

Hand-raising a baby lamb requires a commitment to providing adequate nutrition, housing, and care to give the lamb the best chance to grow into a healthy, productive adult. This information is designed to help provide a better understanding of generally accepted kid management guidelines and how each recommendation benefits the lamb. It is not intended to provide treatment recommendations - there is no substitute for sound advice from your veterinarian.

DIP THE NAVEL CORD IMMEDIATELY AFTER BIRTH TO HELP PREVENT INFECTION

Immediately after birth, the navel cord should be dipped in iodine solution to help prevent bacterial infection. A long navel cord should be trimmed to 3 or 4 inches in length before dipping. A bleeding cord should be dipped, then tied with surgical suture material. Dipping the navel cord also promotes rapid drying and the eventual breaking away of the cord from the navel.

FEED COLOSTRUM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER BIRTH

Colostrum, or first milk, contains antibodies which are not passed to the fetal lamb in utero. Colostrum must be fed promptly (within 2 hours if possible, and no later than 18 hours after birth) because the newborn rapidly loses the ability to absorb these critical proteins directly into the bloodstream. Colostrum should be bottle-fed to the newborn to insure adequate consumption. The ewe's colostrum is always the best choice if it is clean and disease free. Collect colostrum into a clean container and feed immediately. Refrigerate unused colostrum promptly to slow bacterial growth. Feed colostrum for the first 24 to 48 hours of life, then transition gradually to milk replacer if needed.

FREEZE EXCESS COLOSTRUM, RE-WARM GENTLY TO PRESERVE THE VALUABLE ANTIBODIES

Clean ice cube trays can be used to freeze the colostrum quickly in single feeding increments. Store the colostrum "cubes" in a tightly closed freezer bag for no more than 6 months. Thaw colostrum at room temperature or in the refrigerator, and re-warm gently in the feeding bottle over a warm water bath. Do not heat in a microwave - it can damage the antibody proteins. Extra colostrum can be used for other newborn goat kids, or added to milk replacer as an excellent nutritional boost for a nursing kid that is sick.

USE A COLOSTRUM SUPPLEMENT IF NO MATERNAL COLOSTRUM IS AVAILABLE

Colostrum from ewes positive for Johne's and other transmissible diseases, or any colostrum that is contaminated with blood, manure or chunky material should be discarded and not fed. Substitute another ewe's colostrum or fresh cow colostrum, or use Ultra Start[®] Colostrum Supplement according to label directions for lambs if no fresh or frozen colostrum is available.

BOTTLE FEEDING THE NURSING LAMB - FREQUENT SMALL MEALS ARE BEST

Milk is the primary source of nutrition for the pre-weaned lamb. Hand raised lambs can be fed milk in bottles or pails, or in automated feeder units. The method you choose will depend on the size of your herd and your available labor, as well as personal preference. Under natural conditions, lambs nurse very small amounts of milk at frequent intervals. Hand feeding should mimic the natural feeding schedule as closely as possible. To minimize the chance of digestive problems, lambs should be fed at least 4 times daily for the first two weeks of life, then 3-4 times daily until they reach 30 days of age. When using a free choice feeding system, it is important to feed the milk replacer cold to help prevent over-consumption. If your lamb develops scours (diarrhea), provide supplemental electrolytes mixed with water and fed separately from milk. The extra fluids are important to help prevent dehydration and restore fluid and electrolyte balance.



MAKE SURE THE LAMB'S ENVIRONMENT IS SUITABLE FOR A NEWBORN

Provide a clean, well-bedded shelter that is draft free. If the lamb will be hand raised, it is better to house it individually or in a small group of lambs that are close in age, and minimize exposure to other animals, particularly adult sheep and other species. Adult animals often carry and shed in their manure bacteria and viruses that are harmful to newborns.

OFFER DRY FEED AND WATER EARLY TO JUMP START RUMEN DEVELOPMENT

Lambs should be offered a high-quality creep feed with at least 16-18% crude protein at about 1 week of age. High quality forage (fine stemmed hay or pasture) should be made available at about 3 weeks of age. Avoid very leafy alfalfa hay as this can increase the chance of bloat. For all animals it is very important to provide clean, fresh water free choice at all times.



LAMB CARE: Volume 3.01 Tips for Hand Raising a Healthy Lamb



WEAN FROM MILK REPLACER WHEN THE LAMB IS EATING SOLID FEED

A healthy lamb that is consuming hay, creep feed and fresh water daily, and is growing well, can be weaned from milk replacer at about 30 days of age. A weaning weight goal for most lambs is about 25 to 30 pounds, or double the birth weight. The most important consideration is dry feed intake - the lamb must be consuming at least some dry feed regularly before it can be weaned. Wean lambs abruptly rather than taper off milk feedings.

CONSULT YOUR VETERINARIAN FOR PROTOCOLS ON VACCINATING AND CASTRATING

On your veterinarian's recommendation, vaccinate lambs in the first two weeks for *Clostridium* and any other diseases that are a problem in your herd. Boosters for some vaccines are needed in two to four weeks.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Your livestock veterinarian and local university extension agent are often excellent resources for sheep information, as well as many online sources. Please visit the Learning and Resource Center at www.savacaf.com for some helpful online links.