

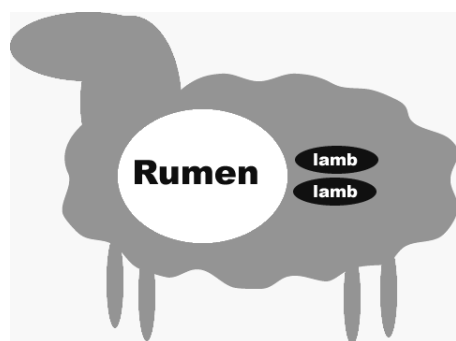
DORSET COMMERCIAL CONNECTION

Improving Newborn Lamb Survival

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Livestock market prices are the highest in history and I can't think of a better time to be more concerned about newborn lamb survival. Even if we are talking about only five lambs, at 75 pounds per lamb and at least \$2.00 a pound market value, we are looking at an overall value of \$750. This can be even more when we factor in the value of breeding stock. So, let's look at a few ways we can ensure that lambs survive past birth.

Nutrition plays a critical role in the survivability of lambs both prior to and during lambing. Sufficient nutrient levels are needed for fetal development. This includes growth of the lamb, fat reserves at birth, and vigor once that lamb is born. Nutrition also has an effect on the quality and quantity of colostrum and we all know the importance



Early in a ewe's pregnancy, the lambs are very small and take up little room within the ewe. There is plenty of room for the rumen to expand as the ewe eats.

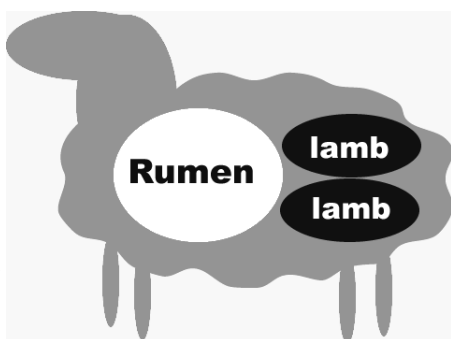
attention to body condition of ewes at lambing time. Thin ewes are likely to produce less milk and possibly lower quality colostrum than ewes in good body condition. They are also more likely to have lighter weight lambs, which in turn are less likely to survive than average weights. A good goal is for lambs to weigh 10 pounds at birth.

On the other hand, don't let ewes get too fat because then we start to see problems with pregnancy toxemia and even prolapse. There's only so much room inside that ewe for feed, fat and lambs! And, if that internal capacity is filled with lambs and fat, then the ewe feels full before she has eaten enough to meet her nutrient requirements.

Health care is also important throughout gestation. Observe ewes at least 10 minutes a day to identify any problems. Vaccinations, such as C, D

of lambs receiving colostrum as soon as possible after birth. Ewes should have adequate amounts of feed, feed that provides the correct amount of protein and energy, and a good mineral supplement to keep them healthy and allow them to produce healthy lambs that are adequate in size.

Pay close



As the lambs begin to increase greatly in size during late pregnancy, there is less room for the rumen to expand as the ewe eats. Ewes in ideal body condition will have enough room internally to accommodate the growing size of the lambs as well as the rumen so that the ewe can eat enough to meet nutritional needs.

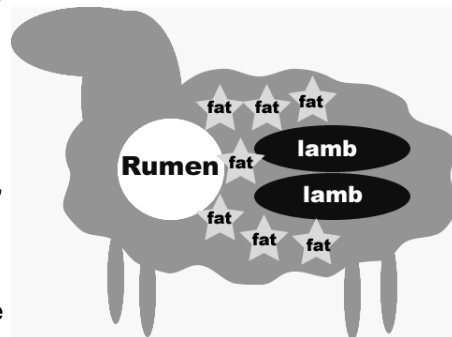
and T, given during the last month of pregnancy will also provide some protection to newborn lambs until their immune systems are developed enough to produce antibodies from their own vaccinations. If your flock has had problems in the past with any abortion diseases, make sure ewes are vaccinated. In some cases lambs may be born weak and die shortly after birth rather than being aborted at some point during the pregnancy.

Once the lambs are born we should pay attention to a few details. First and foremost is to make sure that the lambs are getting enough to eat. Typical lamb behavior is to stretch when they

get up, ears should be alert and they should readily seek the udder. Lambs that cry, stand around hunched up, or simply don't get up most likely need more to eat. You can also pick up the lamb and check its belly for milk. Hold the lamb behind the front legs, with the back legs dangling. Feel the belly to see if it feels like an inflated balloon.

Dipping navels is a good way to protect from infection. This is more important when

lambs are born inside as compared to lambs born outside on CLEAN pasture areas. Note my emphasis on clean! For lambs born in very cold weather, be sure to have some



Body condition becomes more critical during late gestation when part of that room inside the ewe is taken up with fat. This is why ewes who are overly fat suffer from pregnancy toxemia. They simply don't have enough room internally to accommodate the growing size of the lambs, the space taken up by the fat and the space needed for the rumen when the ewe eats. Therefore, the ewe is not able to eat enough to account for the increased energy needs during the last part of her pregnancy.

extra towels available to get them dried off more quickly. You may also want to have a heat source available to keep the lambs warm until they are dry. I prefer to use a heat lamp mounted inside a barrel, with a hole cut into the barrel for the lamb to walk in and out. Tie the barrel to a corner of the barn to prevent the ewe from knocking it over and starting a fire.

A few minutes paying attention to these details can mean a big return in the number of lambs bouncing around your barnyard or pasture. Proper care can also bring returns in healthier sheep, meaning less time spent in the barn dealing with problems. Plus, proper care can also translate into heavier weaning weights for your lambs!