



Preparing for Lambing

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Lambing time is the busiest season of the year. This time spent with the ewes will be either the failure or success of your enterprise. There are three major components to remember:

1. Body condition of the ewes- have them in good to excellent condition
2. Be prepared
3. Pay attention to details

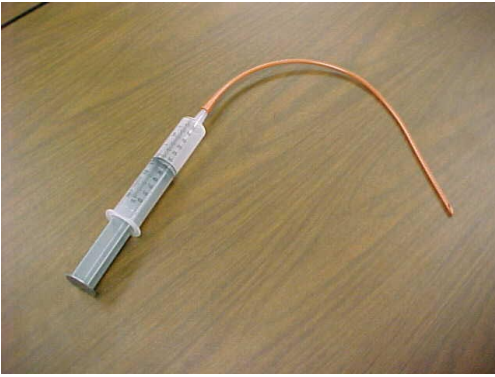
Body Condition

Body condition of ewes is important both at breeding time as well as lambing time. Ewes will lose weight as they are nursing their lambs, so they need some extra condition to keep up their energy needed for milk production. In addition, ewes will need to keep in good condition to insure lambs are developed and large enough in size to survive outside their mother's womb. Energy levels during pregnancy should be increased during the last third of the pregnancy to prevent diseases such as pregnancy toxemia. This disease is caused by poor nutrition, in particular low energy levels, throughout the last part of the pregnancy.

Be Prepared

Preparing for lambing begins long before any ewes actually lamb. You should have several supplies on hand as well as have facilities prepared to handle the newborns. Some of the supplies you may want to have on hand include the following:

- Iodine: Dip navels of newborn lambs as soon after birth as possible. Do not dip navels on lambs that have been born for several hours. The iodine helps to dry up the cord and dipping lambs after several hours can cause bacteria to be sealed inside the cord and may result in a navel infection
- Colostrum: You should keep a supply of several ounces of colostrum in the freezer in the event that a ewe does not have milk, does not have enough milk, or has milk on only one side of her udder with twins. Thaw colostrum slowly in a container of warm water. Thawing in the microwave or heating too hot will destroy the antibodies in the colostrum.



- **Weak Lamb Feeding Tube:** For lambs that are too weak to stand up and nurse on their own, you can place milk directly into their stomach using a feeding tube. When inserting the tube through the mouth of the lamb, be sure he swallows. This will insure that the tube goes to the stomach and not to the lungs. The feeding tube is also useful for lambs that have gotten chilled.

- **Milk Replacer:** For those lambs that become orphaned or are removed from their mothers, you will need a supply of milk replacer to feed them. Lambs less than a week old will need fed four to five times a day. Allow them to drink as much as they want. As the lamb gets older, you can decrease the number of feedings to three times and then to twice a day. Bottle lambs can be weaned at 30 to 45 days. Limit older lambs to approximately 20 ounces of milk at a feeding. Larger quantities can make a lamb sick or even kill it. To wean lambs, decrease the number of feedings gradually and then decrease the amount of milk at each feeding until the lamb is consuming all dry feed.
- **Towels:** As lambs are born it is a good idea to dry their heads off. This helps to clear the mucous away so that the lamb can breathe more easily. During cold weather, toweling a lamb will help to get them dried off quicker, helping to prevent chilling.



- **Heat Lamp or "Lamb Hotel:"** If you lamb during cold weather, you may need a heat lamp to prevent lambs from becoming chilled. Weak lambs may also need a heat source so that the milk they drink is used to make them stronger and not used to keep them warm. Newborn lambs have very little fat covering and can use up those fat stores very quickly during very cold weather. The "lamb hotel" is a barrel that has a heat lamp hanging from the top and a door cut into the side for the lambs to enter. The "hotel" supports the heat lamp so that the ewe can't knock it down and also radiates the heat to keep the lamb warmer. When hanging a heat lamp by itself, remember to hang it so that if it gets knocked down, the lamp will come unplugged. Heat lamps are capable of causing a barn fire if left unattended.

- **Bottles and Nipples:** Be sure to have several bottles and nipples on hand for feeding colostrums or milk replacer to weak or orphaned lambs.
- **Antibiotic:** Some type of antibiotic is useful in the event that a lamb or ewe develops an infection. Types of infections that you may find in ewes include those from a retained placenta or a vaginal tear as the lambs were born. You may also need to treat lambs or ewes for pneumonia.

