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EC67-206 Feeding and Care of Young Lambs Under Farm Conditions

Ted H. Doane

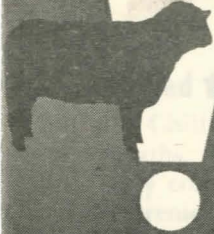
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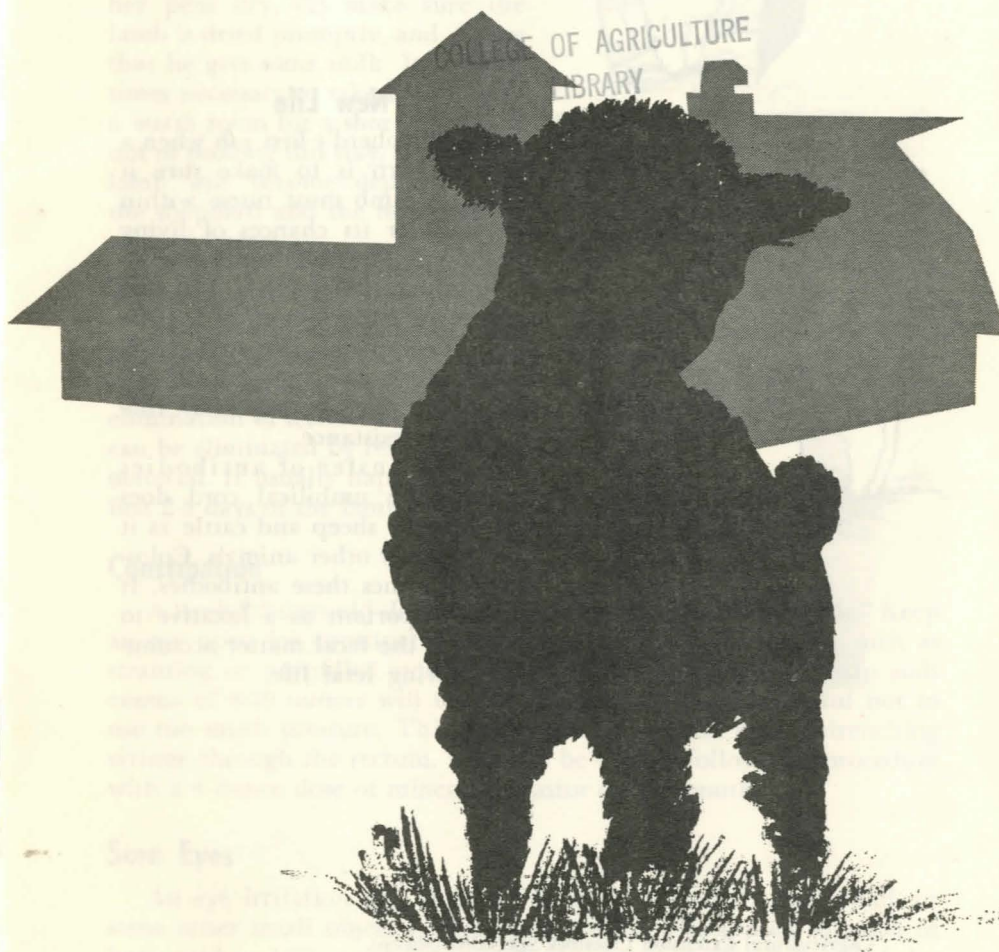
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Feeding and Care of Young Lambs Under Farm Conditions

By Ted H. Doane¹

The proper feeding and management of lambs is important to profitable sheep production. Careful attention to details of care and management of lambs will often mean the difference between a good profit or a loss in your sheep operations. Some of these details such as sore eyes, diseases, castration, docking, creep feeding, and care of the orphan lambs are discussed in this circular.



New Life

The shepherd's first job when a lamb is born is to make sure it nurses. A lamb must nurse within one hour or its chances of living are limited. Most lambs nurse within 30 minutes after birth. The first milk is an important meal for the lamb. Colostrum, the first milk, is not only a rich food for the offspring, but plays an important role in disease resistance.

The transfer of antibodies through the umbilical cord does not occur in sheep and cattle as it does in many other animals. Colostrum furnishes these antibodies. It is also important as a laxative to clean out the fecal matter accumulated during fetal life.

