

## PREPARING FOR THE LAMBING SEASON

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Lambing season is the most important time of the year for shepherds. With proper planning and preparation, it should go smoothly and be rewarding for the shepherd. The last third of pregnancy is most important because this is when the majority of fetal growth occurs and mammary tissue synthesis is beginning. This handout offers some general management recommendations pertaining to lambing. Recommendations for pasture lambing will vary somewhat.

### One month before lambing

1. Increase energy in ewes' ration.
  - a. General recommendation is ½ to 1 lb. per ewe. Start by feeding ¼ lb. per head and increase gradually.
  - b. Recommendation for high producing ewes is 1 lb. per fetus (Iowa State).
2. Continue feeding good quality sheep mineral fortified with selenium.
3. Start feeding coccidiostat (Bovatec, Deccox, Rumensin)
  - a. Deccox or Rumensin may partially control abortions caused by *Toxoplasma gondii* (cat coccidiosis).
4. Vaccinate for CDT (*clostridium perfringens* type C & D and *clostridium tetani*)
  - a. Annual booster for ewes previously vaccinated (don't forget rams).
  - b. Two injections (2 to 4 weeks apart) if vaccination status is unknown or ewes have never been vaccinated for CDT
5. Deworm prior to lambing
  - a. To counter peri-parturient rise in worm eggs and relaxed immunity
  - b. Protein supplementation may improve immunity to worms.
6. Crutch or shear ewes
  - a. Shear
    - i. Cleaner environment for lambs.
    - ii. Cleaner fleeces.

- iii. To reduce moisture (humidity) in barn.
- iv. Shorn ewes take up less space.
- v. But, only if you have adequate facilities.
- vi. Shorn sheep require more feed to compensate for heat loss.
- vii. Shear at least a month before for highly productive ewes.
- b. Crutching – shearing around the vulva and udder.
- c. Shorn or crutched ewes will seek shelter for their lambs.

#### Supplies you should have on hand for lambing

- Disinfectant for dipping navels (iodine, betadine, chlorohexidine)
- Colostrum (frozen, ideally from your own flock, cow and goat colostrum better than commercial colostrum)
- Milk Replacer (lamb)
- Stomach Tube (for feeding small and weak lambs)
- Bottles and nipples
- Bearing retainers (for holding a prolapsed vagina in place)
- Lubricant (for delivering lambs)
- Nylon rope, snare, leg puller (for delivering lambs)
- Rubber gloves, protective sleeves, or latex gloves (for delivering lambs)
- Bucket and soap (for delivering lambs and washing udders and vulvas)
- Old towels (for drying off lambs)
- Heat lamp or warming box (for warming chilled lambs)
- 50 percent dextrose (for weak lambs)
- Vitamin E/Selenium injection (for white muscle disease)
- Thermometer
- Propylene glycol or molasses (for pregnancy toxemia)
- Calcium borogluconate (for milk fever)
- Mastitis treatment
- Antibiotic
- Castrating, docking, and ear tagging (or notching) equipment and supplies
- Scale
- Sling for weighing lambs
- Record book or sheets for recording lambing data

#### Preparing Lambing Quarters

- Provide enough space to prevent overcrowding. ~ 20 sq. ft. per ewe.
- Separate heavy ewes from ewes that will lamb later.
- Building should have plenty of ventilation but no drafts.
- Dry bedding
- Portable lambing pens/jugs (4 x 5, 5 x 5). Rule of thumb is to have 1 jug per 10 pregnant ewes, but it depends upon the concentration of lambing, number of multiple births, etc. Feeders and water buckets for lambing jugs.

### Signs of Lambing

- Vulva swells, some mucous discharge
- Udder swells
- Hips sink in
- Ewe will prepare birthing area by smelling the ground, pawing the ground with her front feet, and going round and round.
- She'll get up and down a lot as birth pains build up.

### The Birth process

Stage 1: uterine contractions and cervical dilation (12-14 hours)

Stage 3: actual labor and delivery, membranes rupture, water bag breaks (1-2 hours)

Stage 3: expulsion of fetal membranes and involution of uterus (< 8 hours)

- Observe ewes closely during the lambing period and give assistance when necessary.
- Check ewes at least four times daily.

### After lambing

- If necessary, assist new lambs by cleaning membranes from around the nose and face.
- Place ewe and lambs in a clean jug
- Encourage ewe to lick lamb(s)
- Only use heat lamps if lambs are weak or chilled. Place heat lamp 3 ft. above ground in corner of jug to prevent overheating/fire.
- Check to see if the ewe has milk and the teat canals are open. Remove wax plug if necessary.
- See that ewe owns her lamb(s) and allows them to nurse
- Dip navels. Clip long navel cords.
- Make sure ewe passes afterbirth.
- Provide plenty of water and high quality hay.
- Gradually add grain to diet. Don't feed grain until the second day.
- Check on the health of ewes and lambs at least 3 times per day. Lambs that are lying down should be made to get up. Healthy lambs stretch when they get up. If necessary, check to make sure lambs' bellies are full.
- Move ewes and lambs to mixing pens in 1 to 3 days. Recommendation is to keep ewe and lamb(s) in jug one day for each lamb in litter.
- Clean and disinfect pens after removing ewes and lambs.
- Dock and castrate lambs 1 to 7 days.
- Introduce creep feed by 10 days.