Feeding and Managing the Ewe Flock during the Winter

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service
FEEDING AND MANAGING THE EWE FLOCK DURING THE WINTER

The basis for a good winter ration for the ewe flock is top quality legume hay. Satisfactory results can be obtained from grass silage if it is made with a preservative such as corn. High quality roughage makes for healthy, strong lambs at birth. If corn or sorghum silage is fed, be sure to include at least 2 pounds of top quality legume hay or 1 pound of alfalfa meal or pellets per day per ewe.

Winter pasture, such as bluegrass, brome, fescue, rye or winter wheat, is a natural and excellent winter feed for ewes. Providing pasture insures that the ewes will get some exercise, which is good for any pregnant animal. It also helps keep the sheep barn clean and saves the bedding until lambing time.

Keep the ewes in good condition, but not excessively fat. Excessively fat ewes are difficult to get with lamb and have more trouble at lambing time. Ordinarily, a ewe should gain 20 to 35 pounds during pregnancy, and most of that should be made in the latter part of the gestation period. Remember, the life of the lamb starts when the ewe is bred. In other words, a lamb is fed for 5 months (146 to 152 days) before birth.

If ewes are in poor condition, feed 1/2 to 1 pound of grain, such as corn, oats or mixture of both, per day per ewe. This is particularly advisable during the last month or 6 weeks before the lambs are born.

Stiff lamb disease: If you are having trouble with stiff lamb disease, feed the ewes equal parts of crushed or rolled wheat and wheat bran, 1/2 pound per day, 30 days prior to lambing, along with roughage. Continue this mixture in the creep feed for the lambs.

Tag the ewes. Shear the heads of wool-blind sheep. A wool-blind sheep is helpless.

Keep the rams away from the ewes during the winter. Avoid narrow gates or high sills that the ewes must jump over. Provide enough trough space for every ewe, and arrange the troughs so the ewes can get to all of them easily. Many lambs can be saved by not crowding the heavy pregnant ewes.

A good mineral mixture consists of 2 parts bone meal and 1 part loose iodized salt. If you live in a cobalt deficient area, add 1 ounce of cobalt sulfate per 100 pounds of salt.

Provide fresh, clean water at all times.

Do not pasture the ewes in corn stalk fields. There is often too much corn, the roughage is too coarse and low grade and there is danger of bruising the ewes' udders on the heavy stalks.

Many pregnant ewes are shorn just before lambing. They must be handled carefully and shorn by careful, experienced shearers. A shorn ewe is a better mother than an unshorn ewe because she will keep her lambs in the barn during cold, rainy weather. The lambs can nurse more easily. Shorn ewes are less likely to crowd or smother their lambs by laying on them.

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