

NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – February 2009

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

By Small Livestock Educator Betsy Hodge

Hi Folks,

The six lambs we kept from the fall lambing are growing well considering the very cold weather. We had to rig up a heated bucket for them to drink out of because they drank so little that the line to their waterer actually froze in that below zero weather. We also had to rig a hay feeder for them rather than throwing flakes of hay into the pen. They ate some and wasted the rest. Hay is too valuable to waste at the moment.

Speaking of hay, the rest of the flock is getting first cut round bales in feeders that hold the bale up off the ground. These feeders work pretty well but do require getting in the pen once a day and shuffling the hay around so the sheep can eat it all. We are currently using two feeders but have another one to add as soon as it gets repaired. There are quite a few young sheep in the flock and I want to be sure they have enough space to eat. The hay is available all the time so they can eat when the big sheep are done but they will eat better with less bashing around if there is more bunk space. Sheep tend to eat as a bunch and then lay down as a bunch so it is important to have enough bunk space for them all to eat at once if possible.

The flock is currently getting about a third of a pound of grain per head per day to bring up the protein level just a bit. The energy certainly doesn't hurt them when the temperatures are so cold either. Could they get along without the grain? Maybe in the short term. However, the younger animals and the pregnant ewes might suffer in the long run. Most times a little investment up front will save you lots of problems later on. If it was feasible to divide the flock it might be possible to feed those fall lambing ewes that aren't pregnant yet just hay and use the grain for only those that need it. Another strategy would be to lamb in late May so the ewes would be getting some good pasture before lambing. The advantage of getting a smidge of grain is the inclusion of minerals and to get some of those vitamins that have been decreasing in the hay over the winter (Vitamin E especially).

The haylage was a successful experiment. The quality was very good in terms of lack of mold or spoilage. We used an Ag-Bag for the haylage. One thing we need to improve is the actual feeding. The bunks we made work well for the sheep but are pretty hard to hit with the big bucket on the tractor. We are brainstorming modifications to either the bucket or the bunks. Too much haylage fell to the inside of the bunks. The sheep cleaned up a lot of this but it is a shame to waste any of it. It has frozen into lumps that the sheep still spend a lot of time chewing at it. Must be good tasting.

I have been encouraged to see the guardian dog, Bear, asleep in the middle of the barn with the sheep all around him. The sheep still don't like it when he is up and gamboling around. He is still kind of playful at eight years old. However, I don't see that panic when he is minding his own business. He is loose with the sheep in the barnyard and he can also go up into the pasture. The snow is so deep that he spends most of his time in the barnyard, however. (In case you were wondering...as of February 2nd we have had 72 inches of snow which compare to 68 inches last year at the same time)

I went visiting farmers in Franklin County one blustery day in January. Pat and Beth Downing have started a hair sheep farm in a former dairy barn. **One of the most interesting things they are doing is keeping their records on the computer using FlockFiler.** Look it up on the internet (Flockfiler.com). It is one of the most user-friendly programs I have seen.

Kirby Selkirk's sheep stay outside with a windbreak all winter. He noticed that some of the lambs were not doing well. They tended to be the ones that were kind of small to begin with. **It didn't seem possible that they could be having parasites in January but we took some fecal samples and tested them and sure enough** they were carrying the Barberpole worm. I figured even if they had parasites in the fall that the worms would have been dormant or basically died off over the winter. However, that is not the case and Kirby has taken measures to treat them and move them to a better feeding situation. There's a good chance the combination of being a small sheep in a big flock, the really cold weather allowed the parasites to take advantage of their hosts.

Recently, I had a conversation with Robin Dolan, who buys a lot of lambs from the North Country and other places in the state. She said they saw many lambs with lung worms and also liver flukes this year. They slaughter at their farm so they get a chance to observe these things. I suspect the prevalence of these parasites is a result of the wet summer we had – at least in the North Country.

We had a very interesting North Country Shepherds meeting in January. Angel Dunkelburg spoke about her Alpaca farm in Waddington. She also has other fiber animals like Merino sheep and talked about all the interesting things she does with the fiber. We had lots of questions about how she got interested in alpacas. She was looking for some kind of enterprise and settled on alpacas because they are friendly, she could handle them, they are “green” or earth friendly, and they are not dangerous. They also provide tax breaks. She was willing to take the risk and invest a lot of money to get started. She now has about 40 animals. She feels it has paid off over the years.

We learned that there are two kinds of alpacas, Suri and Hualaya, with fleece type being the main difference. She has Suris which grow soft, silky locks. Alpacas come in 22 colors and females live about 15 years. All of Angel's alpacas are registered and DNA tested. They are hand mated because there is no room for error. Alpacas require protection from predators like many small ruminants. She does have alpacas for sale if you are interested. Prices start at \$500.00 for a fiber animal and up to \$20,000.00 for a breeding female!

