



SHEEP SHEET

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Producing early suckling lambs is dependent on the genetic potential of the ram and more importantly influenced by the environmental influences under which the ewe produces and rears the lamb(s).

Lactation in sheep is normally 60 to 120 days. Ewe milk production increases from birth and reaches its peak between four and six weeks. After this peak it begins to decline slowly. The lamb or lambs are solely dependent on the ewe's milk for the first three weeks. Inadequate ewe milk production during this critical time leads to poor growing lambs. Between three and four weeks after birth the lamb begins to supplement its diet by grazing forage and/or nibbling on hay



Factors influencing ewe milk production.

There is variation between breeds of sheep and within breeds. Older ewes tend to produce more milk. However, the nutrition of the ewe during gestation (pregnancy) and lactation has a very significant effect on the quantity of milk produced.

Increasing Ewe Milk Production for Lambs

Sheepdex E-3

Ewe nutrition and milk production:

Ewes malnourished during gestation tend to have a more rapid decline in milk production and do not lactate for as long. The measure as to whether a ewe is being adequately fed during gestation is her maintaining her body condition.

Ewes cannot maintain a high plane of milk production at the cost of their own body reserves. Thus it is important to ensure the ewe receives a balanced diet fed, at the proper quantity during gestation. The following are some suggested rates of supplementary grain (oats, barley, corn etc.) feeding during pregnancy and lactation:

| | |
|----------------------|-------------|
| Pregnancy, 0-100 day | 3/4 lb./day |
| Lambing, 100 day | 1.0 lb./day |
| Lactation | 1.5 lb./day |

Any time during these above periods that feed intake is restricted, significant reductions in milk production will result. This could result in up to 50 per cent reduction in a two to four days. This must be remembered when feeding ewes during the lambing season. The shepherd must also ensure that **ALL** ewes have equal access to the supplemental feeds. Recently lambded ewes are unlikely to go over to the supplemental feeding area, so intervals between feeding should not be too long. Minimally feeding during lambing should be at least daily, and even twice/day is highly recommended.

Ewes that have limited feed intake during their first two to four weeks never reach their potential lactation peak and consequently produce less than their genetic potential

throughout lactation.

Although the quantity of milk produced is very dependent on the available energy (carbohydrate) in the ewes' diet, the fat content of the milk is influenced by available roughage. Where the roughage in the pasture or range is limited it may be advisable to provide the ewes with some supplemental hay (alfalfa, alfalfa-grass mix, other legumes and mixed grasses) until the pastures/range have enough nutritional substance and bulk.

Other handicaps to lamb growth.

A few sheep health experts have found that during the lambing season, the ewe has decreased immunity. Thus, if the ewe is carrying a worm burden (internal parasites), worm egg output increases also. This contaminates the pastures, dry-lots, lambing area too. A worm burden in the lamb can severely reduce suckling lamb growth rates. This condition can be controlled by monitoring the breeding ewes prior to turning them out on pasture/range, and drenching if necessary. Many producers routinely pre-lamb drench their ewes in order to reduce the effects of parasitism.

Some areas of the United States where cobalt is deficient, it is critical to make sure that the ewe is properly supplemented. Vitamin B¹², made with cobalt in the rumen, can be passed across in the milk. A deficiency in vitamin B¹² in the lamb will retard growth rate. An injection of vitamin B¹² should be given to the lamb at four to six weeks.

Maximizing lamb growth rate.

The younger the lamb is, the greater its growth potential. For the first three weeks lamb growth will reflect the ewe's milk production. From this point in time on, it will also reflect the pasture/range available for grazing. Therefore, when planning your lambing season and preparing your lambing

locality, make sure you have the best pasture/range forages available from, at the latest, a month after the initial start of lambing.

Summary:

1. Maintain the ewes' body condition during gestation.
2. Provide adequate feed during lactation.
3. Make sure ewes are not deprived of feed during lactation - feed regularly and at least once/day.
4. Check the parasite (internal) load in your ewes before lambing.
5. Plan ahead.....have the best pastures or range ready at least one month from the initial starting day of lambing.
6. Don't forget ewe's milk is over 85% water. Without and adequate supply of clean drinking water, all of the information presented above is irrelevant.



For more information write:
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