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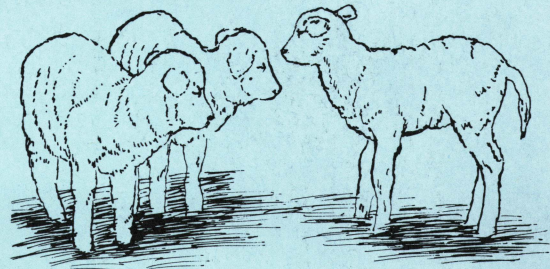
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## Early Lamb Management For Idaho Farm Flocks

*Soda Springs*

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Idaho farm flocks can be counted on to show consistent profits. The key is a management system that will develop thrifty, fast-gaining lambs for marketing at an early age. The basis for such a management system is a creep feeding-drylot lamb program where the lambs never go to grass.

Market prices for lambs usually reach a peak in late May or early June. With the early marketing management system, your lambs will be finished and ready for market by early June. You will obtain the maximum price per pound. You will also reduce costs, because lambs carried through the summer will generally put on slower, more expensive gains and will grade lower. They will have more parasites and higher death losses.

The early marketing management system will work if you are willing to change your present system. You will need a high percentage of multiple births — at least 150%. Your lambs will need an inherited ability to make rapid gains. Crossbred lambs sired by meat-type rams are preferred. And your lambs must be born before March 10 to be ready for sale during June market peak.

### Advantages of Creep Feeding

The creep feeding-drylot lamb program is profitable because it matches the lamb's natural fast-growing period.

For the new lamb, the most efficient conversion of feed to meat occurs during the first 100 to 120 days after birth. Lambs can easily gain 80 pounds in their first 80 days. Birth to market gains of 0.8 to 1 pound per day are common to thrifty lambs. Lambs from the better managed flocks will be marketed at 110 to 120 days of age weighing 100 pounds or more.

These young lambs are very efficient feed converters. They will gain 1 pound in weight for every 2.5 to 4 pounds of feed consumed. In comparison, older, weaned feeder lambs will normally gain only 0.25 to 0.5 pound per day and will require 5 to 8 pounds of feed for each pound of gain.

Young lambs will make maximum daily gains only when the energy levels are adequate in their feed. Severe stress from low energy feed, or from disease and parasites, will reduce growth efficiency.

Some of the advantages of the creep feeding-drylot lamb program are:

- Increased weight gains, especially for multiple-birth lambs.
- Most efficient feed conversion.
- Early marketing. Lambs will be marketed at a younger age and during the period of normally high lamb prices.
- Marketing from drylot. Since the lambs are sold without going to pasture, this reduces internal parasite problems in the lambs and enables you to carry more ewes on available pasture.

For most rapid body weight gains when creep feeding a completely pelleted ration, start with a ration of 50% grain (concentrate) and 50% roughage. Change to 60:40 grain-roughage in about 6 weeks, and to 70% grain and 30% roughage in another 6 weeks. This is opposite to the feedlot lamb feeding ratio of 40% grain and 60% roughage.

If grain supplies are limited and market prices are high, you can feed a 25:75 grain-roughage ration to lambs up to 65 or 70 pounds average body weight. Then switch to a 50:50 ration. However, lamb growth rate will be slower, the feeding period will have to be longer, and you may miss the peak market lamb prices.

### An Early Lamb Management Guideline

#### February and March

- A. Lamb before March 10.
- B. Carefully attend shed lambing to help reduce death losses.
- C. Provide dry, warm well-bedded quarters for the lambs and keep the creep feeders clean.
- D. Begin creep feeding farm lambs at 1 week of age.

Lambs will begin to nibble at grain and hay when they are about a week old. Although lambs will not consume significant amounts of feed for the first 3 or 4 weeks, the small amounts consumed at earlier ages are critical for establishing both rumen function and the habit of eating. Lambs should be eating about 0.5 pound of creep ration per day at 21 days of age.

- E. Locate the creeps where the lambs will use them.

Place creeps for drylot lambs in a convenient, well-protected area. A heat lamp or light over the area may attract lambs.

- F. Provide a palatable creep ration, especially the starter ration. Palatability becomes less important after the lambs are 6 to 8 weeks old.

