

NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – April 2009

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Hi Folks,

We have lambs! Sunday April 5th there were twins born at both the home farm and the Extension farm. Both sets were found standing up with full bellies just the way I like to find them. The big challenge was the wetness and mud. Saturday was sheets of blowing rain. The home barn was pretty snug and dry because it faces east. The Extension barn faces south so it was very wet and dirty. Luckily our ewe had found a relatively dry corner to lamb in and the lambs were clean and dry. However, for the ewe to get to the round bale hay she would have had to walk through knee deep glop and the last thing we wanted was for the lambs to follow her out there. We reluctantly made a jug and after a few more lambs were born on Monday we put all the ewes and their lambs in the other end of the barn in a dry pen.

This is supposed to be our pasture lambing group...problem is there isn't much pasture yet and the concrete that is supposed to be in the barnyard is not there. Our intent was to compare pasture lambing now to barn lambing in the fall. We chose to lamb in April so that the lambs would be big enough for the Muslim holidays at the end of the summer. Last year there were two weeks of 70 degree weather in the middle of April...so far this April is cold and rainy. I guess if we want to see the decreased labor of pasture lambing then we need to move our lambing closer to actual pasture. It can even be cold and rainy in May but not usually this cold and this rainy.

We are running up against two problems we can't do much about at the moment except manage around them. The first is the direction the barn faces. South seems logical to gather warmth and sunlight but too much of our precipitation comes from that direction causing the barn to be wet. The barn requires too much bedding and therefore it takes extra labor to clean it out more often. The other challenge is the mud between the barn and the round bale feeders and also between the barn and the pasture. We talked about a cement pad or geotextile fabric and stone. A shortage of time and money and probably the complacency of having a nice fall kept us from getting it done.

Cornell Study Underway - We are part of a study Cornell is conducting to compare labor inputs, feed costs, mortality rates and productivity for farms kidding or lambing at different seasons of the year and using different management schemes. Several other North Country farmers are participating as well. Our job is to keep good records.

One of the things we need to keep track of is the body condition of our ewes. They can range from 1 (really skinny/bony), to 5 (really fat). The ideal is something around 3 with some allowance for older animals being thin. Our sheep were a little on the thin side this winter but seemed to pick up some weight when the weather warmed up (but not thawed). Since it became cold, wet and muddy they have lost some condition again. They are definitely not as heavy as they look. The wool is very deceiving. To body condition score properly you have to be able to feel the sheep's backs and squeeze in on the sides to feel the fat cover. Of course, the sheep don't just stand there for this process! We will be body condition scoring the sheep again when we wean the lambs. It will be interesting to see whether they lose due to the milk production or whether they gain due to the green grass.

Baby Goats - There have been lots of cute baby goats born lately. I can tell because I receive lots of baby goat pictures in my email. I have helped a few people with de-horning and castrating. I have seen young kids and lambs, especially hair lambs with what is called a milk goiter. For years I thought we had a bad iodine deficiency at my home farm and I had read that Boer goats and hair sheep had high mineral requirements. However, they should have been getting enough iodine so I was surprised to see lumps under their necks that appeared to be goiters. They were all healthy and growing well. A standard goiter is an enlargement of the thyroid gland related to a deficiency of iodine in the diet. However, it turns out that fast growing kids and lambs can have a condition that looks like a goiter. However, it turns out to be an enlarged thymus gland. The parts that generally enlarge are right under the chin and on each side of the neck right below the jaw. In goats the thymus can be quite large and then usually begins to regress at about 6 months of age. The function of the thymus is related to the immune system.

Milk goiter (the enlarged thymus gland) is very common and normal and actually a sign of healthy, unstressed kids and lambs. The good news is you don't have to try to get rid of it! It can look like an abscess or CL but it is not an infection and does not have to be cured. It is not seen in traditional wool breed lambs.

Guardian Dogs - Our new guardian dog, Wanda, is doing well and filling out now that she is getting enough to eat. She is very good with the sheep and stays in the pasture and barn area like a pro. She is getting more outgoing with people, too. Turns out she is only about a year and a half old which is good news for us in that she will be around for awhile. Both dogs are respecting the ewes with lambs. Bear has been sleeping very deeply during the day which makes me think he is working hard at night.

Goat Health Basics – Join us at the Extension farm classroom for a meeting on goat health basics Saturday April 18th, starting at 10:30 am. Carolyn Pierce will join us to answer the hard questions and I will cover some basics. The meeting will be video-teleconferenced to Jefferson, Oneida and Suffolk Counties. Please register at our office at 379-9192 or email me at bmf9@cornell.edu.

MEETINGS

North Country Shepherds - North Country Shepherds meeting – it is time to go back to the fourth Tuesday of the month which would be April 28th at 7:00 pm at the Extension Learning Farm. I am working on a farmer to talk about their farm and it would be a good time to catch up on marketing news, lambing progress and shearing/wool pool info. Bring a friend.

Other meetings coming up – I am planning to do an IPM **parasite management class** that includes the FAMACHA system of selective de-worming some Saturday in July. As soon as I nail down some family plans I will get the date out to everyone.

Anyone interested in a **drive-yourself-tour**? Early fall would be a nice time to tour around the North Country and visit sheep and goat farms and share ideas, If you have places you would like to visit, let me know.

Sheep and llamas for sale – Several North Country farmers would like to sell their sheep flocks. Terry Zumbach has a herd of 21 registered Suffolks, 2 registered Tunis rams and crosses of those breeds. He farms in Jefferson County and can be reached at 646-1310.

Paul Cerkelwich has a small flock of commercial Dorset ewes for sale that originally came from the Extension farm flock. He lives near Oswego and can be reached at 342-7883.

Connie Augsbury has three female llamas for sale. They are all in the 6 to 7 year old range. One is caramel and white, one is dark brown and one is caramel and brown. Call Connie at 393-2636 for more information. The llamas are located in Russell.

Marketing News – Gouverneur held their graded Easter sale on Saturday April 4th. Sandy vonAllmen was the grader and said she graded 86 lambs on Friday. Most graded well. I don't have final numbers of animals at the sale but will try to have them next month. It seems that less and less people are lambing in the winter which of course means fewer lambs at the Easter sale. There were 2550 at the New Holland sale with prices for top grading lambs in the 40-60 pound range going for \$1.72 to \$2.85 per pound according to their report.

The lamb marketing sub-committee met and talked about two good markets for 70 pound lambs. Dolans are looking for chunky, fed lambs for their direct market in the Utica area. Kyles are looking for 70 pound feeder lambs (not fattened) for their operation south of Rochester. Both pay well for nice lambs and may be willing to pick them up if we cooperate to fill loads. Both markets could work for someone who doesn't want to direct market their lamb but can work with quality standards.

Animals Wanted

Barb Murray is looking for some sheep to graze her pasture from May until fall. Page wire fence, water provided. No charge. Barb has sheep experience. If you need pasture call Barb at 265-2994.