Hunter Nutrition

The Program That Performs

FALL NEWSLETTER 2023

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GESTATING EWE FEEDING

by Jeff Hunter

Most of you will be lambing late this fall and winter. As you head into winter, remember that good preparation is everything. Assuming you have adequate forage supplies then our attention goes to nutrition and health concerns for the gestating ewe. In much of the country, we will be out of grass and all of its benefits by December, most likely earlier. Without high quality grass, the ewe flock becomes totally dependent upon the shepherd's feeding skill. Nutritional supplementation of the winter forage supply becomes critical. We will be in a demanding winter environment and need to fulfill the increased nutritional demands of late gestation. Much of this years winter hay supply will be first cutting or lower quality hay. The 2023 hay crop is of both lower quality and lesser volume. Hay sampling and ration balancing based on forage quality should be considered for most flocks. With lower quality hay, fed at a lower rate, we will need to feed more of the correct amounts of grain and supplement. You will have to adjust your traditional gestating feeding program this year.

The annual reproduction of sheep in the winter and early spring can be demanding. Preventative health (vaccination programs), nutrition and stockmanship must be at a high level for successful winter production. A good late gestation vaccination (CD/T, Pasturella, etc) program for ewes will lead to success at lambing and during the early life of the lambs. Gestational nutrition is critical, as we are supplementing almost all of the needs of the ewes due to the stage of production and the low quality of much of our forage.

Winter gestation feeding has a double challenge of low quality hay and the fact we are feeding for that highly demanding production stage. The fact that winter gestation feeding coincide with low quality forage makes supplemental feeding critical for success. The probability of deficiencies of even a basic nutrient such as energy or protein and certainly selenium, magnesium, calcium, Vitamin E, etc. is high! A good Gestation Feeding Program starts 6-8 weeks prior to lambing. Without adequate energy, newborns will be small and weak, stillborn and abortions will also be at a higher level. Adult animals that are shorted on energy will lose weight, have low milk production, a shortened live span, and have a longer re-breeding interval. Protein will be needed to maximize milk production and for the viability of newborns. Calcium, magnesium, and, to some extent, potassium play a big role in metabolic disorders which can be disastrous. The sudden onset of hypocalcemia and hypomagnesia frequently seen in otherwise healthy ewes are results of those deficiencies. Feeding these nutrients as a preventive measure is more successful than the treatment options. Iodine is very important in reducing stillborns and preventing goiter. Low selenium and/or vitamin E results in white muscle disease in newborns, weakness, low birth weight & viability, lamb death loss, stillborns, dystocia, delayed breed back time, and lowered performance.

Production stage specific feeding programs can address these concerns. While ewe maintenance requirements are usually filled with free choice mineral and pasture/forage. Gestation and Lactation have a much greater need for all classes of nutrients. The first significant nutritional change for the ewe occurs during late gestation (the last 4-6 weeks). For a ewe carrying twin lambs, her dry matter needs increase by 30%, energy (TDN) by 60%, and protein by 50%. These are dramatic changes at any time of the year! Adequate levels of these nutrients are necessary because 70% of fetal growth occurs during the last 4 weeks of gestation. A good gestation feeding program will increase lamb birth weight and survival. Sufficient energy is needed to prevent pregnancy disease (ketosis) in the ewe. Gestation feeding programs affect the ewe's milk production during lactation. Too much feed can cause fat deposits in the udder reducing production. Over feeding can lead to lambing difficulties due to large lambs. Not enough feed can also cause a delayed onset of lactation and lower milk production. Proper grouping of ewes so that they have 4-6 weeks on the 'late gestation ration' will minimize these problems. What you do to the ewe flock in late gestation determines the success of your lambing ! Prelambing vaccinations and feeding to prevent coccidiosis, abortions, stillborn, and white muscle disease should be routine practices.

Typical Gestation feeding recommendations would be about 4 – 4.5 # of hay equivalent and about

1-1.25 # of grain daily. Recommendations vary with ewe body weight/condition, breed, fleece length, temperature, and forage quality.

EVALUATING REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS

by LeAnn Hall

Getting the maximum number of healthy lambs on the ground without exceeding facility, labor, and management capacity provides opportunity for maximal financial returns. Achieving a high number of lambs born requires a high pregnancy rate, that is # of ewes pregnant ÷ # ewes exposed X 100. Tracking and recording this information necessitates management and time input, but it prevents the surprise of fewer than expected lambs born next season.

To begin addressing your flock's reproductive success, take the obvious off the table: old or chronically sick or lame rams and ewes won't breed well, if at all. Cull and treat animals so only the healthy and sound enter the breeding season. Rams with incomplete, malformed reproductive tracts or poor sperm are unable to settle ewes efficiently. Get them semen-tested before the breeding season starts.

Evaluate the body condition score (BCS) of ewes and rams with enough time to make adjustments. On a scale of 1-5, the ideal BCS prior to breeding is 2.5 for ewes. This condition makes ewes especially responsive to the flushing effect, achieved by feeding a higher plane of nutrition for 3 weeks prior to and including the breeding season and resulting in higher pregnancy rates. Rams should start the season at 3-3.5 BCS to accommodate their increased energy demands. Adjusting BCS to appropriate levels is most effective and feed-efficient in the dry period, resulting in a higher pregnancy rate and early-mid gestation resulting in stronger, healthier lambs at birth and weaning.

