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Sheep Management — Postlambling

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Newborn lambs should be confined to jugs for 2 to 4 days, depending upon thriftiness. Good flock management is critical for growing fast-gaining, thrifty lambs to slaughter weight.

- **Identification of Ewes and Lambs.** Identification is essential for monitoring mothering ability, and ewe-lamb identification is basic in preventing baby lamb starvation. Have your marking equipment ready and handy. If you paint numbers for brands, use only approved, scourable branding fluid — not barn paint. You can buy paint brand numbers about 3 inches in size, or you can make them from heavy gauge wire. Many sheep growers apply a side brand number to the ewe and the same brand number to lamb or lambs along with a mark to designate twins. This helps to associate ewes with lambs which may become unthrifty.

Identification is also important for any record system. Ear tags, paint brands or a combination is essential. Try not to move a ewe and her lambs out of the jug to the mixing pens until they are identified.

- **Checking Ewes and Lambs.** Routine checking assures that the lambs are mothered up, receiving sufficient milk and healthy. Your daily checking should determine state of thriftiness and provide early detection of diseases such as scours and pneumonia. Without routine checks, starve-outs because of mis-mothering will surely occur. All slow lambs which are standing apart from their mothers should be closely observed for difficult breathing, soiled tails or a humped-up and gaunt appearance.

Check periodically to see that ewes are strong and healthy after lambing. Frequently observe the nursing process or closely examine udders for early detection of potential "blue bag."

- **Watching for Pinning.** Check all lambs to see if they have the first defecation (feces) packed or glued between the underside of the base of the tail and the anus. This can be scraped away with a small stick or washed clean with mild, soapy water.

- **Checking for Scours.** Always be observant for scours. Check every lamb twice daily for scours while they're inside and at least once daily after they're outside. Early detection and prompt treatment are necessary. If one of a set of twins must be treated for scours, you should also treat the other twin.

Early signs of scours may include fever, weakness, dehydration, standing humped up and pasting of manure around the tail area. Diagnosis can be made on the basic sanitary conditions, fecal culturing and clinical signs. Treatment can best be determined by a veterinarian, and early detection will markedly improve the treatment results.

Any number of commercial preparations for treatment are available, especially antibiotics and the sulfas. Spectinomycin Sulfate has been very effective for the treatment of scours in baby lambs at the U.S. Sheep Experiment Station at Dubois. Electrolyte solutions can be safely administered by mouth with an esophageal probe in cases of dehydration.

- **Watching for Pneumonia.** Pneumonia may be caused by many organisms and foreign bodies affecting the lungs. Newborn lambs may be immediately subjected to external factors which tend to overcome their resistance. Inadequate ventilation, moisture condensation and extreme temperature variation seem to predispose pneumonia. The lambing shed should be **well ventilated but not drafty**.

Improper ventilation within the shed allows a build-up of ammonia from fecal decay and urine. The

excessive ammonia irritates the linings of the trachea and lungs and can lead to sickness. To avoid ammonia and moisture problems, clean the shed regularly and avoid overconfinement. Move lambs out of completely closed sheds as soon as the strength of the lamb and weather conditions permit. Minimizing shed confinement may help but may, in turn, lead to other problems.

The most obvious signs of pneumonia are abnormal breathing, coughing and depression. High fever above 103° F is common. Early detection increases the chances of successful treatment. Specific treatment may include penicillin, tetracyclines or sulfa drugs. Successful treatment depends on starting early in the course of the disease and treating consistently for 4 or 5 days.

A final word of caution — avoid the overuse of heat lamps. Also, provide shelters against storms once lambs are outside, and minimize stress factors as much as possible.

- **Keeping Jugs Clean.** A jug should be cleaned after each ewe and her lambs are moved to a mixing pen. If you can't clean the area after each confinement, keep deep litter within limits and keep it as dry as possible. Spread slack lime over the floor before rebedding a cleaned jug. Too long a time between shed cleanings will allow ammonia and moisture to build up. When dirty, filthy conditions exist, the potential for lamb sickness increases.

