



Ram Fertility

Dr. J.D. Bobb

These past several weeks we have been semen testing rams at the clinic and it seems to be one of the worst years we can remember for ram fertility. The high heat and humidity early this summer have really caused some ram fertility problems. The semen that a ram is producing in his testicles today will be stored in the epididymis for 49-50 days. This allows the sperm to become mature and fertile. For example, if it is a very hot, humid day today the ram could still be fertile but in 49-50 days most likely he will have dead semen.

I would predict that come lambing time there will be some sad stories of open ewes and long lambing seasons. Most of all rams we are seeing are having lots of dead semen, this will only be a temporary infertility and the rams will get better as we get closer to the fall months. Generally, October is the best month for ram fertility and May would be the lowest fertility month.

The lesson learned this year for many producers, will be to take better care of the rams during the hot summer months if you want to breed in August. There are some very simple things that really make a difference such as shearing the rams in late May or early June. Making sure the rams have a fan on them and access to fresh clean cold water at all times.

The truth on ram fertility will be discovered this winter when lambing starts, but all indications are that we will have some hard lessons learned. The one thing to keep in the back of your mind is that the weather today affects the ram 49-50 days from now. If your ram fails a Breeding Soundness Exam, wait about two weeks and check him again. Having dead semen is not as bad a prognosis as rams that have white blood cells in the semen.

Sheep Management Education (in the comfort of your own home)

Continuing with providing various delivery methods of educational information, the Pipestone Lamb and Wool Program launched online courses so sheep enthusiasts can keep current in the comfort of their own home or office.

The most popular course is Introduction to Sheep Management (LWMP 1001). This course is the online version of the successful home study course that provides an overview of year long sheep management. The course also studies the philosophy of sheep management and its relationship to business goals. Introduction to Sheep Management course is a 14 lesson self paced course with continuous enrollment. This is one credit course that has no text book required. The 14 lesson topics include: Getting Started in the Sheep Business; Your Ewes, Your Rams and Their Health; Breeding Strategies; Lamb Feeding; Facilities and Equipment; Ewe Flock Economics; Wool Pre-Lambing Management; Lambing Time Management, Difficult Births, Baby Lamb Health; Orphan or Bonus Lambs. Grafting; Creeps and Creep Feeding; Weaning and Weaning Methods; Fitting and Showing Sheep; Raising Versus Buying Replacement Ewes. This course is offered online or through the mail.

Other online course offerings include: Equipment and Facilities (LWMP 1202); Introduction to Sheep Health (LWMP 1300); Ewe Ration Formulation (LWMP 1502); and Wool Characteristics and Properties (LWMP 1701)

The Pipestone Lamb and Wool Program is a sheep management education/consulting program offered by Minnesota West Community and Technical College located in Pipestone, Minnesota. The purpose of the program is to help maximize the profit per ewe and realize the full potential of all sheep through the use of modern management practices, new technologies and new approaches to marketing of both lamb and wool.

For more information visit the Pipestone Lamb and Wool Program web page www.pipestonesheep.com or contact one of the Lamb and Wool instructors, Philip Berg, philip.berg@mnwest.edu, 507-825-6799 or Mike Caskey, mike.caskey@mnwest.edu, 507-825-6808. To register for one of the on-line courses contact Sue Lovell 507-847-7929, sue.lovell@mnwest.edu or register on-line at www.mnwest.edu/formmail/formdl.htm

Strategic Smart Worming

1. Two populations of parasites—one in sheep and immature stage on pasture waiting to infect sheep.
2. Life cycle is 21 days—if you deworm sheep and turn back out onto the same pasture they will be infected.
3. Two types of dewormers—
 - A. Purge—white worms, levamisole
 - B. Persistent—ivermectins
4. Having sheep off feed for 24 hours increases the effectiveness of dewormers
5. Dewormers kill adults not the eggs. If you keep them in a dry lot for two days post deworming, viable eggs will be dropped in a dry lot, not in the next pasture.
6. Pasture rotation—the more frequent, the better.
7. Cleanliness of pasture in terms of larvae is directly related to how long it has not been grazed by sheep.
8. Never underdose!! This encourages resistance.
9. Resistance is directly proportional to the frequency of deworming.
10. Bottle jaw is a symptom of low blood protein. The number one cause of low blood protein is heavy parasite load.
11. Bottle jaw is variable and should not be used as a measure of success (or lack of) a dewormer.
12. Dectomax injectable is the most persistent dewormer available and fits well when we need to go back to an infected area.
13. Internal parasites move freely between sheep and goats.
14. Internal parasites do not move between sheep and cattle or sheep and horses.
15. Iron is not the rate limiting step in red blood cell production. Iron is unnecessary in treating sheep recovering from heavy parasite load. Deworm and provide good nutrition in a dry lot.

Straight Talk

Greetings from the Minnesota State Fair. Back from Alaska for the event, a saner person would have passed on it, so many people.

I believe for most of them, the livestock exhibit is more of a zoo attraction. Why would you slaughter an animal when you can just go to Wal-Mart and get all the meat you want?

So much for the State Fair but it is an opportunity to visit with sheep friends and it is an attempt to expose agriculture to those that have forgotten or know nothing about it.

