

Sheep Continued from page 1

to 40-percent of our ewes carry this gene, so we have a lot of ewes with triplets and a handful of quads."

Coupled with the booroola gene is a complimentary cross-breeding program that can increase total pounds of lamb weaned per ewe by up to 18 percent over the base breeds, according to Leder. "By selecting breeds that are genetically different, but complimentary to one another, we get the best of both worlds."

The Leders employ a modified three-breed rotation that features a black-faced down breed for growth, good muscle development and large size. "We started with Oxfords, then

used Hampshires but most recently we've been using Shropshires," he noted.

Dorsets, the second breed in the cross, produce ewes that are quiet and good mothers. The third breed in their rotation is the East Friesian, known for its excellent milk production. "We've used half East Friesian rams to get 25 percent blood in our ewes," Leder explained. "Those ewes are capable of nursing triplets, and we expect our mature ewes to handle triplets."

Recently, they've also acquired a South African Meat Merino (SAMM) ram. "He's like a black-face down breed in that he gives us good growth and

size but also some really good wool," Leder commented.

LAMBING SEASON MANAGEMENT

Preparation for lambing begins about a month before the first lambs are born when the ewes are vaccinated for over-eaters disease and tetanus, commonly known as CDT.

"We do that to get the ewes to have good antibodies in their colostrum, and we don't vaccinate the lambs until we begin deworming in the summer," Leder pointed out.

Ewes are sheared by a team of contracted shearers 2.5 to 3 weeks prior to lambing. "The sheared ewes take up less space

in the barn and it's easier for us to observe any changes in their udder, vulva and hip ligaments," he said.

Leder added, "They perceive the world the same as the lambs who are born with short fleece, and the ewe will seek a comfort zone that's also going to be comfortable for the lambs."

During late gestation flock sorting occurs based on nutritional needs, litter size and due date.

"All ewes receive an ultrasound scan so we know how many lambs they're carrying," Leder noted. "Large-litter ewes (those carrying four lambs) are fed up to 1.5 pounds of whole-grain barley each day, the main flock



COLOR CODED — Shortly after lambs are born, they and the ewe are spray-painted with a number in different colors indicating the number of lambs in the family unit.

