

# NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – December 2008

From the Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County Extension Learning Farm,  
Canton, NY

By Small Livestock Educator Betsy Hodge

Hi Folks,

Winter is here. It was below zero last night and it is time to get serious about winter watering. The frozen ground and lack of mud is great but the frozen hose is another thing altogether. I have a hose in the barn that runs over the rafters so it will drain and I leave the filling end out of the tank so that it drains. Last night I tried to bend the hose into the tank and it broke off in my hand. I just stood there with the hose in my hand trying to figure out what happened...then resorted to carrying buckets. There are many good meetings planned for winter where you can stay nice and warm and catch up on the latest information.

The **North Country Shepherds will meet on January 10<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am** at the Extension Learning Farm. It seems appropriate to talk about warm fiber in January so our meeting will feature Angel Dunkelburg talking about her alpacas, merino and other fiber sheep. Angel has combined fibers and makes different types of hats, socks, etc, to sell at shows and field days. The meeting will start at 10:00 am at the Extension Learning Farm. If you have fiber products to sell or show, please bring them with you to the meeting to share ideas.

It is about time we had a **meeting just for goat producers so January 31<sup>st</sup>** we will have a goat basics – both meat and dairy - meeting from 1:00 pm to 3:00 pm at the Extension Learning Farm. So you have these goats, now how do you take care of them and what can they do for you? We'll talk a little about management and marketing and then the basics of taking care of them. I will try to be flexible and cover what the group is interested in talking about. The idea is for goat owners of all abilities to attend so we can share ideas and cooperate on marketing. If the group is interested we can hold more meetings to cover other topics.

**Save the date of February 28<sup>th</sup>** is you are interested in grazing and grass finishing. We have a super meeting planned with ANCA. Watch for more details next month

The fall lambs will be sorted and weighed for the Christmas sale this week. We don't have as many fall lambs as usual but they are nice looking lambs. Some of the lambs are a little bigger than the 50 pound ideal weight for Christmas and some are a little on the small side. I am anxious to weigh them and find out their actual growth rates. We will probably keep about five ewe lambs. The criteria for choosing them are that they are twins or triplets and have a good rate of gain from birth to weaning. We have a couple culls to go to the sale that have had udder problems and don't raise a decent lamb any more.

Speaking of lambs, we used our Ile de France ram to breed the ewes for the April lambing. We only wanted to breed about 30 for spring and save the rest for fall so we used a marking harness with a blue crayon. In the first 24 hours the ram marked 11 ewes and after 10 days he had 33 marked. Some marks were darker than others but we felt that was related to the crayon placement. Our ewes had not been around any rams so we probably had a strong ram effect which brought a bunch of ewes into heat. We'll see how many will actually lamb in April and see how the marking system works. I was afraid that if I left the ram in too much longer he would have all the ewes marked.

The Ag-Bag was opened December 8<sup>th</sup> and we started feeding the cattle and sheep haylage testing about 13% protein. So far they are eating it well. We will be adjusting the amounts and will report on how the animals do on the haylage next month.

We passed our scrapie inspection on November 24<sup>th</sup> although I have a little paper work to finish up. We were missing one ewe and I was wondering about the coyotes but my work-study student and I went through all the sheep again the next week and found her. We must have written her down wrong during the inspection. It is amazingly hard to look at each sheep's identification and get an accurate list. My home sheep also passed inspection. They are easier to do as they seem to be able to keep eartags in their ears and they are much more varied in the way they look. There are also 26 of them instead of 81.

Last month's article included what it cost me to feed lambs in a pen at home. I noted that I needed to figure out what it cost me to keep a ewe for the winter. I came up with \$105.00 for cash costs like feed, de-wormer, tags, minerals, etc. This does not include the electrical or taxes or labor. The hay I am feeding is expensive and I figured they ate between 4 and 5 pounds per day for 190 days, which might actually be a little optimistic. I also kept a ram all year that should have been added to the costs not to mention at least one of my four llamas. But let's used \$105.00 for now. Many of my lambs were sold for \$90.00 a head (after marketing expenses) so lets say a ewe had twins (I had just over a 200% lambing rate) for a total of \$180.00 per ewe in income. That makes it look like \$75.00 per head above costs. That encourages me to think that if I separate out the goats, llamas and sheep and their expenses that I might actually be coming out ahead on the sheep. The lambs that I am feeding in the barn are not making any more money but they are incurring more expenses so next year I will try to get all the lambs big enough to sell in the fall. Many of them are triplets that are nice and healthy but started small and didn't gain as well as the twins and singles.

Dr, Mike Thonney from Cornell, spent all day November 19<sup>th</sup> touring farms in northern Jefferson and St. Lawrence counties. Thank you to all the farms that hosted us that day. Along the way several topics came up and then again at the meeting in the evening. The first is feeding minerals. Most sheep minerals do contain salt and the salt is there to control the intake of the minerals. If there is a higher percentage of salt then the sheep will eat less of the mineral. If you feed loose salt or a block along with the minerals then the sheep will not eat enough minerals.

I am reprinting below a summary of some of the minerals available locally. We need to be vigilant about getting enough selenium into our sheep. Injections of selenium/vitamin E do help for a limited time and are appropriate in certain situations. However, making sure there are minerals in front of the sheep all the time is important and requires a feeding strategy.

