



## **CREEP FEEDING**

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Getting lambs to market as fast as possible directly impacts profitability in a typical Midwestern sheep flock. Rapidly growing lambs start in the beginning, with the creep. Locally, we see many well-designed creep areas and some poor ones. Producers with well designed and managed creeps consistently get lambs on feed sooner and therefore market lambs at an earlier age.

Purpose of the creep - First of all, creep feeding introduces lambs to the feed that they will consume to market. The earlier that we can encourage lambs to consume creep the faster they will convert to getting the majority of their nutrients from grain rather than from the ewe. Secondly, creep feeding provides a protected area for the lambs to loiter or sleep. This area should be cleaner, warmer and more enticing than the ewe pen, thereby protecting the lambs from injury and exposure to weather and pathogens. Thirdly, creep feeding begins the weaning transition. If we can encourage gradual transition to weaning we will avert some of the stress to the lamb that is present at weaning.

Creep construction - Creep construction should be well planned in advance. The creep should be located in the most draft-free portion of the pen. Ideally the creep should allow access from all four sides. This is of course challenging to engineer and most people will compromise by attaching the creep to one wall for support. We need to make certain that the creep is inviting to the lambs. Hanging a low wattage light bulb or heat lamp over the pen will help entice lambs to enter the creep. The light is far more important than heat so the light can be raised high. There should be as many holes as possible in the gating to allow lambs to feel that they are not trapped. A horizontal bar or board that can be adjusted is a must. This will keep ewes from trying to get into the creep. The horizontal bar can be placed low when the lambs are young and raised as they get older. The horizontal bar should not rub the back of the lamb as it runs in and out of the creep. If it does, it needs to be adjusted. The bottom line is that we want to make the creep easily accessible, bright and enticing. If the lambs spend more time in the creep they will consume more feed.

Creep Feed - The primary requirement of creep feed is that it needs to be palatable. If the lambs don't eat the feed, it does no good. Some producers have successfully tried offering soybean meal as an initial creep feed. It is expensive, however the lambs consume a small amount. These producers will move very quickly to a 20% protein creep ration immediately after the lambs start to consume the soybean meal. A 20% protein ration is great until about 40 days of age. The feed should be crumbled or texturized, not pelleted. Coccidiostats need to be incorporated in creep rations as these young growing lambs are at high risk for acquiring coccidiosis. Deccox is the coccidiostat of choice in creep rations. Because Deccox has a high safety index it fits in well to creep diet.