

Helpful Websites

<http://www.raisingssheep.net/>

<http://www.sheepusa.org/>



Over a Century of Innovation & Trust

Famo Feeds, Inc.

446 Industrial Drive
PO Box 7
Freeport, MN 56331
Phone: 800.450.2145
Fax: 320.836.2200
Web: www.famofeeds.com



5/2017



Over a Century of Innovation & Trust



Sheep Management

- General • Breeds • Breeding & Lambing •
- Nutrition • Management •
- Common Health Concerns •

Helpful Websites

General:

- Sheep are thought to be one of the first domesticated animals.
- Males are called rams; females are called ewes; babies are called lambs.
- Typical life expectancy is 10-12 years.
- Ewe productivity declines after ~7 years of age
- Typical vital signs:
 - Body temperature 102° - 103° F
 - Heart rate 60-90 beats/minute
 - Respiration 12-20 breaths/minute
- Sheep are prey animals and will flee when threatened. Some producers purchase dogs, camels, or llamas to guard their flock and protect them against predators.
- Sheep are HIGHLY sensitive to copper. The degree of sensitivity is related to breed as well with British breeds tending to be more susceptible to copper toxicity.
- Sheep are herd animals and need to be kept with at least one other sheep for their welfare.
- Overall, little labor is required to maintain a sheep herd except during shearing and lambing.
- Sheep typically have between 1 and 3 lambs at a time.
- When planning for lambing, consider market opportunities. Spring and early summer lamb prices are typically higher than fall lamb prices.



- Hoof Trimming—trim hooves regularly to prevent hoof and leg abnormalities. Keep pasture, range, or lots free of wet or muddy areas to prevent hoof ailments such as hoof rot.

Common Health Concerns:

- Copper Toxicosis—Caused by intake of copper. Typically results in death without intervention. Famo Feeds tests every batch of sheep feed for copper content to ensure the safety of our product.
- Enterotoxemia—Seen in lambs fed large amounts of grain. Symptoms include staggering gait and convulsions. Consult with your veterinarian for vaccine recommendations.
- Ketosis—Common in late pregnancy. Symptoms include glassy eyes, staggering gait, listlessness, followed by stiffness and partial paralysis. Ensuring provision of a properly balanced ration during gestation, especially towards the end, will help prevent ketosis.
- Polioencephalomalacia (PEM) - Characterized by self-isolation from flock and signs of blindness. Animals tent to arch their backs and tilt their heads up (looks like they are stargazing). Rations high in corn co-products may predispose sheep to a thiamine deficiency. Prevent by adding thiamine to rations high in grain and corn co-products.
- Urinary Calculi—Usually seen in males. Sheep will appear reless at first, will begin straining to urinate. Typically caused by high phosphorus in the ration. Prevent by keeping phosphorous low, keeping a 2:1 calcium to phosphorous ratio, and add ammonium chloride to the ration or water.
- White Muscle Disease—Lambs will present with muscular stiffness associated with vitamin E and selenium deficiency. Can be treated with injection of vitamin E and selenium. Ensuring adequate intake of these two micronutrients will prevent this issue.
- Stomach Worms—Common parasite in sheep and can cause loss of thriftiness and weight.

Nutrition (cont'd)

- B vitamins do not typically need to be supplemented to sheep or other ruminants because they synthesize them in their rumen.
- While lambs are still nursing off the ewe, creep feed can be supplemented to the lambs to increase rate of gain.

Management

- Shelter/Shade—Sheep are decently hardy animals that can withstand considerable cold when given protection from the wind and a dry-bedded area to rest. Sheds may be used for shelter provided that they are well-ventilated and that the ground under the shed can drain. Sheds should be cleaned regularly to prevent buildup of manure.

Average Space Requirements for Sheep Breeding Herd	
<u>Feeder Space</u>	
Group-fed	16 – 20 in/ewe
Self-fed	8 – 10 in/ewe for hay 10 – 12in/ewe for silage
<u>Creep Feed</u>	1 – 1.5 in/lamb
<u>Water</u>	
Automatic Bowl	40 – 50 ewes or ewes with lambs
Tank	15 – 25 ewes or ewes with lambs/ft. of tank perimeter
<u>Shelter Space</u>	
Open-front building with lot	10 – 12 ft ² /ewe 12 – 16 ft ² /ewe and lambs
<u>Lot</u>	25 – 40 ft ² /ewe or ewe and lambs

- Water—Feed-choice water should be provided at all times. Make sure water is clean and potable. If water intake is limited it will affect feed consumption. Water system should be capable of supplying at least 3 gallons water/head/day.
- Shearing—Shearing is best left to the professionals. A breeding flock should be shorn yearly before being turned out to summer pasture. Lambs should be shorn after weaning. Ewes should either be shorn or crutched 3 weeks before lambing; crutching refers to the wool being shorn from around the vulva and udder. Rams should be shorn a few weeks before breeding season for optimal breeding capability and fertility.

