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## G79-433 Rearing Lambs on Milk Replacers

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## Rearing Lambs on Milk Replacers

Rearing orphan lambs on milk replacers can help increase profit.

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*Ted H. Doane, Extension Sheep Specialist*

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Orphan lambs can be an extra profit to the farm flock. As much as \$40/lamb can be paid to labor if time is available. A warm room (in the winter) and some basic equipment are all that are necessary.

A large portion of the nation's lamb crop dies from starvation during the first week after birth. Orphan lambs less than 4 weeks of age usually require the use of milk replacer supplementation. Switching lambs to milk replacers shortly after birth has not reached its full potential in sheep husbandry.

### Lambs That Should be Fed Milk Replacer

- Lambs that are orphans due to the death of the mother, one side of udder nonfunctional on a ewe with twins, mismothered lambs, etc.
- The third lamb in a set of triplets or an obviously weak lamb in a set of twins.
- Any lamb that shows symptoms of progressive weakness during the first week after birth where this can be traced to an inadequate milk supply.
- "Bummer" or orphan lambs that often can be detected at one or two weeks of age by their thin condition and dirty faces, suggesting that they are stealing a limited milk supply from other ewes.

The usual procedure is to wean the weakest lamb in a set of triplets or twins. University researchers, however, recommend that the strongest lamb be weaned and the weakest lamb(s) left on the ewe. A higher survival rate and more satisfactory performance is noted when this method is used. However, if the weak lamb left on the ewe dies, another graft should be made. Some lambs will not adapt to a nipple as well as others. This may create another decision.

### Management of Lambs When Weaned to Milk Replacers

- The lamb must first have colostrum from the ewe for survival. If none is available from the mother, provide the lamb with colostrum from another ewe or from a supply frozen in preparation of the lambing season.
- Place the lambs in a warm, dry, enclosed area with other lambs on milk replacer. Slatted or mesh floors are excellent for these lambs; avoid drafts.
- The lambs should not be able to see or hear their dams while being weaned onto a milk replacer.
- Lambs may require assistance the first day when learning to nurse from the replacer pail.
- Avoid placing very young lambs in the same pen with older lambs that may deprive them of adequate milk replacer.
- Inject the lambs with the following when placed in the nursery:

Iron-dextran

Vitamin ADE (If ADE is not available, use A & D.)

Combiotic

Make certain that the milk replacer contains a high level of antibiotics to avoid scours and other digestive disorders.

### **Composition of the Milk Replacer**

There are a number of commercially prepared lamb milk replacers on the market. Lambs may perform satisfactorily on some calf milk replacers that are on the market. However, most calf milk replacers do not contain enough fat to be used successfully with lambs. Listed below are some recommendations for preparing milk replacers:

- Best results have been obtained with milk replacers containing a minimum of 30 percent fat and 24 percent milk protein.
- Fat can be added to calf milk replacers in the form of choice white grease (lard) or butterfat. *Vegetable oils should not be used.*
- The lamb replacer should be diluted with water to a minimum of 20 percent dry matter (two pounds milk replacer per gallon of water). Read package instructions carefully.
- Mix replacers thoroughly before feeding. Avoid using replacers that will not stay in suspension. Mix the powder in warm water and cool immediately to about 33°F. This helps to eliminate the problem of ingredient separation during storage. A blender is very good for this operation.

### **Method of Feeding Milk Replacers**

Use one of the multiple nipple systems for self-feeding the milk replacer.

Recent research has suggested that lambs perform better on cold milk rather than warm milk. Cold milk does not sour as quickly and the lambs consume only a small amount of cold milk replacer solution at each nursing, but nurse more often. This reduces digestive problems. The one problem with feeding cold milk is getting the lambs to start nursing adequate amounts. Warm milk may be used the first week and cold milk thereafter. In a free choice system, each lamb will consume 1/2 to 3/4 pounds of milk replacer powder in solution daily [2 to 4 pints of liquid milk].

Research results have not shown any advantage for feeding more often than twice daily after the lambs are one week old if they are hand-fed.

Restrict intake of milk replacer after the lambs are two weeks old to encourage consumption of dry feed.

The following ration has proven quite satisfactory for encouraging young lambs to eat.

<b>Table I.</b>	
<b>Ingredient</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Ground shelled corn or milo	45
Ground alfalfa hay	20
Soybean meal	25
Molasses	8
Bone Meal	15
Trace mineralized salt	0.5
Aureomycin or terramycin	2.5 grams/100 lbs.

As soon as the lambs are eating dry feed, wean them to a high-quality dry ration and manage them as early weaned feeder lambs. Lambs can be weaned from milk feeding at 25 to 30 pounds body weight or when they are 30 to 45 days of age. Some experimental lambs have been weaned successfully at lighter weights. Post-weaning rations, until the lambs reach about 60 pounds, should be high in protein (15 to 20 percent) and energy.

**NOTE:** Milk replacers may be difficult to find in some areas. Check with local sheep producers, county Extension agents, feed companies, and sheep suppliers as well as wool associations or buyers. There are at least three companies that manufacture the milk replacer. Remember that it must have over 24 percent protein and 20 percent dry matter to be successful.

Adapted from material presented in *SID Sheepman's Handbook*, 1977.

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