



PRELAMING TIME VACCINATION

J.D. Bobb, DVM

International SheepLetter

Vol. 18 No. 1, January-February 1998

The idea of vaccinating a ewe prior to lambing is not only good management, but essential to reduce newborn lamb mortality. When we vaccinate a ewe several weeks prior to the lambing season it stimulates her immune system and the production of antibodies against the disease. Vaccinated ewes will pass these antibodies in their colostrum to their newborn lambs. Each lamb needs to consume approximately 8 ounces of colostrum in the first several hours after birth to receive these antibodies from their mother.

Diseases that are routinely vaccinated for include E. coli, overeating Type C, and tetanus. Ewe lambs or first time lambing ewes should receive two vaccinations at least two weeks apart. A good protocol for ewe lambs is vaccinating at 5 weeks and 3 weeks prior to lambing. For mature ewes that have lambed in previous years a single vaccination at 3 weeks prior to lambing is sufficient to stimulate the immune system. The antibodies the newborn lamb receives will help protect it against the challenge of the disease. These passive antibodies are very effective for E. coli and Type C overeating. They will help control tetanus, but you need to provide additional protection in lambs when docking and castrating to prevent tetanus.

Shearing time, if done in the last month of pregnancy is a good time to also complete the prelambing vaccinations. Many producers use a nurse goat or a milking goat to raise orphan lambs or produce milk for the bottle lambs. Goats should also be vaccinated the same as ewes to help insure adequate supply of antibodies if their colostrum is to be saved for newborn lambs. Some research indicates that frozen colostrum should be replaced after one year of storage to insure adequate antibody levels.

When thawing frozen colostrum to feed newborn lambs, you need to prevent heating at high temperatures which can destroy the proteins which form the antibodies.