¹ Agricultural Extension Livestock Specialist (Sheep).

Problems with Young Lambs

Chilled Lambs

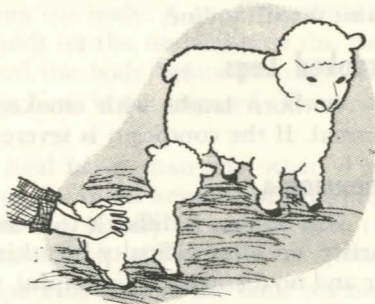
Chilling is a cause of many deaths. Chilling is common in very cold weather if a lamb is not extremely strong and the ewe is not an aggressive mother. To prevent this, the lamb must be dried as soon as possible and must nurse within an hour.

To avoid problems in extremely cold weather (1) keep the ewe and her pens dry, (2) make sure the lamb is dried promptly, and (3) see that he gets some milk. It is sometimes necessary to take the lamb to a warm room for a short time. Try not to prolong this stay, because the lamb will become dependent on the shepherd and the heat and become a bum.



"Pinning"

This condition is caused by the first feces "gumming up" around the tail and anus, stopping the elimination of feces. The condition can be eliminated by removing this material. It usually happens in the first 2-3 days of the lamb's life.



Constipation

A lamb 2-3 days old should be nursing well and be "filled out." Keep an eye open for constipated lambs the first week. Symptoms such as straining or over-filled stomachs may be an indication. A soap suds enema of 8-10 ounces will usually bring relief, but be careful not to use too much pressure. This enema can be applied with a drenching syringe through the rectum. It would be wise to follow this procedure with a 4 ounce dose of mineral or castor oil by mouth.

Sore Eyes

An eye irritation can be bothersome to a lamb. If dust, chaff, or some other small object is causing irritation, a saturated solution of boric acid or 15% argyrol dropped into the eye twice daily will help.

Inverted Eyelid (Entropion)

Sometimes in new-born lambs the eyelid is turned in. Irritation results from the eyelashes and can cause blindness if not corrected. To correct use one of the following methods:

(1) Use adhesive tape to hold the eyelid in place for a couple of days.

(2) Use eye ointment, if not too serious, until lid turns out.

(3) Use two sutures through the eyelid folds to tie the lid back for a few days.

(4) Clip out part of the skin fold about the size of a dime, just below the eyelash. When the skin grows together, it should pull the eyelid down and turn it out.

(5) Use metal clips (surgical type) to hold back the lid.

Navel Ill

Lambs are usually not as subject to this problem as are other classes of livestock, but to avoid the trouble tie off the umbilical cord and paint it with iodine.

Crooked Legs

Newborn lambs with crooked legs will usually straighten out to normal. If the condition is severe, a splint may be used for a few days.

Pneumonia

This disease is difficult to treat. A lamb that recovers is usually unthrifty, and has difficulty breathing. Dry quarters with plenty of fresh air and no disturbance is helpful. Call your veterinarian.

Stiff Lambs

Prevention is the best cure for stiff lambs. Wholesome feed and sanitary living conditions are the best treatments. The most common stiff-lamb disease affects muscles in the hind legs. Sometimes the front legs and shoulders are affected.

This disease usually attacks lambs that are several weeks old. It does not seem to be infectious. It is said to be due to a Vitamin E deficiency. Stiff-lamb disease rarely occurs when wheat bran is included in the ration of the ewe eight weeks before lambing and while she is nursing the lamb. Wheat bran also should be included in the ration of the lamb. The fastest-growing lambs seem to be more susceptible. Stiffness in some lambs may be due to arthritis or navel ill.

Dysentery or Diarrhea

The newborn lamb picks up this disease from the contaminated teats and udder of an ewe subjected to filthy bedding and lot. Lambs one or two days old are most often affected, but lambs up to three or

four weeks also may be affected. The sick lambs have no desire to nurse. They are in pain and are distressed. Usually the back is arched, with the belly tucked up tight. The feces will become grayish-white to yellowish in color. There may be some streaks of blood. Death usually comes within a few hours to three or four days.

Make the pens more sanitary to prevent continued infection. Consult your veterinarian if the condition persists.