Soybean oil meal (SOM) is useful in a starter ration to increase palatability and provide additional protein. However, SOM is expensive. Oats and dried molasses beet pulp (DMBP) are both palatable to young lambs. However, if young lambs are allowed too much DMBP, scours may occur.

- G. Use a simple ration. Creep rations do not have to be complex.

Research results indicate lambs will perform as well on simple creep rations as they will on complex rations.

A simple suggested creep ration (rolled): 50% barley, 25% DMBP, 25% oats. Lambs should be eating from 1 to 1.5 pounds daily at 6 weeks of age.

- H. Provide lambs free choice alfalfa hay, salt, and clean fresh water.

High quality, leafy, bright green alfalfa hay and alfalfa pellets are very palatable. Maximum intake has generally been observed when lambs are started on high roughage (alfalfa) rations with creep grain level rapidly increased once consumption has started.

- I. Supplement the ewes with the refused feed left in the creep daily so fresh feed is available to the lambs each day.

## April and May

- A. Gradually switch the lambs to a high-energy creep ration at about 6 weeks of age.

- B. Self-feed a whole, rolled, or a completely pelleted ration. Lambs sort and chew. Avoid finely ground, dusty rations.

Suggested creep rations (simple):  
(1) 70% barley, 30% DMBP or oats;  
(2) 80% shelled corn, 10% oats, 10% SOM. Allow free access to alfalfa hay, salt, and fresh clean water.

- C. Adding antibiotics (aureomycin or terramycin) at the recommended level of 10 mg per pound may be beneficial in reducing secondary infections.

- D. Discontinue feeding grain to the ewes as soon as the lambs are eating adequate amounts of the creep

ration daily — at about 5 or 6 weeks of age. Feed the grain to the lambs because they convert grain more efficiently than the ewes.

- E. Consider early weaning.

Weaning at 90 days is common, but more flock owners are weaning at 60 days or less. Early weaning at 40 to 50 pounds body weight can be successfully achieved provided lambs are on full feed. Suckling lambs after 60 days of age has no advantage. Research at Cornell has shown that milk production of the ewe reaches a peak at about 4 weeks following lambing and steadily declines to approximately 50% by the 10th week. About 74% of the milk is produced in the first 8 weeks. After 60 days the ewe is not much more than a companion to the lambs, and she serves as the principal spreader of internal parasites on pasture if the lambs are allowed to graze with her.

- F. At the latest, wean lambs when ewes go to pasture.

## June

- A. Top out lambs weighing 100 to 110 pounds at weekly intervals for marketing.

- B. Continue self-feeding, high-energy creep ration. You may need to limit the hay intake to less than 30% of total daily ration.

- C. If lambs are not already weaned, you may turn out ewes to pasture with lambs corralled in drylot.

Allow ewes to nurse lambs twice daily gradually limiting to once daily and finally weaning. **Do not graze lambs under this system of management.**

- D. Ewes can graze pasture with lower quality forage when the lambs are weaned. Also, more ewes may be grazed on the same pasture acreage.

- E. Provide shade for tail-end lambs not marketed early in June.

Daily feed intake will gradually decline during the period of extreme summer temperatures. Continue feeding for maximum gains. Market all lambs as soon as possible. Shearing late lambs before peak summer temperature may be profitable resulting in more rapid body weight gain.

## General Comments

This system of farm lamb management is adapted to high-energy feeding for earlier finishing and marketing to obtain maximum lamb prices. Lambs managed under this system will not have the energy level of their daily ration interrupted. Consequently, gains will be faster and more efficient and marketing will be earlier.

Lambs fed high-energy rations are more susceptible to enterotoxemia. Vaccinate early to reduce the incidence of this disease in the fast-gaining lambs.

Feeds and feed combinations can be varied to help you use the most readily available and economical feed combinations. Lamb rations must be palatable and fresh to induce maximum consumption. Don't feed dusty, moldy, wet, or sour feeds. Simple mixtures in creep rations will give excellent results if maximum consumption is maintained.

In general, young lambs show a preference for coarse, rolled grains and pelleted feeds. While cost of preparation may be a limiting factor in rolling or pelleting, both rate of gain and feed conversion are increased with pelleted complete feeds, concentrates, and roughages. Many lamb producers feel that the increased rate of gain, the additives which can be included, the constant grain-roughage ratio, and reduced labor needs offset the added cost of pelleting. This will depend on the cost and availability of pelleting in your area.

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