

# Small Ruminant Update



Quarterly Newsletter

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## WELCOME!

The UF Northeast District Small Ruminant Group welcome you to the first Small Ruminant Update Newsletter!

This electronic newsletter will be sent quarterly by email to small ruminant producers, enthusiasts and people involved with the small ruminant industry in Florida. The quarterly newsletter will include updates on management practices, small ruminant projects, coming events and items we think might be of interest to you. Our main interest is to best serve the needs of the Florida small ruminant industry. We hope this newsletter will help to keep you informed on the latest small ruminant news!

### Vaccine Protocol for Lambs

Alicia Halbritter

Clostridial bacteria are the most likely to affect lambs in the first few weeks of life. Clostridial perfringens type C and D as well as clostridial tetani are the three most common types that can impact sheep. These bacteria types are covered under the 'CD-T' vaccine.

Expectant ewes should be vaccinated 30 days before lambing with a CD-T booster for the lambs to gain passive immunity through the colostrum. Lambs should be vaccinated with their first CD-T vaccine around six weeks old. A booster shot should be given approximately four weeks later.

If a lamb does not receive adequate colostrum or if the mother was not vaccinated before lambing, then the lamb can receive a CD-T vaccine in their first 1-3 weeks of life. If lambs are purchased and the vaccination status is unknown, a booster vaccine may be needed. If mother was not vaccinated or vaccination status of the lamb is unknown, a tetanus anti-toxin (150-250 units) should be administered at the time of docking, castrating, and disbudding to ensure protection against the bacteria.

CD-T vaccinations are administered subcutaneously, or under the skin on the neck. Additional vaccinations may be helpful depending on your flocks' level of risk for certain diseases. Be sure to discuss any vaccination plans with your veterinarian and establish a vaccine protocol for your flock. Get recommendations for a whole flock vaccination plan here: [https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/\\_b/B127/welcome.html](https://aces.nmsu.edu/pubs/_b/B127/welcome.html)

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### Sheep Selection

Cassidy Dossin

Selection of breeding stock is the basis for flock improvement. The key for any sheep producer is to combine operation goals with production benchmarks and visual evaluation to select the best sheep for your farm.

As a small ruminant producer, before looking at any livestock, you need to define your market and consider you're your customer wants. Next, it is important to look at your records and your flock and decide on parameters you wish to improve on. Any good selection program will emphasize confirmation, production traits, and economic traits that are tailored to a specific flock and operation.

### The Importance of Rams

Ram selection is highly important because the ram contributes the most genetically to the next generation. A ram will sire many lambs each year while the ewe will sire only two or three. To make the most genetic progress in your flock, take special attention in ram selection and find high quality stock.



## Visual Evaluation

Producers have relied on visual evaluation for years, and even with all the genetic information we have today, visually evaluating livestock is an essential tool for selection. Keep in mind the following traits when visually evaluating lambs to bring into your flock.

**Structure:** First and foremost, examine a lamb's soundness. Sheep must be structurally sound to remain productive in the flock for years to come. Look how comfortable the animal appears as it walks. Look at feet and legs, checking that each leg is set squarely at the corner of the animal's skeleton. Look at the joints, the hips, hocks, and pasterns, to see that they are flexing comfortably. Strong pasterns are necessary for a long productive life of a ram, especially.

Secondarily, you can further select lambs for desirable appearance traits. Lambs with elevated chest floors, long necks coming high out of the shoulder, and level tops may be prettier, but these traits won't make much difference outside of the showing.

**Muscling:** Producers raising sheep for meat should pay attention to a lamb's muscling during selection. Look for thickness through the loin and rump, the most valuable cuts on a lamb carcass. Choose lambs that are wider and heavier muscled over their top. You can look at the thickness of the leg for a good indication of muscling.

**Body Capacity:** The capacity of a lamb's center body can be a good indicator of their fleshing ability. Thus, a deeper bodied lamb with more spring to their rib is likely to maintain their condition with less resources than their shallow bodied, flat sided counterpart.

**Reproductive Characteristics:** Take note of a lamb's sex traits just to be sure the lamb will be a productive addition to the flock. Ewes with hard, lumpy, or pendulous udders should not be considered for breeding purposes. Normal scrotal circumference for yearling rams is 33+ cm and 36+cm for adults, but this can vary by breed. Rams with a scrotal circumference much smaller than the standard may be late-maturing or have low fertility. In general, select feminine appearing ewes and masculine appearing rams. Masculine rams are generally more active and aggressive than those who lack masculinity traits.