Breeds:

- Wool Breeds—Bred for their fleece quality. Examples would be Rambouillet and Corriedale.
- Hair Breeds—Instead of wool, these breeds produce hair which they shed in the spring. These breeds tend to be more heat tolerable and parasite resistant. Examples would include Barbados Blackbelly and California Red.
- Meat Breeds—Bred for their meat quality. Examples are Dorset, Hampshire, Suffolk and Southdown.

Breeding and Lambing:

- Puberty occurs between 5-9 months of age (around 70-100 lb). This is affected by breed, genetics, body size, and nutrition.
- Estrus cycle is typically 14-19 days in length with sheep being receptive for 24-36 hours.
- Gestation is typically 142-152 days in length.
- Breeding season typically begins in fall, lasting 5-7 months, and is affective by daylight, breed, and age.
- To maximize lamb crop, use the proper number of rams.
- Rams should be 10 months old before mating.
- Leave rams with flock for 8 week breeding season (typical duration). Consider shearing rams before breeding season especially in hot weather.
- Utilize breeding markers to identify ewes that have been bred. Coordinating paint colors may help to track breedings that occurred in the first, second, and third part of the season.
- When breeding season hits, ewes should be in moderate body condition and gaining weight.
- The last 6 weeks of gestation are critical for ewe nutrition. About 70% of fetal growth occurs in this period. Inadequate nutrition can lead to smaller lambs, increased death loss, lower

Ram to Ewe Ratios	
Yearlings – 5 years	25 – 50 ewes
Mature rams	15 – 30 ewes
Older rams	Use for light duty breeding

Breeding and Lambing (cont'd)

milk production, increased pregnancy-related disorders, and depressed mothering instincts.

- Lambing season will be your busiest time of year.
- Approximately weights: Single lambs 10-12 lbs, a twin lamb 9-10 lbs, and a triplet 5-8 lbs.
- Prior to lambing, place ewes close to lambing in a separate area for observation. Lambing pens should be 4x4 to 5x5 ft in size depending on breed size.
- Lambing pens are commonly referred to as jugs. You will need 10% as many jugs as ewes.
- Have heat lamps handy in case they are needed.
- Shear ewes if temperature permits a short coat or clip wool from around rump and udder for cleanliness.
- Upon birth, remove any membranes from the nose and check for breathing. Dip navels in 7% iodine or other disinfectant.
- Once standing, ensure that the lamb begins nursing. It is important that the lamb consumes colostrum (first milk) soon after birth.
- Heat lamps should be used to keep newborn lambs warm and to help them dry off.
- Make sure to mark lambs to identify them and record necessary information.
- After birth, lambs and ewes should be kept together and separated from the rest of the flock. After 1-3 days, move them to a mixing pen.
- If the mother is not producing enough milk, lamb may be grafted to another ewe or bottle-fed. Famo Feeds does have a milk replacer labeled for use in lambs.
- Always thoroughly clean and disinfect lambing pens after use.
- Between 7 and 14 days of age, dock tails and castrate males (if not intended for breeding). Make sure to exercise proper sanitation and turn lambs out into a clean area to prevent infection.

Nutrition:

- Depending on your set up, you may choose to graze your sheep or feed them dry forage, either way a supplement should also be fed.
- Keep in mind that nutritional needs will vary with age, stage of production, environment, and management.
- Monitor body condition to determine if you are over or under-feeding your sheep.
- Don't forget that water is an essential nutrient. Sheep should have access to free choice water at all times. Limiting water intake can depress feed intake, inhibit production, and contribute to the development of urinary calculi in rams.
- Digestive fiber is needed for proper function of the rumen. Even when fed a complete pellet, at least 1 lb of hay should also be fed to ensure a healthy rumen environment.
- Increase intake for ewes starting 2 weeks prior to breeding and continue 2-3 weeks into breeding season. This is referred to as flushing and increases ewe ovulation rate.
- Urea is often fed as a nitrogen source to sheep. While this is acceptable for adult sheep, it should not be fed to lambs because of their immature rumen.
- To prevent urinary calculi, stones that block the passing of urine, make sure the calcium to phosphorous ratio is at least 2:1. Consider utilizing a feed that contain ammonium chloride for preventative measures.
- Sheep need vitamins and minerals as any other animal would. If you choose to feed a free choice mineral or trace mineralized salt block ensure that it does NOT contain added copper.
- Though sheep have a requirement for copper, the range between requirement and toxicity is very narrow. If you notice your sheep are lethargic, struggling to breathe, or their mucus membranes begin to take on a yellow tinge call your veterinarian immediately.

Suggested Dry Matter Intake as a Percentage of Body Weight	
Ewe Maintenance	1.75 – 2.20
Flushing	2.20 – 2.80
Early Gestation	1.80 – 2.30
Late Gestation	2.20 – 3.00
Lactation	3.80 – 4.20