

Sheep and Goat Newsletter – June 2011

From the Extension Learning Farm, Canton, NY

By Betsy Hodge

The final count for our spring lambing is 96 lambs out of 46 ewes. We finished lambing about May 7th. We gradually strip grazed our way down the back pasture for the end of lambing. The grass was painfully slow to start but had plenty of moisture (understatement of the year!). It is still soggy in many places where it should not be in June.

About mid-May we started grazing the sheep flock with the beef herd. There are some challenges to this like getting all the lambs to follow along with the group when going from pasture to pasture and not necessarily having the right sheep where you want them at the right time say for shearing for example. However, it is going very well in general. The cows are not bothering the sheep and hopefully they are eating up all the sheep parasites. We are still trying to perfect our watering system and a good way to deliver minerals when the weather is wet like it seems to be all the time lately. See more on our multi-species grazing in the Beef News.

During the lambing season I received many calls about prolapses. These were not your usual vaginal prolapses. They involved intestines coming out of the vulva. Normally this only happens when there is a tear in the vaginal wall during deliver. However, these ewes were often a week or two before their due dates. In a standard vaginal prolapse the vaginal wall protrudes out and a restraining harness will usually do the trick to get them through lambing. How did the vaginal wall tear? There is one paper suggesting that ewe that are heavy with lambs and maybe heavy themselves and laying on hills may actually tear the wall of the vagina from the weight of the lambs pulling down on the tissue. It seems odd that we had so many this year. I counted eight that people called me about including one at the Extension Farm. In all cases the condition was fatal. In our case the ewes were not fat but they were heavy with lambs and definitely on a hill. I'm not sure what we could do to avoid it in the future. We certainly like having multiples and the hill was the only dry place for the sheep this spring. Hopefully it was a fluke and we won't have another "outbreak" next year.

Speaking of flukes...another odd health phenomenon I heard about over the late winter and spring is sheep dying from liver flukes picked up last fall. We had a wet fall which encourages the snail population. Symptoms included lethargy, anemia, bottle jaw, and loss of appetite. Here's what Dan Grooms, DVM, PhD, University of Michigan wrote in a bulletin called "Liver Flukes in Michigan".

"The natural host for *F. magna* is the white-tailed deer. *F. magna* can infect cattle, sheep and goats while grazing areas shared with deer. Since snails are needed as intermediate hosts during their development, liver flukes are most commonly found in areas with abundant moisture such as swampy or poorly drained pastures. The life cycle of liver flukes begins when eggs are shed in feces of the natural host (white-tailed deer in the case of *F. magna*). When deposited into warm, moist environments, the eggs develop into free-swimming organisms called miracidium. These are able to penetrate snails which serve as intermediate hosts and are necessary for further development of the fluke. Snails shed a tadpole like form of the liver fluke called a cercaria which migrates onto the leaves of green plants where they form a cyst and are eventually ingested by grazing animals. In the small intestines, young liver flukes penetrate the gut wall and migrate to the liver. Once in the liver, young flukes migrate throughout the liver tissue. Eventually they become encysted within the liver. In the natural host (deer), they mature and produce eggs. Since cattle are an abnormal host, they react more intensely to the parasite, forming an impermeable cyst around the flukes which effectively prevents the release of eggs.

Thus, cattle are a dead end host for *F. magna*. This creates a problem in detecting cattle with *F. magna* as most parasitic diseases are diagnosed by identifying eggs in the feces of infected animals. Interestingly, in sheep, *F. magna* does not become encysted. This allows flukes to migrate through the liver unabated causing severe damage and eventual death of the infected sheep.

Besides liver condemnation, *F. magna* it appears to cause few, if any, signs of disease in cattle. However, little is known about the effects that this parasite may have on production efficiency. In contrast, *F. magna* infection is highly fatal in sheep and limits sheep-raising in areas heavily infested with this parasite.”

According to Dr. Mary Smith, DVM, Cornell, the best way to prevent liver fluke infection is to keep your sheep and goats out of wet areas where snails are likely to be most prevalent. At the moment that is almost impossible! Keeping as many deer out of the pasture as possible will also help. The guard dogs and llamas can help in that regard but they can't get to all the pastures when you are rotationally grazing. There are two dewormers that work on adult liver flukes, Valbazen and Ivermec Plus (Clorsulon). However, it is a good idea to work with your vet since the dose needs to be higher than the labeled dose to be effective on the deer fluke and Ivermec Plus is not labeled for sheep and goats.

You should be on the look out for internal parasites in general with all the wet conditions. When it warms up the level of infective parasites will increase. If you are not sure what to look for or which de-wormer to use it is a good idea to take the Integrated Parasite Management and FAMACHA class. I will be teaching it in Plattsburgh on June 25th. If there is enough interest on the western side of Northern New York I will offer it in Canton as well. Please let me know if you want to ride over to Plattsburgh with me or are interested in a class in Canton.

Another health challenge with the wet weather is keeping a clean place for the sheep or goats to rest. At the Extension Farm the sheep can not get into the barn so they lay outside in the grass. However, my home flock tends to cluster in the barn to escape the rain, heat or bugs. They come in wet and then when they are ready to go out they all stand up, poop and pee and then leave the barn for the pasture. The result is a very dirty barn that does not dry out in the damp weather. Fresh bedding doesn't even last half a day. Ewes with lactating udders are susceptible to e. coli Mastitis. They can go down very quickly from the toxins released by the bacteria and if they do survive the infected half of the udder sloughs off. I lost a yearling ewe to e. coli mastitis before I could even treat her. She was fine the when I checked the barn in the evening and then was down in the morning and died before I could even go into the house and get the medications for her. One symptom you sometimes see with mastitis is limping or walking funny on a hind leg since the udder is sore and hind leg rubs against it. In my case, I could close the sheep and goats out of the barn but it didn't seem like the wet weather was going to go on for so long! Finally about 4 bales of shavings helped dry things up enough so the bedding was effective and a few sunny days helped dry out the greenhouse style barn.

OK – Enough complaining about the wet weather. The good news is that it makes the grass grow like crazy! The ewes are raising twins and triplets on grass. When we caught up the ewes in the barn recently I was surprised at how thin some of the ewes feel. However, they are nursing triplets and twins on very wet pasture. I can attest to the fact that walking on soggy ground uses a lot of energy. The lambs vary widely in size because some of them were born at the end of

March and the rest were born between April 17 and May 7. The lambs have their heads down and are eating grass right along with the ewes

Marketing News – Prices had dropped a little at New Holland but were back up the week of Memorial Day. There have been several people looking to buy lambs. Let me know what you have on hand that are 50 pounds or bigger or when your smaller lambs ought to be those sizes. Dan Mangino mentioned that he may be looking for lambs for his customers. His number is 585-734-3311. He would prefer a group so he can come and pick them up efficiently.

Wool prices have climbed to \$1.00 or more per pound lately! Prices haven't been that high in a long time. Make sure you store your wool carefully so you can sell it at the wool pool eventually. We normally have the pool every other year and this is not the year. There is a pool in Norwich usually in September if you don't want to wait for the local pool. Wool should be kept dry and free of chaff and rodents.

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 328-5225 will pick it up to use for mulching his orchard. He can use the tags and hair cross wool even if you want to keep the better quality wool.

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