Docking—Removing the Tail

Lambs are docked so they will stay clean. If the wool gets wet or dirty there is a chance of wool maggots and other sanitation problems. All lambs should be docked between 3-10 days of age. The older lambs get, the more of a set-back there may be and the more chance of bleeding. If the job is done before the blood supply is well developed in the tail, the shock will be less severe. Try to do the job before the fly season starts. If flies are prevalent, EQ 335 or a similar product should be applied to the cut or wound. Disinfect the equipment and utensils you use.

The tail is cut off about 1-1½" from the body. A good "landmark" is the junction or end of the caudal folds on the underside of the tail. Try to push the skin on the tail toward the body before cutting. This lets the loose skin cover the stub so the bone is not exposed. There are several methods of docking:

(1) Knife—The knife wound will heal faster than any other. This is excellent for young lambs because of the small amount of bleeding. If the lambs are more than two weeks old, it may be necessary to tie a string around the stub for a few hours. This will stop loss of blood.

(2) "All-in-one"—A scissor type apparatus used in the same manner as a knife. Precautions are the same.



The All-in-one is used for docking and castrating.

(3) **Elastration (rubber ring)**—This method is used extensively throughout the Midwest. No blood is lost. The circulation is cut off causing the tail to “slough off.” The tail drops off in 2-3 weeks. If the producer desires, he may cut the tail off just below and next to the ring in 2-3 days. This keeps the tail from dragging in the dirt and filth. The ring should come off whenever the tail does.



Place the elastrator ring at the junction of the caudal fold (one to one and a half inches from the body).

(4) **Hot irons or a docking chisel**—These tools, heated to a dull red, will sever the tail without loss of blood. The wound will heal slowly because of the burned tissues. For this method a handy piece of equipment is a board with a hole through which to insert the tail. This insures stubs of the correct length and keeps the hot tools from burning the lamb or helper.

(5) **Emasculatome**—After this apparatus is clamped shut, cut off the tail on the inside of the jaws close to the metal. Leave it for about ten seconds to reduce bleeding.

(6) **Emasculator**—This is used the same as a knife or “all-in-one.” It crushes as it cuts. This eliminates some bleeding.



The Emasculatome is discussed in paragraph 5 under docking.

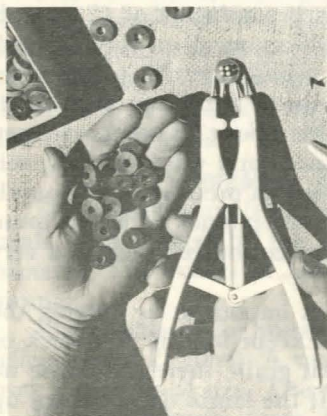
Castrating

All male lambs to be sold for slaughter should be castrated when 3-10 days of age. Castration should be done at the same time as docking. The sooner it is done the better, because there will be less shock. Ram lambs are usually discounted \$1 on the market. When castrating, the two general practices are:

1. Cut off the lower $\frac{1}{3}$ of the scrotum with a knife or cutting scissors.

Pull out the exposed testicles with fingers, pliers or teeth. They should be pulled slowly so as to break the cord off up in the body. Any loose, stringy tissue from the wound should be pulled out or severed. Disinfectant should be used on all equipment and hands.

2. Elastrator (rubber ring)—The rubber ring method of castration is used extensively. There is a hand instrument for expanding the ring and applying it to the scrotum. Be sure both testicles are below the ring when it is released. Do not place the ring against the belly of the sheep. The rings should not go above the two rudimentary teats at the top of the scrotum.



The elastrator or rubber ring apparatus.



Top and middle cuts show the removal of one third of the scrotum. The bottom cut shows removing the testes.

Creep Feeding

Creep feeding is a method of making feed available only to lambs. Creep feeding is desirable because: (1) Lambs gain faster when their milk diet is supplemented with grain (as much as a third to half a pound per day more), (2) The lambs are ready for market 1-2 months earlier, (3) Earlier marketing is adapted to a higher market for spring lambs, and (4) The lambs are not allowed to go to spring pasture, thus permitting more ewes on the same pasture and reducing internal parasites in the lambs.

A creep should be placed in a convenient location and designed so ewes can not enter. For early lambs, the creep should be in a sunny, warm, dry location. A cool, shady location is best for late lambs.



A typical creep feeding layout.

