

FIGURE 7.

Most of the beef cattle in the Western States are beef cattle on stock ranches and stock farms. In the beef-cattle population of the Western States, there is a somewhat higher proportion of beef breeding cows than is usual for the United States (compare Figures 6 and 7). The western stock ranches are beef breeding and raising operations which produce large numbers of young feeder animals that are marketed to the farms of the upper Mississippi Valley for feed-lot fattening and finishing (see Figure 7). Consequently, the concentration of total cattle numbers in the upper Mississippi Valley States (see Figure 6) is partly due to the export of the feeder animals from the breeding herds of western stock ranches. Thus, as a result of past economic developments, the stock ranches of the Western States have become integrated with the economy of the stock farms in the upper Mississippi Valley.

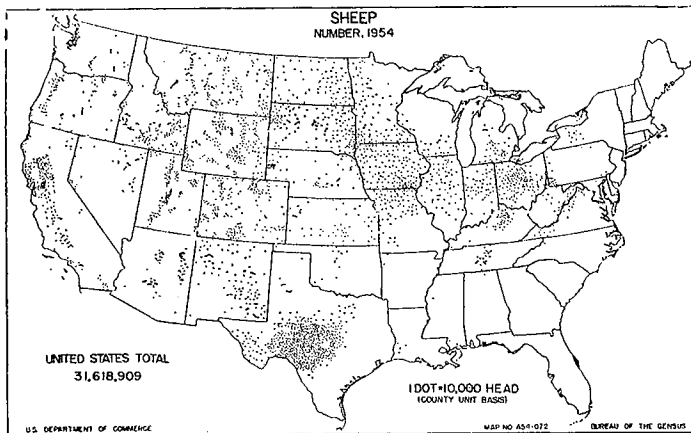


FIGURE 8.

The stock ranches of the West are the dominant factor in the production of sheep in the United States (see Figure 8). The major part of the sheep population of the Western States is on stock ranches rather than on stock farms, although in recent years farm flocks have increased. There is a rather striking concentration of the number of range sheep in the Edwards Plateau district of Texas (see Figure 8). Sheep are widely distributed among the ranches of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico, and others of the Western States.

The sheep ranches, like the cattle ranches, are considerably integrated with the livestock and feeding and fattening farms of the upper Mississippi Valley. Large numbers of feeder lambs from the range bands of the western stock ranches move into the farm feed lots of this part of the Mississippi Valley for fattening and finishing. Many of the feeder lambs from the western sheep ranches are fed for finishing in the irrigated districts of the West. This accounts for the concentration of sheep numbers in the California Central Valley district.

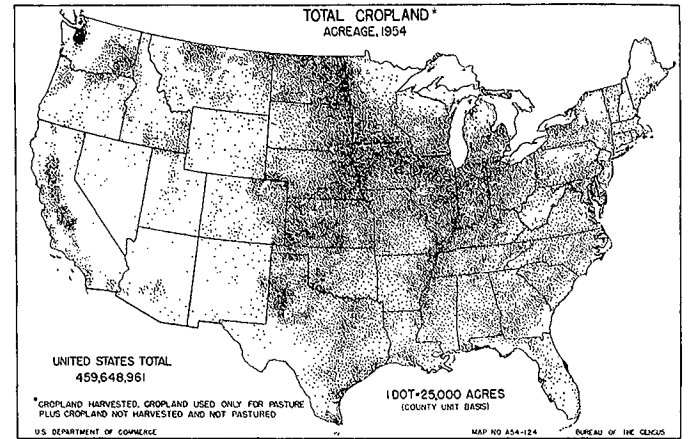


FIGURE 9.

To summarize this general characterization of the stock ranches of the West, it may be said that their economy is that of harvesting large acreages of native forage through the use of grazing animals, with the production and use of a minimum quantity of agricultural crop feeds. This fact is further illustrated by Figure 9. A comparatively limited acreage is devoted to cropland in the 11 Western States. The stock ranches of the West use some agricultural crop feeds and in certain areas may use a considerable quantity, but in the main they derive the major part of the livestock feed from grazing lands. They produce livestock which, generally, go to the farming areas that produce decidedly more crop feeds where they are fed and fattened for market.

Natural Regions

Preliminary to an analysis and discussion of the differences in stock ranching in the Western States, it is illuminating to describe the natural characteristics of the larger natural land areas in the West and their influence upon differences in the stock-ranching operations. A brief discussion of the natural characteristics of the principal physiographic regions of the West, and the influence of the natural factors by regions upon the ranches is valuable as background for understanding the differences in western stock ranching, for the stock ranch must adapt itself to nature and natural environment to a much greater extent than is true of crop agriculture.

There are four principal overall general regions of the West. They are (1) the Great Plains, (2) the Rocky Mountains, (3) the Intermountain Plateau region, and (4) the Pacific Coast region. Within these large general regions there are definitely recognized physiographic areas based upon such considerations as land forms, geologic and soil factors, and climate.