**Mouth:** It's best practice to select sheep with correct mouths to ensure their ease with eating and grazing. In a correct mouth, the top and bottom jaw are aligned and the same size. Avoid "parrot mouths" where the lower jaw is too short, and the incisors are posterior to the pad. Avoid "monkey jaws", the inverse of this, where the lower jaw is too long, and the incisors are anterior to the pad. Parrot and monkey mouths can be easily identified by looking at a lamb's mouth from the side.

Producers have access to data on lambs that can greatly assist in the selection process and give a more precise estimation of how productive an animal will be. Using data takes the guesswork out of visual evaluation and is a valuable portion of the selection process.

**Performance:** Performance indicates measurable or readily observable responses, like an animal's growth and weight at one year of age. By an animal's weight at one year of age, you can get an idea of how fast that animal has grown in comparison to others. Growth is an important consideration for breeding stock that will contribute their genetics to the next lamb crop.

**Prolificacy:** Prolificacy is a parameter for rams and indicates the number of lambs born per ewe exposed. This stat will give you an idea of a ram's fertility.

**Multiple Births:** Whether a lamb was single born or a twin or triplet may be given to you by the seller when you are buying replacements. Select ewes from multiple births or whose dam often had multiple births. These ewes are more likely to lamb multiples, which can markedly increase a producer's profitability.

Selecting quality sheep with the goals of your operation in mind is crucial for a producer's success. Selection is fundamental for flock improvement and takes special attention to be done well. Finding the right additions to your flock is not a matter of maximizing all your desired traits, but instead, optimizing them. Maximizing all our economically important traits is impossible. Focus on traits that are important to your operation, but overall look for well-rounded, quality livestock.

For assistance in flock management or sheep selection, contact your local livestock agent.

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## Kidding and Lambing Season

Catalina Cabrera

### **Things to consider before the kidding/lambing season starts:**

- Keep good records: when will kidding/lambing start? Did you confirm pregnancy?
- Keep your ewe/doe(s) at a good nutrition status during pregnancy. Not obese but not too thin.
  - \*Increase the energy of the ration in the last month of gestation
  - \*Access to free-choice minerals (for sheep) and water
- Make sure they are healthy: vaccination (CD-T), parasite control, feet and teeth.
- Where: Indoor or outdoor, but clean and dry. Keep an eye on the temperature outdoors.

### **Prepare for kidding/lambing:**

- Identification: Ear tags, tagger, animal paint
- Print record sheets/ kidding/lambing dairy: ewe/doe #, kid/lamb(s) #, gender, date, weight, observation(s)
- Small bucket, lubricant (vet lube), kid/lamb puller, and kid/lamb ropes
- Disposable gloves/sleeves
- Small feeding tube / 60cc syringe
- Bottle and rubber nipple
- Milk or milk replacer and colostrum
- Heat lamp?
- Veterinarian's phone number

### **Is the ewe/doe ready?**

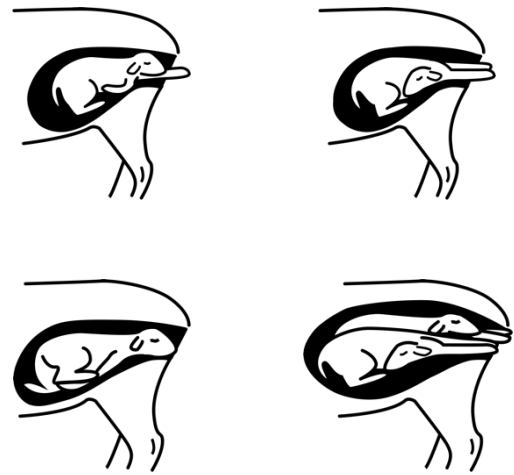
- A few days before:
  - \*Udder fullness, nesting, swollen/loose vulva, discharge. Check twice a day.
- Few minutes/hours:
  - \*Lay down, get up several times, starts to push, looks at her belly
- 30-30-30 rule:
  - \*30 minutes of straining or water bag showing-check her
  - \*If normal, wait 30 more minutes - check her – repeat one more time
  - \*Wait 30 mins between lambs/kids or check

☛ **Normal lamb/kid position:** spine upward, front legs and head or both back legs



