

NNY Sheep & Goat Newsletter – May 2009

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

By Small Livestock Educator Betsy Hodge

Hi Folks,

We had 62 lambs born in twelve days with 15 born the day before Easter. Luckily, the weather improved a lot from the first few days of lambing. Charlie cleaned out the glop in front of the barn making it a lot cleaner and easier to move the sheep around and for them to access the food and water. After a few big days we turned the big pen in open barn into the ewes-with-lambs pen. That move allows us to feed the lactating ewes grain and let the others eat round bales or pasture. By targeting the grain to the animals that need it we save on feed costs. We also purchased some better quality hay which allows us to feed even less grain – not even one pound per lamb in the pen. The ewes are holding their condition very well.

Now if the pasture would come along we could get them all outside. We have drainage issues in the front pasture and we are avoiding the back pasture so we can take a cut of haylage off of it first. The drain tiles have some blow-outs and the pond is dribbling over into the pasture so there are very wet areas and also bone dry areas. The coat of manure it was supposed to get never happened so the grass is quite uneven. There are other challenges like getting a good charge on the fence as well. We have cleared the brush but it is a big fence with lots of divider fences so lots of places that could have shorts. Hopefully, we can get out there this week and be sure we are ready to go. Then there is the fact that the lambs have never seen an electric fence before...and they have always had mom handy in the barn and now they have to keep track of her. The first 24 hours on pasture should be interesting!

We hope to get this group of ewes sheared before they go out. The lambs will also have to be tagged. I wrote on them with spray paint instead of the usual paint branding because they were coming so fast that it was hard to get them painted. The spray paint won't last as well outside so the lambs will have to get tags instead of waiting and getting tattoos. I have been lucky to have help from Charlie, the workstudy students and Chuck Bolesh who is getting hands on training for his own future flock.

All in all, the lambing was very smooth with only two lambs dying and two assists. The two that were pulled were not big problems – one I wanted to go home so helped her along and one was a small ewe lamb with a big lamb that I thought must surely be a single. When I came back later to check on them she had another and was doing fine. After last spring's lambing during which we had to assist many ewes and had all kinds of weird things going on I was a little nervous. However, most lambs were found up, nursed and running around just the way I like them. Most were born outside or just in the edge of the barn and then brought into the big pen. No jugs except when we had a couple sets of triplets and that was mostly so that I could get them all marked and written down. It was great not having to fill all those water buckets and feed each pen individually. We had one episode of mis-mothering when two ewes lambed with twins out by the feeders and lost track of things in the dark. One lamb fell out the end of the barnyard and died and one mother took over the three lambs that were left. All are doing well.

I was also very pleased with the behavior of our guardian dogs. They had never been with the flock when lambing was taking place. The dogs left the ewes alone but hung around the area when there were lambs outside. It is a good thing because all those little lambs crying for their mothers did attract coyotes. Charlie saw them right in the middle of the day when he was up in the woods taking down the maple equipment.

The rams are currently in the flock, breeding the rest of the ewes for fall lambing. We are shooting for September 15th to October 15th to make nice lambs for the Christmas market.

The home flock did very well, too. There were 37 lambs born to 18 ewes and only one loss, a quad that still had the sack over its nose. I didn't see any of them born and they have been perky, funny and very entertaining with manure pile races and king of the mountain on the big rocks. They are all different colors with spots and speckles. Cars go zooming down the road, slow as they go along my pasture and then zoom off again. We had one near disaster but luckily I decided to go home for lunch that day. I found a ewe turtled in the pasture but after I flipped her and revived the half born lamb, she went on to have triplets...one of which was adopted by one of the few sheep that had a single (my lucky day).

There have been a few surprise lambs born this year. The St. Lawrence Sustainable Living lab has about ten sheep and a "wether" who turned out to be quite fertile. They have had a bunch of nice wool type lambs. If you are looking for wool lambs contact Carrie Johns at cjohns@stlawu.edu.

I have been on farms helping with tail docking and castrating with rubber band elastrators. We have found the castrating challenging to do correctly with the big elastrator tool. Kathy Edmonds shared her small black plastic tool which has a small circle at the bottom and that works great because it puts pressure right where you need it to make sure you have a real wether when you are done. I will share the information on where she purchased this tool when I find out myself.

MEETINGS COMING UP

Scrapie Information meeting – May 27th at the Extension Learning Farm Classroom

Anna Draisey and Jennifer Herne from the USDA Scrapie program will be here to present a two part program. The first part at 6:30 pm is for people who want to show sheep and goats and need clarification on the rules in regards to Scrapie. At 7:30 they will present information about getting on the voluntary Scrapie Certification Program and also about rules having to do with marketing animals and the having the right tags. This is also a meeting of the North Country Shepherds.