A view of abortion prevention protocol may be timely. In my own flock, I just vaccinate for Vibrio. Thirty days prior to breeding and a second injection mid gestation. Subsequent years ewes are injected mid gestation only. I believe vaccination for Vibrio is important. I feed Rumensin to help reduce toxoplasmosis and exposure to coccidiosis. Deccox would work as well.

Selenium levels are important but the level of Iodine is crucial. Last year we had abortion problems in our fall lamb crop do to an inadequate consumption of iodized salt. This year we are using salt mixtures that are three times the level of iodized salt. Big Gain has a Tm Salt for sheep and our Premix (#8770) now provides these levels. The toxicity level is 100 to one.

Aureomycin can be fed to reduce the incidence of Chlamydia abortion, the vaccine is presently unavailable. For abortion outbreaks, I am now recommending one pound per eight head for ten days. I also want to insure that iodine and selenium levels are adequate.

If the Chlamydia vaccine was available I am not sure I would recommend it except for sheep imported from the far west. I don't use it in my own flock. The incidence of clinical abortion in native Midwest sheep is very low.

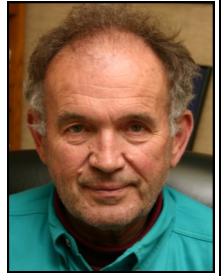
Now for a more controversial subject. It's all about change. Katahdins are sixth place in registers and fourth place in transfers, something that the industry hasn't recognized in the upper Midwest. Put aside the fact that this is the sixth breed I have chosen to work with and let's review history and the facts.

I remember Dwight Holoway and the Finns. Dwight helped me get into the Suffolk business and enabled me to learn a lot about the sheep business. I remember when he purchased a number of Finn sheep at \$600 a head and I also remember a long time friend Garry Testroete looking over the fence and just shaking his head. Now that was a leap of faith and it worked. John Wichern successfully marketed a 200% lamb crop. The Finns brought an increased lambing percentage absolutely nothing else, but it worked. Years later, Katahdins arrived on the scene and some of the same people that utilized the Finns won't even take a look. I agree that the NSIP thing and the certified scrapie program are not a practical key to success but once you are by that and, take a look at some of the larger animals in the breed. You have to see the opportunity or you are truly lost.

Our problems have been going West and buying 120 pound yearling Rambouillet ewes for \$260 to \$300 dollars plus. Once back here they probably will have mature weights when in good rig of 150 to 160 pounds. They will have a good wool clip that will pay for shearing with a couple bucks left over but not a process that one would ever look forward to. A 150% lamb crop marketed will be a miracle but could happen. The ewe will live forever and will never give a lot of milk. Disease resistance will be good. Its pelts have value at the time the crossbred lambs will have a decent pelt.

Now let us take Katahdin ewe or Katahdin cross ewe. She will weigh 150 pounds plus. She will drop in a 200% lamb crop or better, have plenty of milk and the lambs will be thrifty. Ya Doc, but they won't get heavy enough. Whoa, if you breed a black face ram to a mature 160 pound ewe of any breed the results will be the same. I would rather sell 50% more lambs with the same amount of effort. Shearing is not a problem and I will give up some pelt credit that will generally offset the costs incurred with shearing.

To many of you that visited with me or said "hi" at the fair, quite a few of you, I did not recognize you for the most part. I am certainly not a Larry Meade. I appreciate your stopping and also appreciate the compliments on the service we provide. I certainly enjoy answering your questions on ask a vet. Please don't be offended occasionally by my straight up answers. That's the title of this article, "Straight Talk." Six hundred of you have joined my facebook page in the first three months where I continue to share the most recent and most interesting ask a vet questions with all that are interested. Our website has a direct link to my facebook page. Join us at the Katahdin Expo September 15, in Pipestone.



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Web Site: www.pipevet.com. **E-mail:** sheep@pipevet.com

Editor: Shannon Bouman **Regular Contributors:** G.F. Kennedy, DVM, J.D. Bobb, DVM, J.L. Goelz, DVM, C. Vlietstra, DVM

Research Editor: J.D. Bobb, DVM **Circulation Manager:** Nancy Oye

Veterinary services, procedures, biologicals, and drugs mentioned in this publication represent the personal opinions and clinical observations of the contributing author. They are in no way intended to be interpreted as recommendations without the consent of the producer's own practicing Veterinarian. We strongly urge that producers establish a patient-client-veterinarian relationship that allows extra-label use when there are no drugs approved for treatment or if approved drugs are not effective. This procedure allows veterinarians to go beyond label directions when "prudent use" is necessary. The limited availability of drugs and biologics in this country is a major factor in restricting the growth of the sheep industry and allowing producers to compete in the world Market place.

Strategic Smart Worming Continued...

16. Young lambs on pasture are at high risk for parasites (immature immune system)
17. Success or resistance should be measured by fecal egg count 4-10 days post deworming.
18. Avermectins are effective against immature stages hibernating in the abomasum.
19. Larvae are killed by freezing and drying. They survive best in heat and humidity.
20. Sheep rarely get infected with parasites in a dry lot.
21. Hibernating parasites become more active, mate and produce eggs near lambing.

Pipestone Veterinary Clinic
1300 So. Hwy. 75
PO Box 188
Pipestone, MN 56164