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Save Every Lamb

Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service

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SHEEP

Save Every Lamb

Breeding and Gestation

A good lamb crop starts in the fall before the breeding season. Be sure that the rams are as strong and healthy as possible during the breeding season.

Examine the ewes carefully. Dispose of all ewes that are non-producers, old, unthrifty, poor milkers or have spoiled udders. Provide winter pasture and legume hay for ewes. Ewes should gain 20 to 30 pounds in the gestation period.

Many farmers shear their ewes just before lambing if they have adequate shelter. A shorn ewe is much more sensitive to the needs of a baby lamb. She will keep the lamb where it is warm and generally she will not crowd or lay on her lamb. Also shorn ewes require less barn room.

Lambing

Keep the pregnant ewes away from rams and all other livestock. Be ready to take care of lambs at least a week before they are due. The gestation period is 146 days. As soon as a lamb is born, make sure that he nurses. Then put him with his mother in a lambing pen in a warm part of the barn. Use lightweight gates to make the pens. Disinfect his navel with iodine.

Give the ewe fresh water and a small amount of hay - no grain the first day. After the second day, feed a small amount of grain along with their hay. Watch for scours in the lambs. If there is any sign of scours or pinning, reduce the feed for the ewes.

When the lambs are strong enough to follow their mothers, turn a half-dozen ewes and their lambs together. In large flocks, it is advisable to keep ewes with twins separate from ewes with single lambs. This makes it possible to feed the ewes for greater milk production.

When the lambs are 10 days old, feed the ewes liberally (one to two pounds of grain per day) in order to provide plenty of milk for their lambs. Lambs gain in proportion to the amount of milk they receive from their mothers. If ewes are not receiving legume hay or mixed hay, feed about .25 pound of protein supplement per day per ewe.

Dock and castrate lambs at three to ten days of age. Both operations may be performed at the same time. Be sure to use a disinfectant solution, such as creolin or lysol, and wash your hands and knife before each operation. Handle the lambs very quietly. As soon as a lamb is docked and castrated, lay him gently in another clean well-bedded pen away from the ewes for a few hours.

Provide a creep for the lambs as soon as they get their teeth. This is at about 10 days of age. Locate this creep in a clean, well-bedded, well-lighted part of the barn. Hang a reflector flood lamp four or five feet above the floor. This will attract the lambs to the creep. The creep should contain fresh water, a small amount of leafy, green hay, salt and grain. Coarsely cracked corn, rolled oats and bran are good lamb feeds. After a few weeks, the lambs will prefer whole grain.

A good lamb ration consists of: 1800 pounds shelled corn, 300 pounds oats, 600 pounds alfalfa, 100 pounds molasses and 200 pounds protein supplement (32-40 per cent protein) ground over a 1 3/8 inch screen. Lambs should be hand-fed all they will eat twice each day. Additional hay should be provided. A complete ration containing both concentrate and roughage has been developed by Purdue. A Cooperative Extension publication AS-367, "The Purdue 58 Lamb Pellet" contains information about this ration which can be self-fed. Pelleted rations usually increase consumption and also gains.

Try to have the lambs weigh 40 to 50 pounds by May 1. Then good pastures, such as clover and timothy or brome and alfalfa, will provide all or most of the feed required to finish the lambs at 80 to 100 pounds by July 1 or before.

Sell market lambs, weighing 80 to 100 pounds, at weaning time.

Orphan Lambs

Every ewe should raise a lamb. Orphan lambs or one of twins should be transferred to a ewe with no lambs. One method is to put the ewe in a stanchion in the corner of a lambing pen. She can be kept there until she adopts the lamb. Hold the ewe so that the lamb can nurse every few hours. Feed and water the ewe so that she will have plenty of milk.

When it is necessary to raise a lamb with a bottle, feed the lamb about the same

as a newborn baby. Use cow's milk or diluted evaporated milk. Feed only 4 ounces each 3 or 4 hours. As the lamb grows, increase the amount and the time between feedings.

Weaning Lambs

Ewes naturally produce milk for two to three months. Two possible management programs are as follows:

Early lambs born before February 1 may be weaned before the ewes go to pasture. These lambs should be well-fed until they go to market (80-100 pounds at four to five months of age). Put the dams on short rations to dry them up and maintain them but prevent them from becoming over-fat.

Late lambs born March 1 or later should be receiving plenty of milk from their mothers when pastures become most productive. If the pastures are well fertilized and productive, these ewes will increase their milk flow while on the pasture. This added milk will provide all or most of the nutrients needed to get the lambs ready for market.

Keep the lambs gaining rapidly. Weigh a few marked lambs each week. They should gain from four to seven pounds per week. Sell them when they weigh from 85-110 pounds.

For information on "Accelerated Lambing Program" see Purdue University Cooperative Extension Publication AS-329.