Outfit the rams with either paint or a marking harness and crayons to track estrus. Check daily to ensure chosen method retains material to color ewes; it will get used up faster than you wish. Record markings daily in records. Tracking estrus allows identification of ewes that aren't cycling, rams that aren't settling, and ewes that aren't settling, as well as provides approximate lambing dates. Consult your veterinarian if these situations occur as medications and estrous synchronization protocols can correct some of these issues.

After the breeding season, use pregnancy detection methods such as ultrasound or blood test to confirm pregnancy. Accuracy of ultrasound depends on the quality of the machine and experience of the technician but can approach 100%. Ewes need to be held off feed for 8-12 hours prior to reading to minimize intestinal obstruction and false positives. Number of lambs expected can be determined. Ideal timing is 40-60 days post-breeding. Costs typically run between $5-8/head + travel for technician. Blood testing can begin as soon as 28 days post-breeding with nearly 100% accuracy for pregnancy confirmation, but number of lambs cannot be determined. A 2-cc blood sample is collected and sent to lab for evaluation with results expected in 1 week. Cost of the test is $3-4/head + collection supplies and veterinarian if needed for blood draw. More information and kit ordering forms can be found at DG29 Preg Test | *northwestlabs.net*

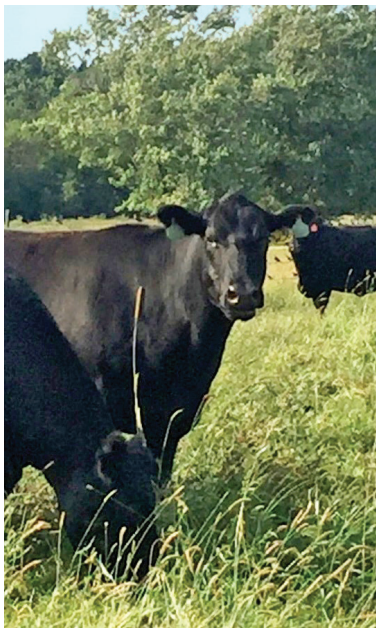
Use pregnancy/open results to make cull/keep decisions, and separate kept ewes that are open for the third trimester (~50 days before lambing). Pregnant ewes need a higher plane of nutrition at this time and during lactation. Running open ewes with this group will cost unnecessary feed, plus result in over-conditioning that can lead to difficulty breeding in the following season, perpetuating and exacerbating breeding problems and low pregnancy rates down the road.

Use these techniques to record and evaluate your farm's reproductive success. Small changes can result in higher pregnancy rates, providing more lambs on the ground and improving profitability of your operation.

BEEF COW WINTER FEEDING NUTRIENT REQUIREMENTS

by Jeff Hunter

Your cows can be fed one of two ways this winter. (1) Feed to just get through the winter, or (2) Feed for Success. Winter winds and cold temperatures are demanding. Add calving and the feeding of lower value feeds; creates much higher nutritional requirements than any other time of the year. Meeting nutritional requirements is critical.



Winter feeding for production is a double challenge of low nutritional quality of stored forages and feeding for late gestation and lactation. The fact that these production cycles coincide with low quality forage makes supplemental feeding critical for success. The probability of deficiencies of even a basic nutrient such as energy or protein and certainly selenium, magnesium, calcium, and Vitamin E is high! Without adequate energy, newborns will be small and weak. Stillborn and abortions will also be at a higher level. Adult animals that are shorted on energy will lose weight, have low milk production, a shortened live span, and have a longer re-breeding interval.

Cows require energy for calf development, digestion, lactation, maintenance of body temperature and all body functions. Cows derive the energy they need from the rumen's digestion of feeds. Cows can utilize serval feedstuffs which cannot be used by non-ruminant's. However forage quality is still important. Intake of hay/silage must be adequate to meet energy and protein needs. If forage quality is low, intake is.

IS YOUR HERD READY FOR WINTER...

by Katie Marchino

Feeding ruminants in any season is no task for the weary, but once winter comes, proper nutrition is vital for any herd. Lower temperatures and harsh climates are hard on an animal's body; however with proper nutrition, you can help ensure your livestock are comfortable come the cold season.

Diving into the anatomy of ruminants, the process of rumination is what provides the animal with energy, and in the cold months is what is crucial for the animal to create heat. The rumen (one of four parts of a ruminants' stomach) contains microbes that break down feedstuffs and start the fermentation process creating volatile fatty acids (VFAs), which then provide the energy for the animal. Heat is the number one by-product of fermentation.

Since ruminants normally spend about 35-40% of their day ruminating, it's important to provide them with plenty of feed and forages to create all the energy and heat they need to stay warm in the winter months. You should feed a substantial amount of high-quality hay/forages and update or switch your feed rations to a higher energy formula. By adding things like beet pulp, soybean hulls and various oils will increase the caloric value or energy in your ration. Adding cottonseed hulls will also increase the fiber of your ration, but are lower energy than the other options listed.

It is also important to consider your water sources in the winter time. Freezing water is a very common issue in the livestock industry, so making sure your livestock have access to clean drinking water is vital. Water is essential for proper rumination; as well as, regulating body temperature, nutrient absorption and lubricating the joints. Using a water-safe heating device in water tanks or checking water sources for freezing consistently will help your herd stay hydrated all winter long.

Feeding in the winter months can seem like a challenging task, but with proper planning alongside your nutritionist and taking extra precautions for the cold can improve your herd vitality in the colder months.

Hunter Nutrition Inc.

200 N. South Street
P.O. Box 412
Brookston, IN 47923

Phone: (765) 563-1003
Fax: (765) 563-1005
www.hunternutrition.com