Winter Sheep Management Tips
Dr. Scott P. Greiner
Extension Animal Scientist, VA Tech

2-4 Weeks Before Lambing
1. Shear the wool from around the head, udder and dock of pregnant ewes. If covered facilities are available, shear the ewes completely. Sheared ewes are more apt to lamb inside, the inside of the barn stays drier because less moisture is carried in by the ewes, more ewes can be kept inside, and it creates a cleaner environment for the lambs and the shepherd. Sheared ewes must have access to a barn during cold, freezing rains, and they must receive additional feed during periods of extremely cold temperatures.
2. Vaccinate ewes for overeating disease and tetanus. These vaccines provide passive immunity to baby lambs through the ewes’ colostrum until they can be vaccinated at 4 to 6 weeks of age. Work with your veterinarian regarding feeding of antibiotics for prevention of abortion diseases.
3. Check and separate all ewes that are developing udders or showing signs of lambing. Check and remove heavy ewes once a week during the lambing season. Increase the grain on all ewes showing signs of lambing to 1 lb daily, and feed all the good quality grass/legume hay they will clean up.
4. Observe ewes closely. Ewes that are sluggish or hang back at feeding may be showing early signs of pregnancy disease. If so, these ewes should be drenched with 2 ounces of propylene glycol 3 to 4 times daily.
5. Shelter heavy ewes from bad weather.
6. Get lambing pens and lambing equipment ready. There should be one lambing pen for every ten ewes expected to lamb.
7. Stock lambing supplies such as iodine, antibiotics, frozen colostrum, stomach tube, selenium and Vitamin E, OB lube, lamb puller, ear tags, etc.

At Lambing Time
1. Check ewes on a frequent basis (every 3 to 4 hours), as feasible.
2. After lambs are born, move the ewe and her lambs to a lambing pen with a minimum dimension of 5’ X 5’. Check the ewe’s udder to see that she has milk, strip each teat to remove the waxy plug that may be present at the end of the teat, and make sure lambs nurse within 30 minutes.
3. Colostrum is critical for baby lamb survival. For ewes without milk or for lambs that fail to nurse, lambs must be given colostrum via a stomach tube. If sheep colostrum is not available, cow or goat colostrum should be used. Colostrum can be frozen in ice cube trays or stored in plastic storage bags. Colostrum should be thawed using indirect heat. Thawing by direct heat destroys the antibodies that are present. Lambs should receive 20 ml (cc) of colostrum per pound of body weight. It works best if feedings can be 4 hours apart.
4. Only use a heat lamp if lambs are weak and chilled. Avoid danger of fire by hanging heat lamps 3’ above the bedding and in the corner of the lambing pen. Block off the corner so that the ewe cannot get under the lamp.
5. Check on the health of the ewe and her lambs at least three times daily. Lambs that are lying down should be made to get up. Those that fail to stretch after getting up may have
a problem that requires further examination. The biggest cause of baby lamb mortality is starvation.

6. Virginia is a selenium deficient state. If selenium deficiency has been a problem, lambs should be given an injection of 0.25 mg selenium per 10 lb of body weight immediately after birth. A good quality mineral provided to the ewe flock on a year-round basis has been shown to be the best way to prevent selenium deficiency.

7. A general rule of thumb is for the ewe and her lambs to stay in the lambing pen one day for each lamb. Weak or small lambs may require a longer stay.

8. Ewes should receive fresh water and high quality hay the day of lambing. Don’t feed grain until the second day. One pound of grain plus 5 lbs of good quality hay will take care of their needs until moving to a mixing pen.

9. If ewes were not treated for internal parasites within 3 weeks of lambing, they should be treated prior to removal from the lambing pen.

10. Keep records on all ewes, noting those that had problems. Individually identify lambs so they can be matched with the ewe. The ability to match ewes and lambs is important to monitor performance, and individual identification is critical for making selection and culling decisions.

11. All lambs should be docked and castrated by the time they are 2 weeks old.