### **Possible problems:**

- Poor cervical dilation
- The fetus is too large/small pelvis
- Deformed fetus
- Malpositioning of the fetus



### **If help is really needed:**

- Wash the ewe/doe vulva area with mild soap and rinse, wash your arms, hands, and equipment
- Use lubricant to enter the vulva and evaluate the position of the lamb/kid and the dilation of the cervix.
- If there is not enough dilation, wait 30mins and reevaluate. If no progress, call your vet.
- If there is an abnormal position, try to reposition the fetus into a normal position very gently. Sometimes you have to push the lamb/kid back in to have more space to correct the position.
- With the correct position, you can now pull but do so in time with the doe/ewe's contraction.
  - Use as much lube as needed
  - You can pull with your hand grabbing both legs, use a lamb/kid puller or lamb/kid ropes
  - Stay calm and be gentle. If no progress in 10 minutes, call your vet.

### **After the lamb/kid(s) are born:**

- Clean membranes and mucus from the nose with a towel
- Make sure the lamb/kid is breathing while rubbing vigorously the thorax with the towel
- Allow the ewe/doe and lamb/kid (s) to bond. Give them space.
- Monitor the bond and if see if the ewe/doe gives birth to another lamb/kid. If 30 mins pass by and she is not pushing, you can attempt balloting her abdomen to see if you can feel another lamb/kid.
- Check her udder to see if she has milk, clean with a wet towel, and strip both teats
- Keep an eye on her passing of the placenta (afterbirth) it should be passed in less than 24 hours

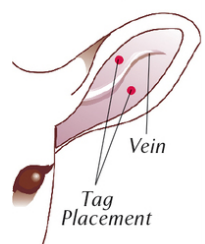
**Colostrum and milk consumption:**

- Watch to make sure that the lamb/kid nurses. If after an hour you haven't seen them nurse or are unsure if they have, pick them up and try to feel the stomach.
- If they haven't nursed hold the ewe/doe and try to stand lamb/kid underneath.
- If that doesn't work attempt to milk the mother. You need 50 ccs of milk/lamb or kid initially.
- If she doesn't have milk, bottle feed the lamb/kid with frozen/thawed colostrum in the first 2 hrs. of life
- If the lamb/kid is not nursing from the bottle you will have to pass a feeding tube.
- After feeding colostrum, repeat the above procedure every four hours.
  - \*The lamb/kid should be fed colostrum (10-20% of its body weight) in the first 24 hours spaced to every 4 hours feedings.
  - \*After the 24 hours of colostrum, you can transition to milk/milk replacer and start spacing the feedings out over a few days' time until they are fed twice a day. Adjust volume with growth.
- If the problem is bonding, restrain the ewe/doe and feed her while you put the lamb/kid to nurse and leave them in a small space to encourage bonding
- If the ewe/doe does not have milk, you can attempt to graft the lamb/kid to another ewe/doe.



**Processing your lamb/kid(s)**

- If indoor, you can dip the navel in a 2.5% iodine solution
- Weigh them
- Place an ear tag
- Keep good records



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**SHEEP AND GOAT INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT**

**What is the potential for the sheep and goat industry in Florida?**

**What are the main challenges faced by our producers?**

**What are the alternatives for developing this emergent enterprise?**

The sheep and goat industry development project is an interdisciplinary project developed by University of Florida/IFAS faculty to assess the challenges and potential of the sheep and goat industry in the state. If you are a sheep or goat producer in Florida, please give us 15 minutes of your time to tell us about your operation, main challenges and needs. Check the link <https://bit.ly/3kvIT7C>, or scan the QR code for accessing the survey.

Join our effort, be part of this project, and together we can strengthen and expand this emerging enterprise. For more information visit, <https://agronomy.ifas.ufl.edu/forages/sheep-goat/> or contact us at [forages@ifas.ufl.edu](mailto:forages@ifas.ufl.edu).

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Photos courtesy of Louise Hall, Windlestone Ranch

The UF Small Ruminant Update Newsletter is published quarterly by the IFAS/ UF Extension, as an educational and informational service. Please address any questions to Izabella Toledo, the Dairy Regional Specialized Agent of the Northeast District and Editor of the Small Ruminant Update Newsletter. E-mail: [izatol@ufl.edu](mailto:izatol@ufl.edu)

For the latest on small ruminants and to have access to previous newsletters, please visit the UF Small Ruminant Website: <https://animal.ifas.ufl.edu/extension/smallruminant/>