I took a look at some different mixes available locally, one from Wight and Patterson (W&P) and one from Agway. Both W&P mixes start with the Cargill base that contains mostly salt and then have a mix of trace minerals. Here's the line up in the base mix and in the mixes made at W&P. I made assumptions about the lime and dical that is used so therefore I put the the approximate amount:

	<b>Agway</b>	<b>Cargill</b>	<b>W&amp;P grain</b>	<b>W&amp;P no</b>	<b>Hoegggers</b>
Salt	40%	89%	~30%	~30%	20-24%
Calcium	20%	0%	~18%	~6 to7%	14-15%
Phosphorus	0%	0%	~6 to 7%	~6 to 7 %	7%
Sulfur	0	0.9%	0.3%	0.3%	1.2%
Cobalt	60	200 ppm	67 ppm	67 ppm	60 ppm
Iodine	70	200 ppm	67 ppm	67 ppm	70 ppm
Iron	4800	2800 ppm	933 ppm	933 ppm	1000 ppm
Manganese	8000	5000 ppm	1666 ppm	1666 ppm	300 ppm
Selenium	90	60 ppm	20 ppm	20 ppm	27 ppm
Zinc	16000	17600 ppm	5867 ppm	5867 ppm	4000 ppm
Copper	none	none	none	none	1500 ppm

The Agway mix is meant to be mixed into bulk feed and can also be fed free choice. There is no phosphorus at all. When mixed with a corn-based feed, the phosphorus is supplied by the grains. If you aren't feeding any grain then that should be considered.

The Cargill mix is also meant to be mixed into bulk feed so when it is sold as free choice sheep minerals Ellie Stripp makes some additions to make it more complete. After her mix it is about 30% salt. Ellie adds Lime and Dical to the mineral mix meant to be fed along with a grain and hay diet to make an about a 2.5:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio. This balances out the extra phosphorus in the grain. The mineral mix for "not feeding grain" or just a forage diet like hay or pasture has a 1:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio with the calcium and phosphorus supplied by Dicalcium Phosphate.

Many goat farmers feed the Hoegggers mineral mix (available at [www.hoegggers.com](http://www.hoegggers.com) and there is also a version made by Ellie at Wight and Patterson that is about the same analysis). It has a 2:1 calcium to phosphorus ratio and also has copper (a no-no in sheep minerals). The Hoegggers mix also has Vitamins A, D and E, magnesium and potassium..

On a totally different note, I want to recognize Emily Washburn for her excellent show results at the NAILE (North American International Livestock Exhibition) in Louisville. She had the Champion Shropshire Ewe and was the Premier Shrop Exhibitor. Looking at the results shows that she placed in several other classes, too. Take a look at the results at <http://www.livestockexpo.org/Show%20Results/sheepResults.aspx>. Congratulations Emily! We may have to recruit you to share your experiences at a North Country Shepherds meeting in the future!

**Marketing Notes** - The Empire Gouverneur Graded Christmas Sale will be Saturday December 13<sup>th</sup>. Animals can be delivered on Friday for grading. Contact Jack Bero at 315-287-0220 or his cell at 315-322-3500 for more information. Our fall lambs will be there.

The prices at New Holland were up a little for the first week in December probably due to the Muslim holiday known as the Festival of the Sacrifice. Prices had been down a little to \$1.10-\$1.15 for 70 pound lambs but it was back up to \$1.30-\$1.40 per pound that week. It will be interesting to see how many lambs show up at the sales around Christmas time. Many years ago it was a great time to market fall born lambs because there weren't many lambs available and there was a large demand. In the last few years, the supply has increased quite a bit.

Paul Guldenzoph from Central NY has a nice Katahdin flock for sale. There are 61 Katahdin and Katahdin/Dorper cross ewes. Many are yearlings and ewe lambs. Contact me for more details or contact Paul directly at [Wilmar45@aol.com](mailto:Wilmar45@aol.com) or 891-3156.

It wouldn't be the December Sheep & Goat News without a few Christmas gift ideas for the shepherds in your life. Let's start with the basics. Everyone loves those small, tough plastic pails. You can never have too many of them, especially in the winter when half of them are in your house thawing. Grain scoops are always good, too. They crack easily in the cold when you toss them at the Border Collie that isn't listening. Good hoses (the kind that don't break off in the cold) are always appreciated, too. Warm gloves – like fleece or wool that can take getting wet are good choice and pair them with some handwarmers.

A mineral feeder that works would encourage anyone to remember to feed the minerals to the sheep. Farmers also appreciate gifts of food like maple syrup and honey. Gift certificates to the local farm supply store can never go bad. For your non-farm friends, how about a package of lamb chops. You might make a future customer out of them.

For your trusty dog I would recommend a pig's ear or if it is a herding dog something active like a Frisbee. I hate to spend money on dog treats when the dogs think sheep poop is a delicacy.

For your sheep and goats, food is always a big hit. Try graham crackers, pretzels, leftover rolls, bread, cookies and veggies. I always like to take something out to the barn and sit with the animals and share it so pick something you like, too...just watch out for the dogs, they like everything and they don't like to share.