



FALL NUTRITION

J. L. Goelz, D.V.M.

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Fall is an excellent time of year to take a look at your feeding program and shop around for cost savings. This year in the midwest we have grain prices at a 15-year low. Hay and forages can also be found at some very low prices. Still by shaving a few dollars here and a few dollars there we can trim out expenses significantly.

First of all remember that a ewe carrying a one month old fetus has a low energy and protein requirement. In addition, weather conditions in the fall are very favorable to sheep in that they don't need to expend energy to either cool themselves or keep themselves warm. Also, remember that the energy and protein requirements will change drastically two to three months from now along with the weather. Therefore now is the time to "rough" the ewes out on your poorer quality forages and save the good quality forages for pre-lambing and lambing time.

Options: We have seen many different types of fall grazing and forage utilization systems that work. Silage feeding is a very economical feed, especially when corn is under \$2.00/bu. Silage needs to be harvested at the correct amount of moisture, packed well and covered with plastic to prevent spoilage. Remember that when you feed silage you are feeding 50% water so you will be feeding nearly 2x the amount of feed to the sheep when compared to grain and hay. Obviously, silage feeding is only practical if you have the mechanized equipment to handle it. After harvest silage should be allowed to ferment for 2 weeks before you begin to feed it to prevent nitrate toxicity problems. Also, never feed moldy silage or hay to sheep as you could run into a listeriosis problem and significant death loss. While silage is high in energy density and moderate in protein it is very low in vitamins and calcium.

Crop Residue: Another option that many people in the midwest use is to graze corn stalks. Harvested corn fields have more dropped grain available than anyone thinks and the best part is that it is virtually free. If you can graze sheep on stalks you can fulfill their energy requirement while decreasing your labor. It is a good idea to feed some corn to the ewes during the week before turnout to prevent grain overload. Also, while corn stalks are adequate in energy they are deficient in calcium and minerals so free choice mineral is critical.

Alfalfa: Grazing frozen alfalfa fields is another option that some producers utilize. Sheep do very little damage to the field and often will just strip the leaves off the stem. This leaves the stem to catch snow and prevent winterkill while the ewe will consume the most nutritious part of the plant. As long as the alfalfa has had a killing frost there is little risk of bloat.

Byproduct feeds: There are many byproduct feeds such as sweet corn silage, distillers grains, etc. available in different parts of the U.S. Most of these are economical locally but transportation greatly increases the cost. Many companies will provide nutrient analysis if you request it. Some of the disadvantages of byproduct feeds is that often they have a high water content which makes them perishable and they need to be taken in truckload quantities which means you need lots of sheep. Be sure to consider the nutrient analysis when considering the use of byproduct feeds.

Anytime that you can extend the grazing season it will reduce your labor of hauling feed to the sheep and removing manure. Furthermore, in fall grazing system it is important to remove any thin ewes from the flock and house them with the replacement ewe lambs as they will be on a better plane of nutrition before lambing. Don't forget to provide free-choice salt, minerals and vitamins as most fall forage is deficient. Remember also that the goal in the first-trimester of pregnancy is to maintain body weight. Check the condition on the ewes and be certain that they don't move backward.