

MFA Sheep Feeding and Management Programs

Sheep production is a somewhat specialized farm enterprise. Producers can effectively and efficiently use forage and pasture to produce wool and meat at a profit.

The ability of sheep to use forage and feeds that do not compete directly with humans should help insure the long-term success of sheep raising. Ahead you will find sheep management and feeding suggestions, and advice on how MFA feeds can be used in a successful sheep enterprise.

Breeding Management

1. Lambs should be weaned at about 8 weeks of age, at least 4-6 weeks before breeding, to give the breeding flock ample time to dry up and get in shape for breeding.
2. Ewes should be in healthy condition, but not too fat for breeding. Breeding season is usually during September and October. This schedule means ewes will lamb during February and March.
3. Worm the flock with Ivomectrin, Tramisol or TBZ one month before breeding and again in the spring before turning out on pasture.
4. The following vaccinations may be administered before breeding ewes:
 - a. Lepto – 5 strains, 4 to 6 weeks before breeding (repeat annually).
 - b. Vibrio – 2 to 3 week before breeding (repeat annually).
 - c. Vitamin AD – 2 cc.
5. Start flushing the breeding flock (both ewes and rams) 2 to 4 weeks before breeding. Feed 0.5 to 1 lb. of MFA 12% Sheep Pellets or MFA Sheep Supplement 34 (mixed with grain to provide 12% protein) per head per day, depending on the condition of the flock.
6. Provide MFA Sheep Mineral free choice at all times for the breeding flock.
7. Leave the rams with the flock at least 8 weeks. One ram is needed for each 30 ewes. Observe the flock to make sure the ram is working and settling the ewes. The estrus cycle ranges from 14 to 20 days.
8. Good grass pasture and free-choice mineral is adequate until about 2 months before lambing. Depending on forage quality, start feeding 0.5 to 1 lb. of MFA 12% Sheep Pellets or MFA Sheep Supplement 34 (mixed with grain to provide 12% protein) per head per day. A ewe should gain about 20 to not more than 35 lbs. during gestation. Most of this gain should take place in the latter part of gestation. Adequate nutrition help prevent pregnancy disease.
9. Stocking rate for pasture breeding is 1 ram to 25 to 35 ewes.
10. Keep rams away from the flock during the winter. Heavy ewes should not be crowded.
11. Shear the breeding flock when danger of chilling weather is past. Avoid shearing during the 4-week period prior to lambing.

Feeding Management for Ewes

1. Provide at least 1 linear foot of feeder space per ewe when roughage or concentrate is hand fed. If a separate roughage rack is used to self-feed hay or silage, 6 linear inches of space per ewe at the rack is adequate.
2. Provide at least 3 gallons of water per ewe daily. The waterer should provide 1 linear foot of open tank per 20 ewes or one automatic bowl per 30 ewes.
3. Water temperature may range from just above freezing to high of 80°F in summer. However, warming water to a temperature of 50° to 60°F in the winter is desirable.
4. Feeding and watering equipment should be located some distance from shelter until the start of lambing to encourage the ewes to exercise.

Lambing Management

Proper care of the farm sheep flock at lambing time is essential for a large percentage of lamb

crop to be expected. Here are some management tips to follow during this crucial period:

1. Vaccinate pregnant ewes with CD&T toxoid 4-6 weeks prior to lambing (If not vaccinated before, give 2 doses 2-3 weeks apart, ending 4-6 weeks before lambing.)
2. Chip rear quarters of ewes prior to lambing.
3. Be ready at least a week before lambs are due. (The gestation period is 146 days.)
4. Make sure lambs nurse immediately after birth. Individual pens should be available to each ewe in the warmest part of the barn. Disinfect the lamb navel with tincture of iodine spray.
5. Give the ewe fresh water and a small amount of hay the first day with no grain.
6. On the third day, feed a small amount of grain. If there are any scour problems with the lambs, reduce the ewe's feed intake.
7. Separating ewes with twins from the rest of the flock allows feeding ewes for maximum milk production.
8. After 10 days, ewes should be fed 1 to 2 lbs. per day of 12% Sheep Pellets or MFA Sheep Supplement 34 (mixed with grain to provide 12% protein), depending on forage quality to help increase milk flow.
9. Dock and castrate lambs at 7 to 10 days of age. Use sanitary procedures to prevent infections. Vaccinate with Tetanus antitoxin at this time.
10. At 2 weeks of age, provide creep feed in a protected, well-lighted area to attract the lambs. MFA Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets should be used on a self-fed basis to give lambs the nutrition they need for adequate growth. It provides the lamb with 15% all-natural crude protein and extra levels of minerals and vitamins. Creep feeding is most likely to pay when there is a large percentage of twins, when milk production is low, and when lambs are pushed for early marketing in June when prices are usually at their highest. Consumption of creep feed will vary depending upon the ewe's milk production.
11. Vaccinate the lambs for overeating disease (enterotoxemia) and tetanus. (Use CD&T toxoid) starting at 2-3 weeks of age with two additional doses given at 3 week intervals after the first dose.

