



MIXING PEN — After spending 1-5 days in the lambing jugs, ewes and lambs are transitioned to the mixing pen for a few days before gaining access to pasture.

receives .5 pounds and the late-lambing ewes get .3 pounds."

During lambing season Penny continually checks ewes throughout the day and checking is also done at 10 p.m., 2 a.m. and 5 a.m. "This is done to make sure lambs end up with the right ewes and to prevent dystocia," he related.

Once lambing takes place, the ewe and her lambs are placed in 5-foot pens along the perimeter of the barn, known as lambing jugs, for 1 to 5 days.

"These are really bonding pens, not birthing pens, because what we want to happen in the lambs' first couple days of life is for the mother and the babies to imprint on each other what they sound and smell like so they can find each other later and stay together as a family."

Lactating ewes are fed up to 2 pounds of barley per day, which is less expensive than corn and is higher in protein.

Lambs and lactating ewes are moved from the jugs to mixing pens and then are given access to pasture. Grain is no longer fed when the ewes are slow coming off pasture in the evening.

LAMB PROCESSING

Tail docking and castration are accomplished using elastrator bands within the first 6 to 24 hours after birth and following a full feeding of colostrum. Lidocaine, a local anesthetic is administered to reduce pain and harmful lamb movement.

Color-coded, small plastic lamb tags (not official I.D. tags) are attached.

Family units also are numbered and color-coded with Sprayline aerosol spray paint.

Green is applied to single lambs and their mothers, red is used for twins, blue for triplets and orange for quads. "This eliminates a lot of post-lambing problems," Leder affirmed.

Managing large litters requires extra care. "We'll often hold back strong lambs to give the smaller, weaker ones the opportunity for a positive nursing experience," Leder noted.

Grafting is also a tool used in raising healthy lambs. "This involves taking a lamb from a large litter, say four, and giving it to a ewe that had a single," he said. The Leders often use slime and stanchion grafting.

"Slime grafting often occurs when two ewes are giving birth near the same time when it's easiest to switch a lamb from one ewe to another by covering the grafted lamb with mucus from the ewe," he explained.

He adds, "A stanchion graft takes place when a ewe loses her lambs; you put her in a stanchion, let a lamb nurse on her and over 2 to 7 days she will often accept it as her own."

If a graft fails or isn't available, some lambs are raised as orphans, fed with nipple buckets. "We keep our orphans with our quad groups so they learn how to be sheep," Leder said. "They also have access to creep feed in a portable shed and remain in a stable environment over the summer, which has worked out really well for us."

Summing up the success of the Leders' sheep enterprise, he said, "The net effect of our genetics and management effort is that we wean a 200 percent lamb crop at 75-80 pounds in August."