

# Leading a flock of sheep

## *An inspiring account of Veerakempanna*

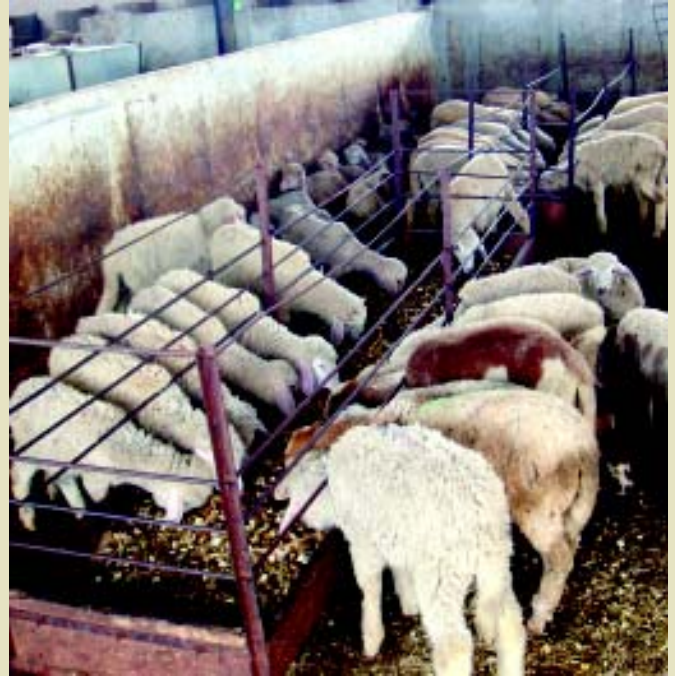
**S**heep are the gift to dryland farmers by nature which can yield returns within 1.5 years of investment, says Veerakempanna. Veerakempanna of Anoor village in Chikkabalapur district, like any other dryland farmer in Karnataka, unable to meet the ends with dryland farming alone, was supplementing his income by rearing some local breeds of sheep.

From the beginning, Veerakempanna has been keen on rearing sheep on his farm. He feels that while dairy requires higher investment, poultry is risky and goats are highly susceptible to disease and cause damage to the environment. But the local breeds that he had were of low productivity with low quality wool. In 1973, he saw some exotic sheep breeds in the congress exhibition held at Bangalore. He was interested in improving his local graded *Bannur* sheep with this dual purpose *Corriedale* ram one. But he could not afford it at that point of time. In the next five years, Veerakempanna somehow managed to mobilise resources and bought the dual purpose *Corriedale* ram. This marked the beginning of his journey as a sheep entrepreneur.

A keen learner, Veerakempanna visited various farms, local veterinary hospitals and the research institutes to know about the various diseases and learn how to treat them. With careful management, Veerakempanna was successful in getting good returns from sheep rearing. In a few years, the number of sheep on his farm increased to 60. Further, he went on to learn the nuances of shearing, grading, spinning and weaving from Dr. Kareem Khan, a scientist at Ranibennur. He took around 500 kgs of wool to Ranibennur, which was weaved in to blankets and sold.

By the year 1995, Veerakempanna bought another 6 acres of land by the income generated from his sheep rearing. He made a number of innovations in feed management. He earmarked some land exclusively for cultivating fodder. He started growing fodder sorghum. Besides feeding sheep with green fodder, he started converting the excess fodder to silage and hay. Gradually he also adopted stall feeding for the sheep along with open grazing. He continues to supplement the feed with nutritional additives. In future, he plans to prepare and use fodder pellets in stall feeding.

Also, Veerakempanna has been successfully integrating his cropping as well as livestock systems. While the crop residues form a source of feed to the sheep, the sheep manure is applied back to the soil. The most important objective of letting the sheep graze on his lands is to enrich his soil with its urine and manure. He collects the dung from the stalls and applies to his land.



*Stall feeding for effective feed management.*

Veerakempanna sells off the additional sheep manure which is in great demand, also helping in improving the soil fertility in the neighbouring fields.

Veerakempanna has received a number of awards for his skills in sheep breeding, for promoting stall feeding and promoting integrated farming systems. He represents a number of committees working on sheep improvement. He is a much sought after resource person by the government departments as well as NGOs. He has been spreading knowledge on sheep rearing widely. Also his farm has been attracting a number of visitors from India and abroad.

Today, Veerakempanna's farm is a place of learning. He trains a number of people on sheep management. He helps sheep rearers in breeding improved breeds. He guides all those who are keen to start sheep rearing. A true 'inspirer' indeed.

*Veerakempanna can be contacted at Anoor village, Sidlaghatta Taluk, Chikkaballapur Dist, Karnataka. Phone: 08158-256117  
E-mail: vkempannasheepbreed@rediffmail.com*

*This article was prepared on the basis of interactions with the farmer by Mr. Ranganath Babu and Mr. B V Joshi, AME Foundation, Bangalore.*