Lambs should have creep feed available when they are a week old. By 2-3 weeks of age, they should be eating. Whether lambs are hand-fed or self-fed depends upon the operator. Most lambs are hand-fed.

A good grain ration for starting lambs is a mixture of 12 pounds of cracked shelled corn, 3 pounds of soybean meal or similar feed, and 2 pounds of bran. This ration can usually be cheapened after three to four weeks by gradually working up to a mixture of one-half cracked corn or milo and one-half oats. After about six weeks of creep feeding the lambs will take whole corn or milo and whole oats. At this time, the proportion of corn may be increased. A mixture of 20 pounds of cracked yellow corn, 20 pounds of oats, 10 pounds of wheat bran, and 10 pounds of either soybean, linseed, or cottonseed meal is a very useful feeding ration.

It is doubtful whether the mixture is as important as judging the amount of the mixture for each feeding. Except for the first week or 10 days, when the lambs are learning to eat grain, there should be no grain left in the trough after 20 minutes. If the lambs do not clean up the grain in 20 minutes, the quantity should be reduced for the next feeding. Refused grain should be removed immediately. A wise feeder

tries to feed almost as much grain as the lambs will clean up. As soon as the lambs are on full feed, self-feeding may be employed. Good quality alfalfa hay should be part of this ration, free choice.

When lambs founder they become so-called "hot-lambs." The back will become arched or humped over the loin. While the lamb is standing, the hind legs will quiver. The weight is frequently shifted from one leg to the other. The lamb will not stand up long at one time. In some cases, the lamb will go to the feed trough and eat while sitting up like a dog. There is no cure. The lamb may live if the grain is cut to half or less. Shear the lamb to help him keep cool.

Pellets as a Creep Feed

The limiting factor in creep feeding pellets is the cost. There is little question as to the increase of rate of gain or feed conversion with pellets, but the relatively high cost of grinding, mixing and pelleting makes the profit in pelleted feeds questionable.

Many producers feel that the rate of gain, the additives which can be included, and the constant grain-roughage ratio offsets the cost. Another fact worth considering is that it is not as costly when you buy all of the ingredients as when you must transport your material to town and home again.

The best pellet ratio for creep feeding seems to be 50% grain and 50% roughage, or 60% grain and 40% roughage. This is opposite to the feedlot lamb ratio of 40% grain and 60% roughage.



Should I pellet?

Overeating Disease in Nursing Lambs

This disease usually affects the largest, fastest-gaining, and greediest lamb. It is caused by the toxins produced by excessive numbers of bacteria. The wastes of bacteria (in large amounts) are toxic to the animal.

The treatment for young lambs under 2 months of age is antitoxin (effective for 21 days). A vaccination (bacterin) can be used for lambs over 2 months of age. The vaccination is effective for several months.

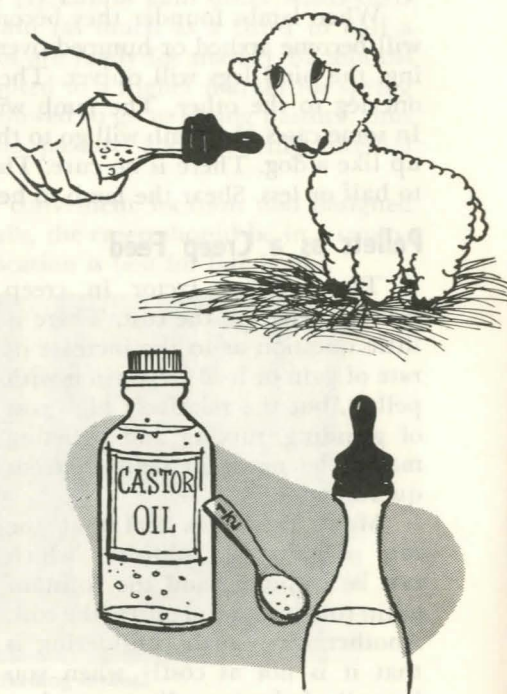
If nursing lambs come down with the disease, it is recommended that they be taken off of the enriched feeds or pasture for a day or two, until they can eliminate the excess toxins.

Orphan Lambs

If possible, get a lamb transferred to a foster mother before you make a "bum" out of him. See E. C. 61-205, "Feeding and Management of the Ewe."

