

# Enhancing Lamb Survival Rate

Profitability in sheep farming is largely dependent on the number of lambs weaned per ewe per year. The number of lambs weaned divided by the number of ewes exposed to the ram during breeding season should produce a figure approaching 2.00 or even higher. A higher rate is influenced by the number and type of birth such as twins, etc. Survival of lambs is a result of proper ewe care before and during lambing as well as lamb care afterwards.

## Lambing Time

Lambing pens with clean dry bedding should be always available. They should be properly cleaned and disinfected in order for lambs and ewes to be comfortable. Know the signs of lambing. These include:

- Restlessness
- Stretching
- Raising dock
- Obvious straining
- Frequent lying down and getting up
- Looking at their abdomen

The total time for normal delivery is five hours whereby dilation of the cervix takes four hours and the actual delivery is one hour. In normal birth, the water sac will appear followed by the lamb's two feet and nose (normal presentation). If the ewe appears to strain for 30-45 minutes check her to find out what is wrong. Be prepared to assist abnormal birth or seek competent help.

Once the lamb is born, be sure it starts breathing. Clean any mucus membrane away from the nose and mouth. The ewe usually does this job but make sure it is done. If the lamb has a difficulty breathing, you can stimulate by tickling the inside of the nostril with a piece of hay to induce sneezing.

After birth and the lamb starts breathing, a 7% tincture of iodine should be applied to the navel to prevent infection. Following this the lamb should be encouraged to nurse immediately to maximize absorption of antibodies from the colostrum. Lambs appearing slow to nurse should be tube fed with colostrum. Absorption of antibodies from the colostrum ceases from 36-48 hours after birth. One point to remember is to have the lamb fed with colostrum no less than 6-12 hours immediately after birth. A newborn lamb should have a quart of colostrum within 24 hours from birth and as a minimum requirement, should be given twice at the rate of 1 pint each time.

## Reduce Mortality

Studies have shown that about 30% of lamb losses prior to weaning are due to hypothermia and starvation and this occurs with first three weeks of age. Energy (fat) reserve in lambs is only 3% of the body weight compared to 10-15 % in adult sheep, thus making them more susceptible to hypothermia and starvation. This therefore indicates the need for prompt and sufficient energy intake of the newly born lamb.

As a producer you should be keen to observe chilled or inactive lambs. A normal thrifty lamb has bright eyes, alert, and vigorously nursing. Unthrifty lambs are too weak to stand, become isolated with their heads low and ears drooping. Weak lambs become chilled and dehydrated quickly. Normal temperature of the lambs ranges from 101-103°F and body temperature below 100°F indicates hypothermia. Lambs with low temperature should be warmed immediately by submerging the lamb neck-deep in a warm water bath (100-110°F). Dry the lamb using a towel and allow it to nurse after being warmed.

Orphan lambs which need extra care may either be grafted onto another ewe or raised by itself. A high quality milk replacer should be adequate after receiving the minimum amount of colostrum.

A major aspect in preparing for lambing season is to gather important supplies such as the following:

- Heat lamps
- Frozen colostrum
- 60cc syringe & feeding tube
- Record books
- Vitamin ADE injections
- Ear tags and pliers
- Other drugs and disinfectant
- Scale and bucket
- Veterinarian phone number
- Disposable syringe
- Water bath
- Rectal thermometer
- Milk replacer
- Dry-clean towels
- 7% tincture of iodine
- Appropriate lubricant
- Nipples & bottles
- Lamb puller or soft cotton cloth
- Selenium injection

Successful lambing is a direct result of proper management and the points discussed above are its major aspects.