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“TAKES LONGER TO TRAIN THE DRIVER THAN THE SHEEP”

Trained Sheep “Love A Parade”

by Cathie Shaffer

“They love a parade,” says Ed Etzler of VanWert, Ohio, who has trained eight of his registered Hampshire sheep to pull a wagon in parades, and at fairs and livestock shows.

It all started back in 1976, but it wasn't simply a matter of hitching them up and taking off. It took lots of hard work and plenty of figuring.

Before he could learn to drive his “sheep train”, Ed had to find a way to hitch them up. He designed the harnesses himself. Then, using scrap leather, he sewed them together with the help of a friend who runs a sewing machine in a factory.

Ed started with two sheep and worked up to eight. His “eight-sheep hitch” is hitched to a wagon of his own design that's equipped with a brake.

“Getting the sheep into the harness was a challenge, but teaching them to pull the wagon was an even greater

challenge. I used the same commands as for driving horses,” Ed points out.

Two ewes, Patty and Margie, have been in the hitch from the start. So far as Ed knows, his present hitch of eight is the only one in existence. “I know of a six-sheep hitch in Utah but I believe ours is the only one with eight sheep.”

Driving sheep is a family project. Ed's wife Marilyn does the secretarial work, makes the bookings, and helps hitch the team. Their son, Danny, is the “brake man” and assistant driver. The Etzler's two daughters, June and Sally, help out when they are home on a visit.

“It takes as long for a driver to learn to drive sheep as it takes the sheep to learn to be driven,” Ed says. He has taken his sheep to 28 parades and five county fairs. They have performed at the City Hall Plaza in Springfield, Ill., and appear regularly at the North

**FARM
SHOW**

Ag World

BUSINESS IS BOOMING

They Operate A Cricket Farm

If the chirp of a cricket is a sign of good luck, Larry and Myrna Hockin of Clare, Mich., should be very lucky. They raise and sell more than 3 million crickets every year.

Larry and his wife Myrna have been operating Royal's Cricket Farm for the past three years. It's the only year-round cricket farm in Michigan.

The crickets are sold mainly for fish bait, and to pet owners and laboratories as food for spiders, turtles and birds. About 95% of the business is commercial; the rest is small orders for fishermen, or people with pets.

Business has been so good that last year the Hockins had to buy 3 million crickets from another farm to fill their orders.

Cricket farms are sold at a price of \$12 a thousand if shipped, \$10 a thousand if picked up at the farm. They are delivered by regular mail in Michigan, and by airmail to out-of-state customers.

Market-ready crickets are shipped in cardboard boxes that hold about 1,000 each. In the peak summer season, the Hockins often ship out 50,000 a day. Crickets must arrive alive, and can't be in transit more than 2 days.

“We don't count out every 1,000 crickets,” says Larry. “Instead, we measure them in a quart jar which is pretty close to a thousand.”

Royal's Cricket Farm houses the crickets in two pole sheds. Peat or ground up newspapers provide an egg-laying medium for the females.

Cricket farms are fed regular chicken mash and 3 million of them will eat about 500 lbs. a week.

Female crickets develop wings at four weeks of age. Consequently, bins where they are growing must be covered with screens to keep them from flying away.

The cricket business has been good and the Hockins say they might expand into a fully-equipped bait store as a sideline.

For anyone thinking about getting into “cricket farming”, Larry estimates it would take about \$40,000 for a building, bins and equipment. The crickets are the gray or Oriental type and breeding stock can be bought from established cricket farms.

For more information, contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Royal's Cricket Farm, 2041 S. Clare Ave., Clare, Mich. 48617 (ph 517 386-3209).

American International Livestock Exposition in Louisville, Ky.

Ed has retired his lead team from his breeding flock but the other six ewes lamb each year. In fact, one ewe that performed at the Louisville show in 1979 delivered triplets and raised them all.

“The sheep seem to like crowds and the applause. They're usually very good about letting kids come up and pet them,” says Marilyn.

Ed adds that, “We don't intend to add any more sheep to the hitch, but we're going to do more things with them. We can do circles and figure 8's, but there's a lot more we can do if we practice. So, we're going to practice.”