In addition, we had a great class in dyeing fiber, needle felting, and shrinking your wool crafts from Kim Richey, JoEllen Saumier and Linda Hastings. Thank you all for sharing your ideas. There were many marketing tips and creative ideas. JoEllen has wonderful needle felting kits for sale which would make great gifts for a crafty friend or relative. Kim explained how to make variegated yarns in a pan in your oven and Linda told us how she shrinks everything before she gives it away so the recipients can't complain that their mittens shrunk.

While we are on the subject of wool...**The Spin-In is Feb 14th Long Lake** town hall 10am to 3-4pm. Lunch will be Franks and Soup. Bring a dish to pass if you like. They are having Demonstrations of how to care for your fiber and clean it your self. Donna Adams who organizes the Spin-In says that she has a couple of used wheels for sale that are in great cond. If you have some fiber to sell bring it. Contact Donna at adamspark@frontiernet.net.

The North Country Shepherds will have their February meeting at the **Advanced Grazing Meeting** at the Madrid Community Center on February 28th and sponsored by Adirondack North Country Association and Cornell Cooperative Extension. The meeting starts at 10:30 and features Gene Schriefer from Wisconsin who grazes 300 sheep and some cattle. He is going to talk about grass fattening. Please sign up with the Extension Office at 315-379-9192. See the calendar of events for other locations.

The March meeting will be held at the **Grass-fed Sheep Meeting** on March 25th in Canton at the Extension Farm (March 24th in Keesville and March 26th in Watertown). That meeting starts at 6:30 pm and will feature the basics of rotational grazing and also the marketing and regulations for grass-fed products. Please sign up with the Extension office for that meeting.

Check-off Referendum - The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that it will offer lamb producers the opportunity to vote in a nationwide referendum on whether to continue or terminate the Lamb Promotion, Research, and Information Order. The order authorizes the American Lamb Board, whose purpose is to increase market share for domestically produced lamb. A mandatory assessment of 1/2 cent/lb of animal sold finances the board. The referendum will be held Feb. 2-27, 2009 and conducted at USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) county offices where persons eligible to vote should obtain form LS-86. You can also request a ballot from www.ams.usda.gov/lsmarketingprograms. Ballots must be returned in person, by fax or mail to the FSA office. To be eligible to vote, persons must certify they have been engaged in the production, feeding, or slaughtering of lambs during the period, Jan. 1, 2008, through Dec. 31, 2008 (sales receipt for example). Call ahead to the FSA office (386-2401 in St. Lawrence County) to be sure they have the materials before you make the trip.

Consider joining your breed/species organizations as well as groups like Farm Bureau. I know money is tight but the small amount you spend for membership goes right to work for you. Many people volunteer their time to be on the boards of these organizations as well. The Empire Sheep Producers Association (\$40.00 contact Kathy Stumbo at sheepkath@aol.com) promotes wool and lamb at the state fair and NY Farm Days as well as giving lambs to young people to help them get started in the business. Your Empire dues help support ASI which lobbies for the sheep industry in Washington. I belong to the Vermont Sheep and Goat Association as well as the Jefferson County Association. For a few bucks it gets your name in their directory and you get their newsletters. Farm Bureau is the group that will come to your aid when your farm is threatened by unfair laws. They also help make sure politicians in Albany understand the farming issues (contact Onalie Beckstead at 322-4085). Let's support the groups that support our farming enterprises.

Goat Notes

We had a great gathering of goat producers on January 31st at the Extension Farm. The conclusion is that we need to have more meetings with more topics. So...I am in the process of planning a meeting for April that will cover goat health basics and doing some hands-on and some lecture. Watch for more information.

This time of year some goat owners are already kidding. **Not everyone dehorn (disbuds)** their goats, but if you do, you know the importance of doing it while the kids are small and the horn buds are little. The easiest way to de-horn baby goats is to use the electric de-horning iron. It looks something like a curling iron but has a round opening in the end that fits over the horn bud. It needs to be very hot so be sure to let it warm up before using it. The

easiest way to hold the kids while de-horning is to use a goat box. The goat box is a wooden box that the baby goat stands in and it's head sticks out one corner. That way you can sit on the box and do your de-horning and the goat has to hold still. It makes the process much safer but not a lot quieter. De-horning is not a fun project and the baby goats scream when you do it. Fortunately they don't seem to have any ill effects afterwards although the person who did the de-horning may take a few days to recover. I need to find out if there is something a goat farmer can use to numb the horn area.

With the goat in the box, place the de-horner over the horn bud firmly while you count to ten. Now do the other side making sure to apply even pressure. Go back and do the first side and so on until you have done about 30 seconds on each side. You should have a nice copper ring around the horn bud. One trick is to trim the hair around the horn bud with a good pair of scissors before you begin. Check out <http://fiascofarm.com> where there are some helpful pictures.