The goat health basics program went very well in April. Thanks go to Carolyn Pierce for giving up a Saturday and presenting lots of good information on goat health. Other topics planned for next fall are **goat feeding basics** and for winter the group thought **kidding basics** would be appropriate. Keep an eye out for those.

IPM Parasite Management and FAMACHA class – July 18th at the Extension Learning Farm Classroom. Come learn to do fecal samples, manage parasites in your flock through

management practices and learn to use the FAMACHA system to de-worm only those animals that need it. All day class charge is \$35.00. Please sign up ahead at our office at 315-379-9192 or on email with me at bmf9@cornell.edu. More details in the next newsletter.

While we are on the topic of parasites, remember that the season for worm infestations is coming up quickly with warm damp weather. However, flies are already gathering in the barns and on our sheep and goats on the warm days. One strategy is to use parasitic wasps. That sounds scary but the wasps are about the size of fruit flies. We have used them successfully for many years at the Extension Learning Farm (look at www.ipmlabs.com for a relatively local company). Nothing takes the place of good sanitation, getting rid of standing water and rotting hay and manure. If you feel you must spray or powder your animals be sure what you are using is approved for food animals and **read the label**.

Stockdog classes will be held this summer when we have a place ready to use. The barnyard needs to be worked to get rid of the wet spots and we will probably have to put up a new circle fence. If you are interested, make sure I have your email on my stockdog list so I can alert you when we are ready to go or when we need help to get things going! Usually we get together Thursday evenings.

MARKETING NEWS

Jack Bero of the Gouverneur Empire Livestock Sales sent me a summary of the graded Easter sale in April. He felt the sale went well and Sandy vonAllmen, who did the grading, said most of the lambs had been fed better and graded higher than some years in the past. Cull goat and sheep prices were surprisingly high. There were about 90 head graded and about 200 head altogether. Prices for 30-50 pound Blue grading lambs were \$2.00 – 1.50/lb.

At the last gathering of the sheep marketing committee – a subset of the North Country Shepherds – we discussed two other options. The Dolans own a farm in Central New York and sell directly to individual customers. They are looking to buy lambs about 60 pounds and up. They pay \$1.30 a pound up to 70 pounds and \$90.00 a head over that. Obviously they really want those 70 pounders and they would prefer them to be fed a little – not skinny off of pasture. The good news is that they pick them up at the farm if we can coordinate to make it worth their while. Several of us have worked with them for a year or two now with good success. It is nice to know your lambs are going to be handled by “sheep people” and not get shuffled around an auction or trucked all over. Robin Dolan can be reached at 894-0239.

The Kyles from Western New York are also looking to buy loads of lambs. They do not have to be finished and they are also looking for 70 pound lambs. They have mentioned \$85.00 per head and they will pick them up if we can get them coordinated loads. We hope one of the Kyles will come for a visit to our farms to see what type of lambs we have in the next month or so. If you are interested, let me know. The Kyles are working towards a 2200 ewe flock of their own.

We have heard that Adams Farm Slaughterhouse in Massachusetts is also buying lambs and goats. I have not had success reaching the buyer but will report when I do. A local beef producer goes there with cattle and could include some lambs or goats on his truck.

We will also have a **meat goat marketing meeting May 6th** and I will report that information next month.

Shearing/Wool Pool

Remember to plan ahead for shearing so your shearer can be efficient with their time. Have a piece of plywood or clean concrete area to shear on and an appropriate place to put the wool when they are done. A broom, extension chord and cold drinks are good things to have handy, too. Hold your sheep off feed before the shearer comes so that they bend in the middle (the sheep, not the shearer) and keep the sheep bunched together so they are warm and the lanolin is easier to shear through. Wool bags are available from Mid-States Wool Growers (www.midstateswoolgrowers.com or 800-841-9665). You can also store the wool in heavy contractor bags or clean cardboard boxes that are stored in a dry place. Unfortunately no one has gotten a check for last year's wool yet.

Roger Hastings – 518-529-6665 - Roger is retired and has time to shear!

Joe Seavey – 315-386-3363 - Joe is retired and wants to shear, too

White Family – 315-386-1058

Jim Baldwin – 607-257-1683 or jrbaldwin1@verizon.net – for some of you in the southern end of the county or in Jefferson County Jim might be an option. Work together to share mileage since he is coming from further south.