- **Lubricant:** Ewes that need assistance during lambing may need some type of lubricant to make it easier to pull the lamb. Typical lubricants include liquid soaps or powdered lubricants that must be mixed with water.
- **Warm water, bucket and soap:** In the event that a ewe needs assistance and you must reach inside her to realign a lamb, be sure to scrub your hand and arm first. Also remove any jewelry.
- **Propylene Glycol or Molasses:** Ewes who exhibit pregnancy disease will need a source of extra energy that will increase the blood sugar levels. Ewes will need four to eight ounces of propylene glycol daily. Treatment is difficult, so be sure to have ewes in good condition prior to pregnancy and maintain that condition throughout pregnancy. Feed a higher level of energy the last four to six weeks of the pregnancy. Grain rations or simply shelled corn are good sources of energy.



Lambing Quarters (Jugs)

Be sure to have enough room to prevent overcrowding. This is very important. You should allow approximately 16 square feet for each ewe, but plan for a larger area if you have large sized ewes. There should be plenty of ventilation, but the area should be free of drafts. There should be enough air movement to allow for air-exchange. Your sheep should never be closely housed.

You want to keep the jugs dry and well bedded. You want to use straw or another suitable bedding material. Sawdust is not considered a suitable material due to contamination of the ewe at lambing. Your jugs should be made of moveable panels. These pens can be set up and taken down as needed. They need to be approximately 3 feet high and 4 feet long.

You should expect the first lambs to arrive a few days prior to the full 21 weeks. The ewes that are close to lambing should be penned so that they can be watched carefully. Be sure to not overcrowd. Many lambs have been lost when the ewe crushes the first born while trying to give birth to the second one. Only give assistance when the ewe has need of it. This is critical. Many times the ewe has not given up but is just in need of a rest. If you have to give assistance be sure the lamb is in the right position. Front legs and the head should be pointing forward. However, a lamb that is coming backwards can be delivered in that position. If the lamb is in an abnormal position then it must be pushed back and brought forward in a normal position. Always, when pulling, pull downward when the ewe strains. Be sure to disinfect your fingers and hands and also remove all jewelry prior to entering the ewe. Be gentle as you re-position the lamb; you don't want to tear the uterus.

After lambing see that the ewe owns the lamb(s): She should clean the lamb and allow it to nurse. If ownership does not occur, you may have to hold her several times while the lamb nurses. You can also tie the ewe up short to allow the lamb to nurse.

Right after lambing place the ewe and her lambs in a clean jug. While the navel is still wet dip it in tincture of iodine. This will kill any bacteria that may be present. This is a simple precaution to prevent joint ill (navel infection). Keep a close eye on the animals for a few days. The ewe normally passes the afterbirth within an hour after birth. If she doesn't, allow the afterbirth outside of the ewe to remain attached. The weight of afterbirth will help the ewe to pass it. Begin treating the ewe with an antibiotic to prevent infection from the retained placenta.

After a few days, increase the grain feed to the ewe as the lamb takes more milk. In a day or two you will be able to remove the ewe and her lambs from the jug and place in a larger pen where they are mixed with other ewes and their lambs. Prior to removing them, mark the lambs with the same body numbers that you place on the ewe. This will enable you to identify them at a future time. Marking methods vary from paint branding the ewe and lamb to a small brass or plastic tag. Do not tag baby lambs with large tags as this could damage the cartilage in the ear.

Pay Attention to Details

Paying attention to details begins several weeks before you expect the first lambs. Keep a close eye on the ewes. Be sure they are eating and watch for any unusual discharge that may signal an abortion. Increase the energy level of the ration to prevent pregnancy disease. This disease occurs with ewes carrying multiple numbers of lambs and is caused by insufficient amounts of energy in the feed. It is very easy to prevent by feeding grain the last few weeks of pregnancy. In addition, it is important that ewes be in good condition; not overly fat or thin.

As lambing time draws closer, watch ewes for signs of labor. Prior to labor they will tend to move off by themselves and won't eat. Their vulva should be swelled and you will notice a relaxation of the muscles around it. The next sign of the onset of labor is the water bag. Once the water bag appears, the ewe should birth the lamb within 30 to 45 minutes. If you see no signs of progress (appearance of feet) you may need to check the ewe to make sure the lamb is aligned properly with front feet and nose coming first.



After the lambs are born, clear away any mucous around their nose and make sure the lamb is breathing. Vigorous lambs will begin trying to stand within 15 minutes or so after birth. Make sure the lamb is able to nurse and has a belly full of milk. Two ounces of colostrum is normally sufficient to get the lamb started off on a good note. It is also a good idea to check the teats on the ewe right after the lambs are born to make sure the teats are open and that the ewe has milk. If you were unable to shear prior to lambing, you may also want to "crutch" the ewe or in other words, shear the long wool off her belly and around her udder and rectum. This will make it easier for the lambs to find the teats and will help keep the ewe cleaner after lambing. For the next several hours, watch the ewe and her lambs to make sure the lambs have eaten and that the ewe has passed the placenta.

Lambing is an exciting time and with some preparations before hand and some attention to details, you can have an event free lambing season.

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