Sheep Management Before the Breeding Season

Introduction

Lambs should be born within a 30 day period and eight weeks before pastures to make the best possible market lambs, weighing 80-100 pounds by July 15. This requires good management, and the following are some suggestions:

Take Care Of Your Rams

1. Keep the rams away from the ewes except during the breeding season. The gestation period is 146 to 152 days.
2. Provide one ram over one year of age for each 35 ewes so you have plenty of ram power. Ram lambs should not be used on more than 15 ewes.
3. Select rams that are wide-awake, meaty, active and not over-fat. They should be well-grown, heavy-boned, and sound in every respect.
4. Avoid rams that are over-fat, lame, have small testicles, have overshot or undershot jaws, have broken pasterns, are wool-blind, or from flocks where there are lame sheep.
5. Shear the rams during July or August; it keeps them cool. They will be more vigorous and active and will breed and settle more ewes in less time. The result will be more lambs at nearly the same age.
6. Trim the rams' feet a month before you turn them in with the ewes. Lameness in sheep is largely caused by neglect.
7. Do everything possible to have the rams strong and vigorous. They should do their years' work in 30 days.

Give the Ewes A Chance

1. Keep the ewes as uniform as possible in age, condition, type and size.
2. Give the ewes a rest before the breeding season. Sell all market lambs that weigh 80 pounds on or before August 1.
3. Put the ewes on short permanent pasture so that they will dry up and not be over-fat at the breeding season.
4. Wean all lambs that aren't fat enough to sell by August 1.
5. Drench the ewes to control stomach worms as soon as the lambs are sold or weaned.
6. Shear the wool away from their docks. This may be done by crowding the ewes into a small pen, using a Shear Master, and trimming the ewes while they are standing crowded together. Shear the heads of any sheep that are wool blind.
7. Trim their feet.
8. Examine each ewe's udder. Sell all ewes that are non-producers, old, unthrifty, poor milkers or have spoiled udders.
9. Replacement ewes should be well-grown. The size of a yearling ewe before first breeding is a good indication of how large her lamb will be, both at birth and weaning time.

Carefully selected, well-grown Western ewe lambs often are very productive long-lived ewes for Corn Belt flocks.

Replacement ewes may also be selected from the first born fastest growing portion of the ewe lamb crop. Don't overlook twins. They are money makers.
A third source (lower cost) is to obtain solid mouthed, four year old Western ewes and use them only one or two years.

Sheep Management During Breeding Season

Your objective should be to have every ewe bred and settled during the first month of the breeding season.

Good management and very close observation are especially important. Here are some suggestions:

(1) Both ewes and rams should not be over-fat at the beginning of the breeding season. During the breeding season many sheepmen give their ewes and rams a small feed of grain, such as .25 or .5 pound of whole oats each day.

(2) Treat ewes for internal parasites before the breeding season, if possible.

(3) There is a good chance that ewes will breed more readily on blue grass or mixed pasture than on legume pasture.

(4) Pay close attention to the rams. They need rest and extra feed during the breeding season.

(5) One good plan if you have 3 rams and 100 ewes is to turn one ram in with the ewes for twelve hours. Then take him out, feed all the rams one to two pounds of grain, and turn in the second ram for twelve hours. Repeat the process and then turn in the third ram. This keeps a fresh ram with the ewes all of the time and gives a ram 24 hours of rest for each 12 hours of breeding service.

(6) Make a record of the date on which the rams were turned in with the ewes.

(7) Check on the rams. Not all rams are fertile. About three rams in 100 are sterile. A few more will be of low fertility. Some ewes are shy breeders.

One way to check on the rams is to use a coloring material, such as yellow ochre, Venetian red, Prussian blue or lamp black, mixed with pressure gun grease or hard oil. Apply some of this material to the chest of the rams each day and they will mark every ewe that they breed. This is one means of checking on the rams after they have been with the ewes for 40 to 60 days.

(8) The key feature of an efficient lamb program is to have the lambs born within a period of 30-35 days of the time you want them. This means that the flock management before and during the breeding season must be as nearly perfect as possible.