Orphan lambs may be raised on cow's milk, fed with a bottle. This practice is more likely to be successful if the lamb has first had colostrum milk from its mother or another ewe that has not been in milk for more than a week. The cow's milk should be whole, fresh, and warm and fed from thoroughly clean utensils. (*Do not dilute the cow's milk.*) A pop bottle and nipple are good equipment. Try to have the temperature near 100 degrees, or body temperature.

If colostrum is not available, put about one-half teaspoon of castor oil in one of the milk feedings the first and third day. Below is a guide to the amounts and times of feeding per day for an orphan lamb.



Age of lamb	Daily Feedings	Amount of each feeding
1 to 6 days	8 to 6 feedings	1 to 2 ounces
3 to 2 weeks	6 to 5 feedings	3 to 6 ounces
2 to 3 weeks	5 to 4 feedings	6 to 8 ounces
3 to 4 weeks	4 to 3 feedings	8 to 10 ounces
4 to 6 weeks	3 feedings	10 to 16 ounces
6 to 8 weeks	3 feedings	16 to 32 ounces

When the lamb is 10 to 15 days old, start feeding cracked corn and linseed or soybean meal. Pick out the bright green flakes of alfalfa leaves for the lamb. Feed the stems to the ewes along with the leaves the lamb refuses.

Milk can be taken away at about 2-3 months. Make sure the lamb is eating grain.

Milk Replacers

Commercial milk replacers used for calves or pigs can be used for orphan lambs. Follow the feeding schedules mentioned above. It also

may be possible to use some type of a multiple feeding apparatus with a thermostatically controlled heating element if several orphans are involved. The replacer should be replaced and apparatus cleaned every so often (24 hours) to keep it sanitary.

Pasture for Young Lambs?

Most slaughter lambs on creep should never go to pasture because:

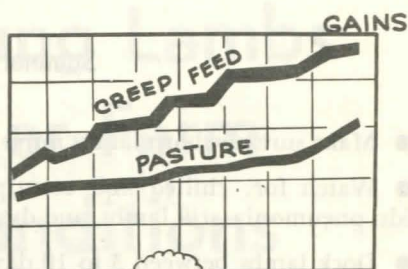
(1) Lambs gain faster with milk and creep.

(2) Lambs pick up worms in pasture, cutting down their gain.

(3) Lambs will eat grass, thus not making desired gains by using their grains efficiently.

(4) Lambs will not be ready for market during the seasonal high prices if pasture is used.

Lambs to be saved as replacements should get the same consideration as other lambs to get their growth. If lambs go to pasture, it should be after they are weaned.



When to Wean Lambs

Lambs should be weaned by four months of age. Slaughter lambs should be marketed before they are weaned (4 months of age). Pure-breds or replacements also should be weaned by this time. Many producers wean at 2-3 months. It has been proven that lambs can be weaned successfully at 2 months of age without any ill effects.

Reasons to Wean Early

(1) Milk production drops after two months of lactation.

(2) Early weaning allows the ewes to rest, so they will become conditioned for breeding.

(3) Lambs can be put on pasture by themselves, eliminating the possibility of picking up worms from the adult sheep.

Equipment

Equipment for sheep can be simple and inexpensive. Extension Circular 60-712, "Sheep Equipment Plans," is available through County Extension Agents or the Extension Agricultural Engineer, College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska, Lincoln 3, Nebraska. The circular has the following plans: Feedlot and ewe-lamb layouts, self-feeders, bunks, creep plans, chutes and dipping vats.

Summary

- Make sure newborn lambs nurse within one hour.
- Watch for: chilled and constipated lambs, pinning, inverted eyelids, pneumonia, stiff lambs, and dysentery.
- Dock lambs between 3 to 10 days of age. Use a knife or "all-in-one" for quick healing.
- Castrate young male lambs at the same time as docking.
- Creep feed for rapid gains.
- Watch for overeating disease.
- Save your orphan lambs.
- Never turn creep-fed lambs to pasture.
- Wean all lambs by 3 to 4 months of age—as early as 2 months of age in some cases.
- Equipment is simple and inexpensive, but necessary.

Other Sheep Bulletins

EC 67-205—Feeding and Management of the Ewe

EC 61-207—Ram Management

EC 60-712—Sheep Equipment Plans (\$1.00)

EC 61-1905—Prevent Worms to Increase Sheep Profits