- **Providing Foster Mothers.** Grafting lambs onto another ewe is more art than science. Several different methods are used, but the earlier grafting is attempted, the greater the success rate. If a ewe delivers dead lambs or only has a single, she would be a candidate for surrogate mother for orphans or for one lamb from triplets. It is better to graft the lambs than to raise them on a bottle or lam-bar. Grafting lambs is a specialized skill. For more details, see University of Idaho Current Information Series 649, *How to Graft Lambs*.

- **Caring for Inverted Eyelids.** Some lambs will have inverted eyelids. The eye waters because the lids and lashes are turned in against the eyeball, causing irritation. To correct this, remove a crescent of loose skin below the lower eye lash with a knife or scissors. The incision will heal rapidly, with the lid held open. Surgical clamps may also be used. Other methods for correcting the problem include stitching or taping to hold the eyelid to keep it in a normal position. Do not save those lambs with inverted eyelids (entropion) for breeding because it is a highly inheritable characteristic.

- **Preventing Soremouth (Contagious Pustular Dermatitis, Scabby Mouth Proliferative Dermatitis, Contagious Ecthyma).** Contagious ecthyma is a disease affecting susceptible sheep of all ages, but nursing or recently weaned lambs are primary targets.

The formation of papules and pustules and the piling up of thick crusts or cauliflower-like scabs on the lips are characteristics.

While the ecthyma morbidity can reach nearly 100 percent of a group of lambs, the mortality is relatively low. Extreme care and sanitation should be used in treating affected sheep, and the virus can affect humans with a condition called "orf." Although medical treatment has not proven effective, you can prevent ecthyma by vaccination.

A vaccine, commercially available, can be brushed onto a small, scarified lesion prepared in the axillary space or inside the lamb's thigh. Vaccination of newborn lambs while they're in the jugs is a good management procedure. Remember, this is a live virus vaccine and should be handled as such. Wear rubber gloves while handling the vaccine.

- **Mixing.** Generally, the ewe and lambs should remain in the jug 2 to 3 days under most conditions. The ewe and lamb (single) should be placed in the jug and remain 24 to 48 hours. A ewe with multiple births should remain in the jug about a day longer (3 days), depending on the strength of the lambs and the ewe's mothering ability. If you have to move ewes and lambs directly outside from the jugs to the first mixing pens, keeping them in the jugs an additional day is advisable.

Protection is a must for lambs outside. Snow storms or strong winds can cause heavy lamb losses. Lambs need shelter outside that they can get under for protection. Canvas over a 3-foot wide frame attached along fence panels or 3-foot shelter tops covered with galvanized tin that can be folded down against the fence for storage will provide protection for lambs. Many shed lambing layouts have permanent outside shelter provided for each mixing pen. The first mixing pens to accommodate 3 or 4 ewes with twins or 5 or 6 ewes with singles (12 to 14 square feet per ewe and lamb) should be available in the lambing shed.

If lambs are moved outside after the first mix, the experienced shepherd will be able to tell when two pens of singles are ready to be "doubled up" into a larger pen and similarly with two pens of twins. This "doubling up" procedure can be continued over a period of several days until the desired number of ewes with lambs are in one group of singles and another of twins. More lambs are saved and lambs make better gains if they can be maintained in small groups up to 6 weeks of age. A good rule of thumb is to have no more than 60 lambs per pen, regardless of whether the lambs come from 30 ewes or 60 ewes.

Keeping twins and singles separate after leaving the lambing shed is desirable. You can then make inspections more easily, but more importantly, you can closely feed ewes according to their production needs. Ewes with twins need more feed than those with singles. When all ewes are run together in a pen, those with twins often do not get enough feed.

• **Preventing Losses Through Care and Cleanliness When Docking and Castrating.** These necessary operations need not cause any death losses if they are done with care and cleanliness at the proper time. Lambs may be "marked" while still inside the jug or when outside in mixing pens using elastrator bands, a hot iron or a knife.

If the elastrator or rubber band is used in both docking and castrating, do so at an early age — preferably within the first day after birth — or at least before the lamb is a week old. Some producers may cut off the tail just below the band 2 or 3 days after it has been applied and then treat the remaining stub with iodine. Use 7 percent tincture of iodine liberally on all wounds made in docking and castrating. Caution: Serious losses may result from tetanus with this method, especially in docking.

