



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN ...

## Preparing for Lambing or Kidding Season

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Lambing and kidding season is an exciting but stressful time of the year for the sheep and goat owner. Through proper preparation of animals, facilities, and ourselves, we can manage a successful season.

Preparation begins months before the kidding or lambing season with ensuring that the health and nutritional needs of the expectant doe or ewe are met. Use body condition scoring to decide if your animals are ready for late pregnancy. If they are too fat, restrict concentrates in the first half of gestation. Alternatively, if they are too thin, up the caloric content of the diet by adding grain concentrates and high-quality nutrition. A nutrient requirement calculator, such as the one offered by Langston University, can be helpful.

<http://www.luresext.edu/?q=content/nutrient-requirement-calculator-and-ration-balancer>

Rapid fetal growth occurs during the last six weeks of pregnancy. The quickly growing fetuses take up space in the abdomen, reducing the ability for the

female to ingest enough nutrients from a forage-based diet alone to match the demands for herself and the fetuses. It is therefore important to feed high-quality forages and energy-dense concentrates during this critical period.

Ewes and does that do not intake enough nutrition during late pregnancy, or those that are carrying multiple fetuses, are at high risk of developing pregnancy toxemia, also known as ketosis. This disease is due to an excess of ketones in the bloodstream. It occurs when the dam can no longer meet the energy needs of the fetal/placental unit and starts mobilizing her own fat stores for energy. In severe cases, the liver gets bombarded by the excess fat; this can lead to fatty liver disease and even liver failure.

Pregnancy toxemia is life threatening to both the dam and her offspring and must be treated aggressively when first detected. Affected ewes and does may show subtle signs initially, such as being dull, not eating, being slow to come to the feed trough, and swollen pasterns. Clinical signs may progress to the ewe or doe being weak and

eventually unable to rise. She may also show neurologic signs, such as staggering or stargazing as the disease progresses. If you notice any animals acting abnormally, or if you have concerns regarding the nutritional status of your herd, you should contact your veterinarian.

Also, approximately 4-6 weeks prior to the start of the birthing season, all dams should be vaccinated with CDT vaccine; this is for *Clostridium perfringens* type C, D and for tetanus. BoSe can also be administered in selenium-deficient areas, such as Indiana, where selenium is not being provided to the herd in mineral or feed sources.

If kidding/lambing occurs in the cold season, dams need dry, well bedded pens that are free of drafts. Heat lamps may be needed if kidding and lambing occurs during cold weather. Be sure to place the lamp where the dam cannot burn herself or chew on cords.

The majority of ewes and does give birth with no problems. However, even in the best-managed herds, a subset will have difficulty. The most common reason for dystocia (abnormal birth) is simultaneous presentation of multiple kids/lambs.

Normal parturition is divided into three stages:

- The first stage is the initiation of uterine contractions and relaxation of the cervix. This stage is characterized by restlessness, pawing, and urinating and defecating frequently. Experienced does and ewes may show minimal signs during this period. Stage 1 can last 2-12 hours.
- The end of stage 1 and the start of stage 2 is characterized by rupture of the allantoic membrane (water sac). Depending on the number of fetuses present, this stage will last 1-3 hours; most does and ewes deliver within 2 hours.
- Dystocia is considered to exist if the doe or ewe has been in active labor for 30 minutes or longer and is not making notable progress toward the delivery of the fetuses. If this is noted, assistance is required. Dystocia may be difficult to resolve and requires skilled hands to ensure the best possible outcome. A veterinarian should be called in situations when skilled personnel are not available on the farm. If delivery is not accomplished within 2-3 hours, the cervix will start to close; that makes the case for immediate intervention once dystocia is noted. C-sections may be a necessity when the dystocia cannot be easily corrected or if the cervix has already begun to close.

## Lambing/Kidding Supplies

Your lambing/kidding supplies should be clean and in good working order before the first birth.

- Betadine for disinfectant
- Clean metal bucket
- Lubricant
- OB sleeves
- Lambing/kidding straps to place on legs to assist in the birthing process
- Dilute chlorhexidine (1:4 dilution, • chlorhexidine:water) for dipping of umbilicus
- Towels
- Colostrum replacer such as Land O Lakes®
- Colostrum Replacement for Kid Goats and Lambs

Once kids or lambs are delivered, they should be stimulated to breathe by briskly rubbing over the ribs and sticking a piece of hay or straw into the nostril. The kids or lambs should not be hung upside or swung to remove mucus from the respiratory tract. Instead, place each kid or lamb in a sitting position on their sternum where they can easily expand their lungs. The umbilicus should be dipped in a dilute chlorhexidine solution (1:4 dilution) to decrease the chances of umbilical infections.

Kids and lambs should be up and nursing within 1-2 hours after delivery. If this milestone is not met, assistance should be given either in the form of encouraging the kid or lamb to stand and nurse, or the feeding of colostrum or colostrum replacer by bottle or tube feeding. Ingestion of colostrum creates a passive transfer of immunity from the dam to the kids or lambs, which allows development of a proper immune system. If the lamb or kid does not ingest enough colostrum within the first 12 hours of life, either due to poor colostrum quality or inadequate quantity due to lack of nursing, the kid or lamb can suffer from failure of passive transfer. If you have concerns regarding colostrum intake or quality, your veterinarian can assist in checking the neonate for failure of passive transfer or aid in evaluation of colostrum quality.

The doe or ewe should pass placentas within 12 hours of birth. If this does not happen, they are considered retained, and your veterinarian should be consulted to prevent future infertility or other medical problems.