

Federation of Yorkshire Commoners and Moorland Graziers

SUMMARY

STOCK AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT

This guide is intended to be a useful source of advice and information for the members of the Yorkshire Federation of Commoners and Moorland Graziers.

1. Recognise the fells are divided into a number of grazing area or “heafs/hefts” occupied by particular stock of sheep.

Sheep have a territorial instinct and graze area of fell where they have been acclimatised and trained to stay. The boundaries are normally associated with physical features such as a valley head running up to the surrounding water-shed or ridges and gullies.

2. Shepherds should co-operate with each other in respecting traditional “heafing” boundaries and recognising that some movement of boundaries is inevitable.

The area can change or overlap according to movement in levels of stocking between “heafs” and there can be regular two-way movement of flocks across boundaries according to weather conditions and human activity.

3. Breed flock replacements from resident flock and ensure that the lambs are allowed to graze the fells with their mothers.

Lambs become “heafed” to a particular area of the fell (called a “heaf”) and become acclimatised to the harsh conditions and diseases (e.g. from ticks) on that area of fell.

4. Maintain the traditional fleece mark and ear marks for each stock of sheep.

Each flock has a traditional fleece mark and ear (“Lug”) mark. These are listed in the “Shepherds Guides” which should be held by fell farmers and be readily available to everyone with an active interest in farming on the fells. The local hill farming community and publisher of the guide should be advised of any changes and mistakes.

5. Ensure that the flock stays with the farm in order to maintain the system of “heafs” and “heafed” flocks with their unique identification marks.

It is expected that the outgoer will sell the stock sheep in regular ages to the ingoer. This arrangement should be formalised in a tenancy agreement

6. Fell sheep removed off the farm should not return to any surrounding fell.

Turning sheep out to surrounding fell is likely to result in disruption of heafs and bad feeling in the community. Unheafed sheep should be sympathetically integrated into the flock fell.

7. Grazing rights on common land must not be exceeded

Particular care should be taken to avoid excessive stocking rates during autumn where there is a practice of turning-out crossing ewes after weaning. Any environmental conditions agreed by commoners and graziers should be adhered to.

8. The husbandry of fell flocks should be practiced by shepherds and sheep farmers who have had the experience of similar conditions.

Ideally, shepherds should be resident in the area and have served their apprenticeship on the fells either with their family or an employee. Newcomers are urged to consult their neighbours and in the case of commons, officials of the Commoners Associations.

9. Shepherds should co-operate at gathering times, promptly exchanging strays (or holding by arrangement) and notifying each other when problems arise on the fell.

The identity of each heft will be enhanced if gathered separately and adjoining sheep shed off on site. Any strays brought in should be returned as soon as possible

10. Maintain at least three consecutive generations of breeding ewes mated to hill tups, using breeds appropriate to hill conditions.

This ensures a supply of suitable home-bred ewe replacements and continuation of an established fell flock.

11. Operate a robust health programme, for scab prevention, use products that will not allow further contamination within the “scab mite” life cycle (17 days).

Ensure that all sheep on that area are treated with this period. Regular tick treatment of sheep should be undertaken where appropriate. Clearing the fells by mutual agreement at appropriate times aids flock health management and checking sheep numbers.

12. Do not allow entire lambs on the fell after the end of September

13. Any feeding on open moorland should take account of adjoining sheep; poaching issues; contamination of water courses and increased peripheral grazing of heather.

14. If hogs are returned to the heafs in the absence of ewes, some corrective shepherding may be necessary taking account of ground nesting birds. (See para 1)

15. When sheep are away wintered, it will be beneficial to maintain the integrity of each heft where possible.

16. Co-ordination with burning plan operation is essential to maintain a nutritional rotation within each heft area. Ensure access to the whole area through fire linkage.

A map of grazing heft boundaries should be drawn up.

17. Heft grazing integrity is maintained by a balanced grazing pattern within each heft. it is essential to maintain this balance throughout the area.

The removal of sheep or from one or more hefts will disrupt the whole system as sheep move into unfamiliar territory. It is also beneficial to maintain some sheep on hefts throughout the winter to maintain and enhance the trods within that heft, giving access to all areas.