Sheep
While sheep numbers on the range and total sheep numbers are decreasing, farm flocks are increasing, along with irrigated forage for feed production. For the following reasons, sheep make good use of irrigated pastures.

* Sheep require only a small cash outlay. Returns from sheep per acre of irrigated land come fast and are relatively high. You can sell wool, old breeding stock, and lambs. Don't expect top returns, however, if you use sheep for ditchbank grazing and only as cleanup animals around the farm.

* Lambs grade high Choice directly off pasture and the dam's milk. Other classes of livestock need some concentrate or grain to put them in top grades on the market.

* The work load with sheep is conveniently distributed. Lambing time does not interfere with other farm operations. On irrigated pastures, lambs can be marketed before the summer slump in pasture production.

* Sheep do not damage laterals, flumes, and head ditches. Consequently, it is not necessary to build expensive fences to keep them out of the irrigation facilities.

This bulletin was prepared by Robert W. Van Keuren, Assistant Agronomist, Irrigation Station, Prosser, Washington; Kenneth J. Morrison, Extension Agronomist, State College of Washington, Pullman, Washington, and Wilton W. Heinemann, Associate Animal Husbandman, Irrigation Experiment Station, Prosser, Washington, respectively.
Establishing the Pasture

Do not locate pasture for ewes and lambs near large laterals. Lambs are sometimes crowded or fall into the laterals and drown.

Land for irrigated sheep pasture should be productive. Don't consider sheep production a hit-and-miss proposition. Irrigated pastures will make sheep production pay, but ewes and lambs that are relegated to cleanup jobs around the farmstead and laterals cannot produce a good return.

Alfalfa and Ladino clover are the two best legumes for sheep grazing. Orchard grass should be used in grass-legume mixtures. If you seed alfalfa alone, 10 pounds per acre are adequate. If you use Ladino clover, seed 3 pounds per acre. Alfalfa-orchard grass should be seeded at the rate of 5 pounds of alfalfa per acre and 6 to 8 pounds of orchard grass.

Preparing the Seedbed

A firm, well-packed seedbed is necessary to establish a good pasture stand. A late summer seeding (August) will be ready to graze the following spring. If you seed in the spring, the grass will not be ready to graze until late in the summer or early in the fall.

The best seeding equipment is a grain drill equipped with depth regulators. Depth regulators make it possible to seed the grass and legumes at a very shallow depth, increasing the chances for a good stand.

Fertilizers

Work 30 pounds of available nitrogen into the seedbed. Use 40 pounds of phosphate for each year the stands will be left in. Phosphate may be top dressed in the fall when adequate amounts have not been applied for the life of the stand. Apply 30 pounds of available nitrogen to an established stand at least three times (April, June, August) during the growing season.

Management

Sheep should be rotationally grazed on the pastures often enough to obtain the maximum feed without trampling or overgrowth losses. Divide the pasture into four equal areas for rotational grazing. Remove the sheep when they have grazed most of the pasture. Leave about 20 per cent of the forage (a 3- to 4-inch stubble). If the sheep are permitted to remain on the paddock after grazing beyond this stage, they may bloat when moved onto a fresh paddock. Also, there is possibility of damage to stand and lowered production of lamb or mutton. Sheep should be off 28 days for best parasite control.

Ladino clover should be 8 to 10 inches high before grazing, and alfalfa should be 12 inches or more. Later in the season the plants contain more fiber, and it is not as necessary for them to be as tall as when first grazed in the spring.

Irrigated pastures should have 4 to 6 inches of growth to go into winter. This will help prevent winter kill due to heaving and cold injury.

Irrigation

With rill irrigation, the flock needs to be checked often. Sheep may lie down, then accidentally roll over on their backs into a rill and die. For this reason the
rills should be as shallow as possible, yet deep enough to get water through the pastures. There should be adequate slope in the rill so that water does not stand in the pastures. Rills for Ladino clover should not be more than 24 inches apart; rills for alfalfa may be 36 inches apart. Ladino clover ordinarily needs more frequent irrigation than alfalfa.

Good pasture management will help reduce the need for clipping, but it may be necessary to clip to eliminate patchy grazing and to control weeds. Excess forage can be used as hay or silage for the winter ration for sheep. Usually, there is an excess of forage during the early growing season if there is to be enough pasture during July and August.

**Carrying Capacity**

Ten to twelve ewes with their lambs can be carried on an acre of irrigated pasture up to the middle of June or the first of July. Then the lambs intended for market should be ready to sell. Generally, a pasture that will carry a given number of ewes and their lambs during June will support the same number of ewes and the replacement ewe lambs the remainder of the season. Follow this general rule only if you market all of the wether lambs and the off-type ewe lambs before July 1.

**Minerals**

Iodized salt should be available in pastures for the sheep at all times. Other minerals may be needed in some areas. The county Extension agent can tell you what mineral supplement is needed in your area.

**Shade**

Breeding herds on irrigated pasture may benefit from shade. Shade should be in the pasture or near enough so that the sheep don't have to travel far from shade to pasture.

**Water**

Sheep need good clean water all the time, even on lush irrigated pastures.
AT THE IRRIGATION EXPERIMENT STATION IN PROSSER, a research scientist checks a trio of sheep that are working their way through a rich stand of alfalfa.

Pasture forages being studied include alfalfa and Ladino clover, seeded alone and with orchard grass.

Results of these and other experiments will be available through your county Extension agent—the State College of Washington’s representative in your county.