Feeding and Management of Orphan Lambs

Each year, one of 10 lambs will die of starvation. Starving these lambs can be simple with an easily and completely digestible lamb milk replacer. Here are some suggestions on managing the orphan lamb:

1. Provide colostrum in the first 24 hours after birth which acts as a laxative, is high in nutrients, and helps build immunity. Cow or goat colostrum will work if ewe's milk is not available.
2. Start feeding a Lamb Milk Replacer. Use lamb milk replacer on:
 - Orphan lambs
 - Weak lambs unable to nurse because of a problem with the ewe's milk supply
 - Unclaimed lambs
 - Third lambs in sets of triplets
 - In twin lambs where one is small or weak
 - One lamb from a set of twins from a ewe lambing at less than 1 year of age
3. Provide a warm, draft-free area to start the lambs. Do not mix younger lambs with older lambs.
4. When bottle feeding, the following schedule is recommended:
 - Birth to 3 days: 4 tablespoons milk about every 4 hours
 - After 3 days: Gradually increase number and amount of feedings
 - 2 weeks of age: One-half pint milk 3 times per day
5. Start lambs on a high quality starter feed at 10 days to 2 weeks. MFA Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets is the feed to use for quick acceptance and maximum growth. Hang a light over the creep feeding area to attract the lambs. Provide a small amount of good quality hay at this time.
6. Wean lambs from milk replacer at 4 to 6 weeks of age depending on the amount of dry feed they are consuming. A small amount of high quality hay should be provided after the lamb is about 3 weeks of age.
7. Calf Milk Replacers are not recommended to be fed to lambs because they have different ingredients young lambs do not fully use.

Growing and Fattening Lambs

Market-topping lambs are fat and weigh between 90 and 110 lbs. The more natural muscling and red meat they have, the more acceptable they are to buyers. Skillful feeding maintains the health of the lambs and promotes rapid gains and results in a low cost per pound of gain. The following are some feeding and management tips for getting lambs on feed.

Feeding and Management of Growing and Fattening Lambs

1. Feed lambs only high quality hay for 3 to 4 day before starting on feed and continue throughout the feeding period. About 2 lbs. of hay will be consumed per head per day.
2. Treat for internal parasites. Watch for external parasites and treat is needed.
3. Provide at least 8 linear inches of feeder space per head when roughage or concentrate is had fed. If roughage or concentrate is self-fed, 3 linear inches of roughage rack or feeder space is adequate.
4. Provide at least 1 gallon of water per day daily. The waterer should provide 1 linear foot of open tank for 20 lambs or 1 automatic bowl for 30 lambs. Water temperature may range from just above freezing to a high of 80°F in summer. However, warming water to a temperature of 50° to 60°F in the winter is desirable.
5. Vaccinate again for Enterotoxemia (CD&T).
6. Shear lambs for maximum gains in the feedlot.

Hand Feeding Lambs

Start lambs on feed gradually. Growing lambs may be hand fed once a day. Start feeding 0.25 lb. per day of MFA Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets or a mixture of either MFA Sheep Supplement 34 and cracked corn mixed to provide a 14% crude protein diet and gradually increase to full feeding in 3 to 4 weeks.

A lamb will normally eat about 2 lbs. per head per day of the grain mix. Reduce hay feeding to 1 lb. each per day. Twice-a-day feeding is recommended after the starting period. The lambs should clean up the grain in about 10 minutes. After reaching 60 lbs. body weight, switch to MFA 12% Sheep Pellets.

Self-Feeding Lambs

1. Start lambs on feed gradually. Feed 1 lb. of MFA Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets daily with 2 lbs. of hay per head per day.
2. Increase feeding gradually for about 2 weeks until lambs are on full feed. Lambs should consume about 2.5 lbs. per head per day on full feed.
3. After lambs reach 60 lbs., change to MFA 12% Sheep Pellets.

Summary of MFA Sheep Feeding Programs

The following is a summary of the various stages in sheep production and the MFA feeds to use in each situation.

Flushing and Late Gestation:

1. 12% Sheep Pellets
2. Sheep Supplement 34 with grain. Feeding rate: 0.5 to 1 lb. per head per day, depending on condition of flock.

After Lambing:

1. 12% Sheep Pellets
2. Sheep Supplement 34 with grain. Feeding rate: 1 to 2 lbs. per head per day, depending on forage quality and number of ewes with twins.

Orphan Lambs:

1. Lamb Milk Replacer
2. Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets (free-choice)

Creep Feeding:

1. Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets (free-choice)

Growing and Fattening Lambs:

1. Hand Feeding – Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets and 12% Sheep Pellets after 60 lbs.
2. Self-Feeding – Sheep Starter/Grower Pellets (1 lb. per head per day) switching to 12% Sheep Pellets after 60 lbs.

Mineral Feeding:

Breeding Flock, Growing and Fattening Lambs – MFA Sheep Mineral