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Your Sheep Business

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Now is the time to make plans for a better lamb crop next spring. Too often the only thought given to the new crop of lambs is turning the ram in with the ewes and trusting that the results will be satisfactory. We don't realize that the size of the lamb crop can be influenced by the time the ewes are bred and their condition the last month before breeding.

I have heard many farmers say that they have had bad luck with a ram because only single lambs were born. They blame this onto the ram rather than onto the ewes, when actually the ewes were the fault, or rather, the owner of the ewes was at fault because he did not have his ewes in the best shape. Most breeds of sheep carry the twinning habit. It is natural for a high percentage of twins to be born in a flock providing all other conditions are satisfactory.

You may have observed that as a rule the ewes that lamb first are the ones that produce the twins while those that lamb late most often produce singles. The ewes that were bred first were the ones that carried the most thrift.

Some people will say that single lambs are more desirable than twins. It is true that a single lamb will weigh more at a given age than either of a pair of twins, all conditions being equal, but the pair of twins will beat a single lamb in total weight considerable. Therefore, the pair of twins is more profitable because there is more to sell.

The job of a good shepherd is to see that all of the ewes are in high thrift at breeding time. This does not necessarily mean fat. It means just in a healthy, vigorous condition and rising rather than falling thrift. Two weeks or a month before the rams are turned in, the ewes should get extra good feed so as to have them in a gaining condition. This extra feed may consist of a nice lush pasture planned for that purpose, or a meadow or field where there is good aftermath. If the flock is bred late after the pasture season, the ewes should be given some grain for at least a three-weeks period before the rams are turned in. This need be no more than a half a pound to a pound of oats per day, depending somewhat on the condition of the ewes.

Of course, it is important to keep up the fertility of the ram right through the breeding season. The ram should be in good flesh when he is turned in. If the service is going to be heavy, it is advisable to allow the ram to run with the flock at night only and to keep him in during the daytime for rest and for feeding. If two rams are being used, it will be advisable to have one out in the daytime and one at night. Alternating their rest periods. If ram lambs are being used, they should by all means be confined in the daytime and allowed with the flock only at night. It is much easier on a ram to run with the flock at night only, because the ewes do not travel as much at night. They bed down, so the ram is not forced to do a lot of extra running around.

There is one other thing to keep in mind at the breeding season. If a flock is not thrifty because of parasites and shows evidence of worms, the ewes should be treated for worms before breeding, at least three or four weeks before the rams are turned in. Either a copper sulphate drench or phenothiazine may be used for treatment