

NNY Sheep and Goat Newsletter – May 2011

From the Cornell Cooperative Extension St. Lawrence County

Extension Learning Farm in Canton, NY

By Betsy Hodge

April Lambing

April showers bring many little lambs. I had my doubts about the weather for a few days when it was 35 degrees, very windy and raining like the dickens. The ewes, including the ewe lambs, performed amazingly well. There were mostly twins and triplets, the weather was nasty and most were born outside. Bear, the Livestock Guardian Dog, deserves credit for keeping an eye on all those babies being born all over the pasture, too.

The weather really made me question my choice of April lambing. Last year was warm and the pasture came early. This year we had ewes lambing outside and eating good second cut hay but no easy way to grain them or separate them from the ewes that did not need grain. They are picking at the green grass but there can't be much volume of dry matter there. Many of them are pregnant with triplets and I was worried that they were not able to eat enough to meet their requirements. Amazingly, they are lambing out and look good.

Then there is the problem of having the ram running around out there, breeding ewes for fall, while I am looking for newborn lambs. We lamb in April and September so the ram is in with the flock at the end of November and in April. I am thinking about lambing May and September. Then the ram could be in with the flock in April and the lambs wouldn't be born until May.

We solved the problem this year by sorting the ewes to be bred for fall into the large pen in the barn. When we sorted we found a few more that were going to lamb that I had failed to mark the first time we sorted. It is a good thing we found them and painted their numbers on them because most of them lambed in the next few days and I would have been struggling to identify them. Now the ram is wearing a marking harness and we sort out the bred ewes every few days so that the barn doesn't get too crowded.

The reason we went with April is that the lambs have a little while to get up and going before the parasites blossom on the pastures. My experience with May and June born lambs was that they are really hit hard by parasites when they are quite small. It is also hard to move lambs with ewes around a rotation so it is perfect to just have them all done lambing just when the grass is coming on and start your rotation.

Our lambing this spring is extra tricky because we had those 27 ram-escape-lambs born at the very end of March. Those lambs are in the barn and the ewes are getting second cut and some grain. They will be big when they go out and the ram lambs will be fertile towards July and August so we will have to separate them. The trick is remembering!

We have also had a challenge with a couple ewes that lambs recently in the barn. The bigger lambs steal all the milk from the younger ones' mother despite her best attempts to shoo them away. This could happen on the pasture when we mix the two groups. I am hoping that the green grass will distract the older lambs from their stealing ways.

While we have the sheep penned in for breeding, we are taking advantage of them being dry and getting some of them sheared. Lee Grainger, who moved here recently from California, sheared for us. He hadn't sheared in a year and a half but it all came back to him along with a few sore muscles. I will list his contact info in the list of shearers later in the newsletter.

Some lambs in the older group have soremouth and we are hoping it won't spread to the younger crew. Chances are it will. It seems to be more like the typical soremouth than the nasty stuff we had last fall. I have not seen any signs of selenium deficiency.

Writing the ewes' numbers on their backs worked very well. The trick is to wait until as close to lambing as possible because the numbers get hard to read in the long wool. It took a little time one afternoon but it saved much time when walking the pasture looking for lambs. With all the rain we had in the last few weeks I especially appreciated having to catch or chase ewes to get their tattoo numbers.

Our total so far is 85 lambs born to 42 ewes. There were 27 born between March 27 and 31 and then another 58 born between April 17 and 28. There are few more ewes to go. We have lost a few to having the sack over their nose. Most were triplets born very close together. We have a few wandering lost triplets that can't seem to stay with the group. We had to find 44 and put him back with his family a couple times, 37 finally adopted herself to another mother having twins and has stuck with that arrangement and 77 apparently eats a lot and the falls asleep when her mother and her siblings leave the area. In general they are all doing great despite being drenched on a regular basis.

“Farmville Sheep Crossing” Online

If you want to see something fun, search in the internet for “Farmville Sheep Crossing.” Our own Dan Gardner's sheep are crossing the street in Manhattan. Anna Knapp spiffed them up and trained them. They had to cross the street during the morning rush hour! It is all an ad for Farmville English Countryside version or their game.

Anyone interested in getting the North Country Shepherds together? How about a potluck dinner on Saturday May 21? Our farm classroom is available. We can socialize and catch up on what is going on around the North Country. Work outside all day and then come and relax and enjoy some good food and good company!

We have had good conversation on the North Country Shepherds and Goat Farmers Facebook group. I guess you have to request to join. Producers are posting pictures of lambs, prices from sales and asking questions. Join us!

Shearers

If you haven't gotten those sheep sheared yet (or switched to hair sheep), here is a list of shearers. Remember the sheep have to be dry and holding them off of feed overnight makes them easier to shear. Store your hay in wool bags that can be purchased from Mid-States Wool Growers www.midstateswoolgrowers.com or 800-841-9665). Heavy contractor plastic bags are OK, too. The wool must be kept dry and clean if you want to send it to the wool pool – probably next year. If you want to discard your wool, let me know and Kirk Severtson (or email him at kirk@severtsons.org) will pick it up to use for mulching his orchard.

- 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 - there are still a few kids left at home who shear
- Lee Grainger – 315-767-0969 new to the area and ready to go

Possible sheep related tours

I am working on some tour ideas. We had so much fun on the beef tour that I think we should do some sheep/goat tours. One tour would be to Kyle Farms 3000 ewe farm south of Rochester. I

was thinking mid to late summer. We have been talking about visiting Rick and Robin Dolan who buy may North Country lambs. They are located near Utica and do all kinds of interesting marketing. Fall looks promising for them. Watch for more details! A trip to Battenkill fiber mill is another possibility.

Marketing News

A group of producers cooperated to share trucking to New Holland for the Easter market on April 16th. Many sent cull ewes. Results have been good with prices for lambs ranging from \$2.05 for large lambs to \$2.60 for mid-size lambs. Many were higher yet. Cull ewes ranged from \$.70 to \$1.25 per pound. There were 4490 sheep at the sale - 56% lambs (2514 lambs). There were also 2798 goats at the sale. Gouverneur had a graded sale the same day and had decent prices on the good quality lambs. I haven't heard how the cull ewes did at that sale.

Funny story of the month...

I was up in the sheep barn after dark checking the new lambs that came in late March. I had the lights on but they are pretty dim. We keep a big box of dog biscuits there for the guard dogs. I reached into the box for a biscuit or two for Bear and BJ and grabbed onto a large furry animal! Way bigger than a rat but it wasn't a cat and it wouldn't come out of the box and I wasn't going to pick it up and dump it out in case it was a skunk. My guess is an opossum. Needless to say, I always look into the box before I reach in there now.