

# Small Ruminant Newsletter

## PREPARING YOUR FLOCK FOR LAMBING



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### • **Nutrition** •

Nutrition of the ewe is the most important factor contributing to the production and growth of healthy, vigorous lambs. The best estimate of

whether your flock's diet is adequate or not is the body condition of the ewes. Ewes should be in body condition score of 3.5 to 4 out of 5 at lambing, which means that the spine and hip bones should be covered by fat but that you can still feel the ribs through the fat layer. The loin should be convex (curved upward), but there should be no depression along the midline over the spine.

If ewes are in reduced body condition at lambing, they will produce thinner, less vigorous lambs. Ewes will be more prone to pregnancy toxaemia before lambing and will produce less milk after lambing. Lambs will grow more slowly. If ewes are too fat (body condition score of 4.5 to 5 out of 5), they may experience difficulty lambing and prolapse of the vagina before or after lambing.



The unborn lambs do 2/3 of their growing in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy. This means that the ewe needs to consume more energy just at the time when the space to hold feed is being reduced by the increase in size of the growing lambs in the uterus. Unless hay quality is very good, most ewes will need to be fed grain during this period in order to maintain energy intake. Depending upon hay quality, most flocks should feed 1 to 2 lbs per head per day of oats and

barley or oats and corn. If the ewes are feed high-quality hay such as second-cut alfalfa or early-cut haylage, grain feeding may not be necessary.

Regardless of the forage and grains in the ration, all ewes need to consume adequate mineral and salt. Mineral is essential to provide the calcium and phosphorus necessary for the lambs growing bones and to prevent milk fever, vaginal prolapses, uterine prolapses, and prolonged lambing in ewes. Mineral and salt should be fed free-choice at all times. Lambs will consume mineral too, so mineral feeders should be at a height that can be reached by lambs. Ewes should be injected with vitamin E and Selenium 1 month before lambing, and all lambs should be treated at birth and at 1 month of age. Lambs are small, so read the label to be sure you get the dose correct!

Creep feeding increases the growth rate of lambs, especially twins and triplets. Lamb creep should be 18% protein, and should be offered from birth. Lambs start picking at solid feed by a week of age. A creep gate is large enough to allow the lambs through but small enough to keep the ewes out.

Ewes should be vaccinated against Clostridial diseases, the most important of which are

## Vaccination

Tetanus and Entertoxaemia Type D (Pulpy Kidney Disease). In unvaccinated flocks, the first dose of Tasvax should be given 2 months before lambing, and the booster dose 6 weeks later. In subsequent years, the ewes need just the booster dose, given 2 weeks prior to the expected start of lambing. If there is not enough time to give the 2 doses before your ewes start lambing, the lambs can be vaccinated at birth and 6 weeks later. They should be revaccinated after three months of age, because antibodies from colostrum can interfere with effective early vaccination.



Lambs from vaccinated ewes should also be vaccinated at 3 months of age, and receive a booster 6 weeks later.



# Lambing Supplies

Now is the time to stock up on supplies you will need at lambing.

Check your medicine chest for:

- Vitamin E and Selenium injection
- 3ml syringes and 20 gauge x 1" needles
- Water-soluble lubricant
- Povidone iodine surgical scrub
- Gloves
- Lamb feeding tube and 60ml syringe
- Baby bottle and nipple for newborn lambs



## Consultation

Our veterinarians are available to give you advice on lambing problems and will be

happy to visit your flock to assist you with body condition scoring and to demonstrate feeding weak lambs by stomach tube.

Of course, we are available for emergency lambing problems and problems with ewes 24 hours a day. To reach the on-call veterinarian, phone 705-722-3232 and select option 1 for emergencies.

**To set up a flock health appointment, please contact us at 705-722-3232 or [info@centralontariovet.com](mailto:info@centralontariovet.com)**



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