



PREPARING FOR LAMBING

Lambing is often a busy and stressful time in a shepherd's year. You can minimize the amount of stress on yourself and your sheep by looking ahead and planning accordingly.

Eight weeks before lambing:

- If your ewes have never been vaccinated against Clostridial diseases, give their first dose of the TASVAX vaccine 8 weeks before lambing. A booster should be given in 4 weeks. Once ewes have had an initial dose, they only need a booster 4 weeks prior to lambing each season.
- Call your shearer if you haven't already booked them. 4-6 weeks before lambing is an ideal time to shear sheep. There are many benefits to shearing ewes before lambing, even in winter, as long as ewes are housed appropriately. It is easier for lambs to find teats, increases the barn temperature and decreases humidity, increases space at the feed bunk, motivates ewes to eat more, and makes it easier to monitor body condition. Shorn ewes are also more likely to seek out warmer and drier microclimates in the barn or on pasture which benefits lambs. Shearing sheep later in pregnancy can be more stressful on ewes, so don't delay too long.
- Consider having a veterinarian visit your farm if you don't have an existing veterinary-client relationship already. Veterinary-client relationships are useful for preventative medicine and required for accessing antibiotics which you may need.
- If you haven't tested your forages already, take samples of different forages available to you and send them to the lab for testing. This is an essential step in ensuring you are feeding a balanced ration, especially in late pregnancy and early lactation when nutritional demands are highest. Your best forages should be fed during this period, and your poorest quality should be fed during maintenance periods or early pregnancy.



Feed samples should be submitted for analysis well in advance of lambing. Saving your best forages for late gestation and early lactation stages means less grain supplementation is needed during these periods.

Six weeks before lambing:

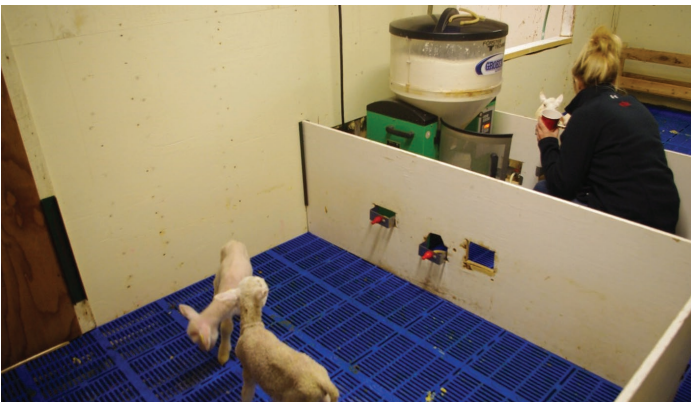
- Switch ewes onto a late gestation ration. 70% of lamb growth happens in the last 6 weeks so ewes have a high nutritional demand during this period. Lamb birth weight is highly influenced by their dam's nutrition during this period. Small lambs have an increased risk of mortality within 48 hours due to chilling, and large lambs increase the risk of difficult births. It is important not to underfeed or overfeed ewes during this time. At the same time, ewes have a reduced gut capacity as lambs take up more room in their abdominal cavity and they cannot eat as much. Offering drier forages will condense the amount of nutrients in every bite and make it easier for your ewes to eat enough. Ration formulation or consultation is a service Perennia offers to registered sheep farms in Nova Scotia.
- Shear ewes. This is a good time to make note of body condition scores which will be important for making nutrition decisions.

Four weeks before lambing:

- Booster ewes against Clostridial diseases. Antibodies will be passed to the lambs and protect them until they are 4-6 weeks old, and their own immunity begins to develop.
- Put together a lambing kit or review the kit you already have; some things may need to be replaced. A list of things you may wish to include is below. In case of early lambs, its best to be prepared a few weeks in advance of when you expect lambing to begin.
- Get lambing pens ready and easily accessible. Lambing pens should be set up in a location free from drafts; if necessary, plywood walls can be added. You should have enough pens to hold 10-15% of your ewe flock at any one point. Pens should be 4x4' at a minimum, but you may consider 4x5' pens for prolific breeds. Ewes and lambs should stay penned up for a minimum of 24 hours if space is limited and may rejoin the flock as long as the lambs are nursing well, have bonded with the ewe, and have been processed. Processing lambs should include selenium/vitamin E injections and identification at a minimum. Depending on your situation, you may also consider tail docking, navel dipping, and weighing lambs.
- Plan your early lactation ration or reach out for advice. Switch your ewes from their late pregnancy to early lactation rations once 50% of ewes have lambed.



Shearing ewes in advance of lambing has several benefits, even in the winter months.



Bottle lambs can be raised with individual bottles, homemade systems or automatic milk machines. No matter what, cleanliness is paramount.

Useful things to have on hand:

Caddy for carrying your most-used items

Vit E/Selenium

Syringes and needles

Lamb tags

Ear punch

Lubricant and gloves (long and short)

Lambing snare for assisting with delivery

Elastrator and bands and/or hot docker

Rectal thermometer

Navel dip

Penicillin (must be obtained from veterinarian)

Pain relief—consult your vet

Milk replacer

Tube and syringe for tubing lambs

Frozen or powdered colostrum

**Nipples and bottles
(clean, empty 1L pop bottles work well)**

Prolapse harness

Heat lamps and bulbs and/or lamb warming box

Scale and bucket for weighing lambs

Headlamp

Record book

Approved livestock paint

Time spent preparing for lambing will pay off at lambing time. Your ewes should be in optimal condition at lambing to ensure lambs get off to a good start. With preparation, lambing time will still be busy, but much less stressful.