

Disasterous drop in woolskin quality

At 70p or less, (autumn 2007) raw woolskin prices ex abattoir hit their lowest level since the 1998 Sheepskin Industry crash.

There is serious concern that hundreds of thousands of skins will have to be incinerated.

Movement restrictions following FMD release and Blue Tongue delayed the annual kill but, instead of skin shortage creating price increase, export restrictions and bio-security fears caused* a glut of skins which had the opposite effect.

When the sheep food chain finally re-opened, abattoirs and skin traders have been hit by a flood of skins they are expected some how to handle.

This pressure has led to a major decline in skin selection & preservation standards and as a result:

THE MOST SERIOUS DROP IN SKIN PRESENTATION SEEN IN LIVING MEMORY – LOOK FOR YOURSELF IN THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

*China alone reportedly rejected 100+ containers of skins and hides on the high seas!



Markers



Pharmaceutical Preparations can stain the fleece permanently

We have been evaluating current treatments from skins being supplied by smallholders where we have the possibility of identifying the cause.

Dysect appears to be the main cause of this yellow stain. For smallholders this ruins classic exotic skins such as Jacob sheep

Figure 1: Dysect classic application - finished skin

General Identification Markers



Animals presented for slaughter now receive a variety of sprays.

The result can be "Joseph's Coat of many colours". Most sprays will wash out – as required by the British Wool Marketing Board. Some remain and spoil the natural appearance of the sheepskin with devaluation of the finished product.

Figure 2: Skin dye markers - will they wash out?

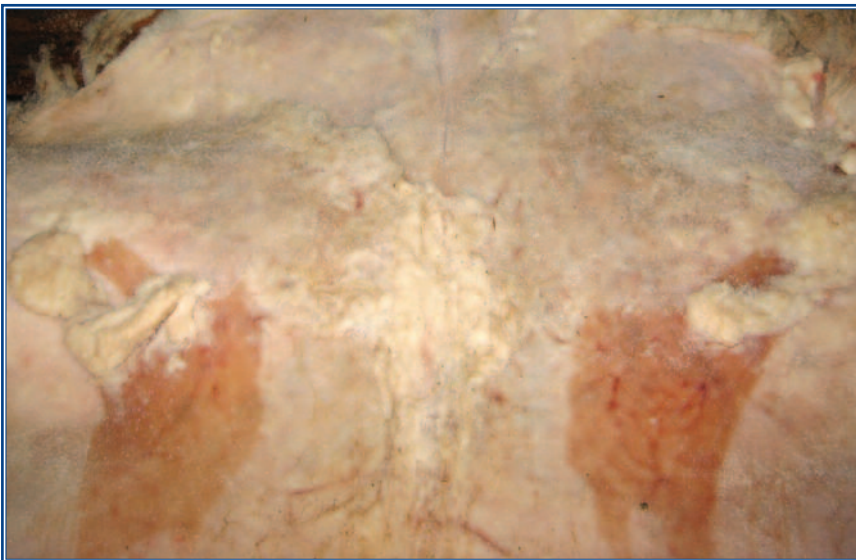
Belly Shearing



Hygiene requirements introduced by Vets and supermarkets have reduced the yield from lambskins. The bellies may have a foot of bare pelt – rugs are mis-shapen and yields for other woolskin products reduced by 10% of the leather area. The costs at sales value are at least £3 per skin

Figure 3: Belly Shear in Bandknifed UK Domestic

Raw Bandknifing at Hide Markets



Bandknifing Raw Sheepskins

Export packs for Doubleface to Turkey in the 1990's resulted in Hide Markets and some Abattoirs bandknifing raw skins prior to salting and containerization. This increased loading and produced lambswool for sale in the UK. However, fat lumps remain on many skins.

Figure 4: Fat lumps left on Green UK Domestic before Bandknife

Damage caused by large Fat Lumps creating uneven wool shear



As the skin passes under the shearing knife the raised area of the fat (top right shoulder in the image) pushes the skin up into the cut. At best the wool is too short to use for doubleface – at worst a hole is cut in the skin. Damaged skins have to be rejected and the Woolskin premium is lost to the trade.

Figure 5: Depression left in wool - cannot make required wool length in key sheepskin products

Inadequate Salting



Preservation of Woolskins is essential to avoid wool slip and putrefaction. Many small abattoirs and Hide markets do not have facilities for large scale drum salting. Hand Salting has to be perfect – no folds with complete coverage. For woolskins, a second salting on day 2 is now often missed out – this means there is no check on the unsalted folds and the whole skin is at risk.

Figure 6: Unsalted areas under folds in the skin are shown by brown putrefaction stains along the edges. Wool slip will result when the skins are washed.

Bad Salting – Wool Slip



Once the skin has been tanned the areas of wool slip are revealed – patches of Grain Leather. It is now impossible to recover the pelt for leather, Chrome Tanning is irreversible. The result is a skin of little value – SCRAP.

For longwools, the tannery has to deal with copious amounts of loose wool which contaminates good skins forming felts which are difficult to free.

The disposal problems of this kind of mess just adds to environmental charges!

Figure 7: Extreme wool slip bald patches of Grain Leather

To close – take a look at what we all should strive for - Perfect Woolskins



Figure 9: Perfect tanned Lambskin



Figure 10: Perfect tanned Lambskin sheared down to 25mm for infant care.

The Real Sheepskin Association views this deterioration with great concern. Cheap woolskins may look like a benefit to the tanners but un-useable raw stock of low value is a disastrous loss to the whole Sheep Industry - farmer, breeders, smallholders, meat and hide markets as well as 'fifth quarter' processors like the Wool and Sheepskin Industries.

The Real Sheepskin Association is committed to promoting British sheepskin products – they are in fact far and away potentially the sheep industry's most valuable by-product!!!!

To see what we can do with them visit www.realsheepskin.org.uk

The Real Sheepskin Association 2008