Docking — Some producers prefer emasculator and burdizzo clamps for docking. Others prefer a heated chisel or docking scissors. Another method is cutting through the skin at the separation point and twisting the tail off, although some lambs bleed profusely.

Castration — A good time to use the knife or one of the other methods is when the lambs are 10 to 21 days old. The "all-in-one" is a very practical instrument for both docking and castrating and is popular with veterinarians. The emasculator may also be used in castrating by removing the scrotum and both testicles in one operation.

The Australian "lamb clam" may also be used. This device has a knife at one end to cut off the bottom half of the scrotum and serrated clamps at the other end for removing the testicles.

A sharp knife may also be used for castration. Cut off the bottom half of the scrotum and remove the testicles. Apply downward pressure to each side of the scrotum with fingers when pulling the testicles to minimize the chance of tearing and causing a hernia.

Blow flies may be a problem in warm weather. Apply a suitable fly repellent liberally to all wounds to prevent maggots. Further applications may be necessary during warm weather.

• **Creeps and Creep Feeding.** A creep feeding program for lambs is profitable for farm flock operators because it matches the lambs' natural fast-growing period. Young lambs are efficient converters. They will gain 1 pound in weight for every 2½ to 4 pounds of feed consumed. Begin creep feeding farm lambs at 7 to 10 days 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 dry feeds. Lambs should be eating from 1 to 1½ pounds daily at 6 weeks of age.

Locate the creeps where the lambs will use them. Place creeps in a convenient, well-protected area. A heat lamp or light over the area may help to attract lambs. Keep the creep area clean, dry and well-bedded so the lambs will use it.

Provide a simple, palatable creep ration, especially the starter ration. Soybean oil meal, steam rolled oats and coarsely-crushed corn are good creep starters. Feed a simple grain mixture with quality alfalfa hay for roughage. Preweaned lambs will do well on creep rations containing 12 percent crude protein since they are also feeding on their mother's milk.

Suggested mixtures for creep feeding are:

- 50 percent rolled barley, 25 percent dried beet pulp, 25 percent rolled oats.
- 70 percent barley, 30 percent DMBP or rolled oats.
- 80 percent shelled corn, 10 percent rolled oats, 10 percent soybean oil meal.

Lambs will not eat any appreciable amounts of dried beet pulp pellets until they are about 6 weeks of age. Their baby teeth are too soft, and the pellets are too hard. You can feed a self-fed whole, rolled or completely pelleted ration to lambs after they are well started on the creeps. Avoid finely-ground, dusty feeds. And, since lambs sort and chew, replace the creep feed daily with fresh, palatable feed. Give the leftover feed to the ewes. For more information on early lamb management, see University of Idaho CIS 331, *Early Lamb Management for Idaho Farm Flocks*.

• **Preventing Enterotoxemia.** No satisfactory treatment for affected animals exists, and thus all emphasis should be placed on prevention. Give pregnant ewes two annual boosters, using a combination of both *Clostridium prefringens* types C and D vaccines at 4 weeks and again 2 weeks before lambing.

If you follow this procedure, and the lamb is suckled properly, it will be protected by colostral antibody until it is 5 or 6 weeks old. The lamb itself should then be vaccinated at 3 or 4 weeks of age. This will allow time for the vaccination to become effective before the lamb begins to eat large amounts of creep rations.

• **Preventing Coccidiosis.** This condition is more common to feeder lambs 3 to 5 months of age than to 1- to 2-month-old nursing lambs. Oocysts are excreted in the feces of infected and carrier sheep. In densely confined units, fecal contamination of feed and water greatly increases the likelihood of an outbreak. Symptoms are bloody diarrhea with straining and an occasional rectal prolapse, followed by dehydration and weakness.

Sulfonamides and amprolium are used in preventing an outbreak because treatment is usually unsatisfactory. Prevent food and water from fecal contamination, and do not allow lambs to be too closely confined.

This publication is one of three written on sheep management. Other numbers and titles are University of Idaho Current Information Series No. 618, *Sheep Management — Prelambing*, and CIS 619, *Sheep Management — Lambing Time*.

University of Idaho and Pacific Northwest researchers have authored several other publications on sheep. For a complete list of these numbers and titles, refer to University of Idaho Bulletin No. 401, *List of Available Publications*, which is in county offices of the UI Cooperative Extension Service.

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