

Lamb Nutrition
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Take steps now to achieve lambing season success



Create a lamb nutrition and management plan in advance to provide optimal care.

*By Dr. Tom Earleywine,
director of nutritional services
for Land O'Lakes Animal Milk Products*

LAMBING SEASON can drive a shepherd's long-term success. The health, growth and early performance of a lamb crop determines the number of feeders for marketing and the quality of replacements entering the flock. With so much riding on lambing season, be sure to plan in advance to provide optimal care to your next crop of lambs.

Set goals.

Before the first lamb hits the ground, analyze past performance of the flock and set goals. Setting tangible goals and determining a path for achieving these objectives can help you build on past flock performance.

Consider the following goals:

- 200 percent lamb crop: Mature and well-conditioned ewes should be able to care for at least two lambs. To achieve this goal, extra lambs (triples and quads) and those from younger or under-conditioned ewes may be better cared for away from the ewe.
- Less than 5 percent pre-weaning mortality: The industry target for pre-weaning mortality is less than 5 percent. However, it's estimated that nearly 20 percent of lambs die before weaning, with 80 percent of those losses occurring during the first 10 days.

Create a colostrum feeding strategy.

Colostrum, or the first milk of the ewe, is the first protection lambs receive against environmental pathogens and bacteria; however, not all ewes are able to produce the quality or quantity of colostrum required for early protection.

Test quality of colostrum with a colostrometer and monitor the amount of colostrum consumed. Provide colostrum at a rate of at least 10 percent of a lamb's body weight by 18 hours of age. Serum immunoglobulin levels

should be above 10 mg/ml.

Keep a colostrum replacer on hand during lambing season in case ewes are unable to produce the necessary colostrum. Colostrum replacers are one way to reduce variation in quality and provide proven protection to newborns. If feeding a colostrum replacer, select one that is formulated and USDA-approved (to prevent failure of passive transfer) specifically for lambs and kid goats.

Determine which lambs should be fed milk replacer.

Feeding a milk replacer can help provide consistent nutrition to the entire lamb crop, especially those that the ewe is unable to care for. The option also allows dairy sheep producers to market ewe's milk.

Determine which lambs should be fed milk replacer as soon as possible, considering the following lambs which require additional care:

- Lambs in dairy sheep flocks
- Orphan lambs
- Weak lambs unable to nurse
- Unclaimed lambs
- Third and fourth lambs in sets of triplets or quadruplets
- Weaker or smaller lamb of twins
- One of the twins from a ewe lambing at less than one year of age

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**Lambing season has a long-term impact on future flock success.
Plan in advance to provide optimal care to your next crop of lambs.**

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Select a lamb-specific milk replacer.

Research milk replacer options and select a milk replacer formulated specifically for sheep. Lambs require different nutrient levels than other livestock, so milk replacers created for other species may not provide adequate nutrition.

The fat content of sheep milk is much higher than cow's or goat's milk and the lactose content is lower. Selecting a milk replacer that provides these higher nutrient levels can better help lambs meet their full potential. In fact, research from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Spooner Agricultural Research Station has shown that successfully raising lambs on milk replacer can increase the net return per ewe for the flock due to increased growth rates compared to sheep milk and non-sheep milk replacers.

To best match the nutrients in ewe's milk, select a lamb milk replacer with an enhanced fatty acid profile and a balance of 25 percent protein and 30 percent fat. The ingredient Digestarom® has also been shown to positively support gut health.

Assist and monitor lambs from birth through weaning.

Create a schedule for lamb management. Consider the following steps and tips when raising young lambs:

- Provide an adequate quantity of colostrum to newborn lambs as soon after birth as possible.
- Remove lambs from sight or hearing distance of ewe as soon as possible after birth.

- Provide a warm, dry, draft-free place to start nursing lambs.
- Assist lambs in nursing for the first few feedings as needed.
- Avoid placing younger lambs with older lambs. Older lambs tend to push smaller lambs away from feeding.
- Hang a light over the milk replacer self-feeding devices for added visibility and warmth.
- Start lambs on high-quality starter feed at 2 weeks of age and provide ample high quality clean, fresh water supply in front of lambs at all times.
- Wean at 30 days or 25 pounds of weight when lambs have begun to eat starter feed routinely. At weaning time, each lamb should have consumed at least 20-25 pounds of lamb milk replacer powder.

For more information on lamb nutrition and management, visit www.lolmilkreplacer.com or contact Dr. Tom Earleywine at (800) 618-6455 or email: TJEarleywine@landolakes.com.

Be sure to visit with Land O'Lakes Animal Milk Products at the upcoming DSANA Symposium!



Meet your new DSANA
Director: Gabby Flores

GABBY FLORES of Colon, Queretaro, Mexico, was elected to the DSANA Board of Directors at the 19th DSANA Symposium in Ontario, Canada.

Gabriela Flores, operates a Colon, Queretaro, Mexico dairy and meat sheep

operation along with her father Enrique. The family added East Friesian ewes to their Katahdin sheep farm in 2009 and have continued to grow their dairy enterprise ever since – adding new genetics and breeds to their flock.

“Mexico currently does have more dairy genetics and breeds than the U.S. does,” she says. “We can find East Friesian, Lacaune and some Assaf and Awassi, but we still rely on other countries for better and different genetics.”

The accessibility of outcross ewes and rams in Mexico has helped Floher de Queretaro to grow their flock to 550 dairy ewes while still maintaining a separate flock of 500 Katahdin meat sheep. Keeping the groups separate has

allowed production numbers to rise.

“Our main goal is to have ewes that are healthy – inside and out – and that carry good milking characteristics,” Flores says. “In the future, we would like to grow our flock and have great genetics to sell. Better genetics will benefit both us and others interested in the dairy sheep business.”

Flores says that growing their flock has taken time, but that DSANA and other dairy sheep producers in the organization have helped the family to learn quickly.

“We’ve learned that time, patience, a strong will, a good team and a good selection program can go a long way,” she says. “Cheers to nice and healthy dairy sheep! And sheep products of course!”