

FACT SHEET

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KEYS TO EARLY WEANING AND FEEDING LAMBS FOR SLAUGHTER

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EARLY WEANING

Early weaning is practical for a number of reasons discussed in this publication. Research reports show that milk production of most ewes declines rapidly after the second week and is of minor importance after 8 to 10 weeks. Some ewes continue producing a good supply of milk throughout the nursing period, however this is an exception.

The decline in milk production of Merino ewes on three different types of Australian pasture land is shown below.

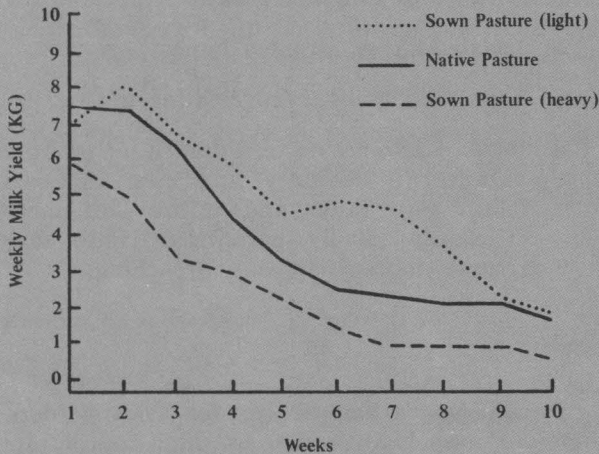


Fig. 1. Milk yields of Merino ewes rearing single lambs (from: Davies, H. L., 1963 Aust. J. Agr. Res. 14:824).

Aside from the decline in milk production a lamb's digestive tract after 9 weeks of age is practically the same as that of an adult. The following graph shows the development of parts of the lamb's digestive system.

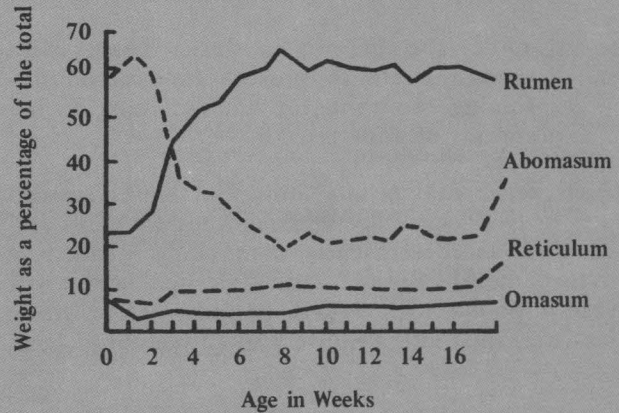


Fig. 2. Fresh wet weights of the four stomachs expressed as a percentage of the total weight of the four. (from: Waldrop and Coombe. 1960 J. of Agr. Sci. 54:140).

High quality feeds and special care will produce a quality market lamb at an early age.

Use minimum weight of 45 pounds or 9 weeks of age as a guide for early weaning. Lambs may be weaned earlier, but their feed must be fortified with vitamins and minerals.

Advantages or reasons for early weaning are:

- Ewes mend faster and are in better condition for rebreeding.
- Grazing pressure on pastures is reduced by removing the lambs.
- Older ewes can be sold earlier.
- High quality forage such as small grain pasture can be used more advantageously by separating ewes and lambs.
- Early weaning reduces the internal parasite problem.

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- When supplemental feeding is necessary to produce a fat lamb it can be done more efficiently.
- Early weaning is essential to the efficient operation of an accelerated lambing program.

Several disadvantages of early weaning are:

- Limited milk production of the ewe may be of great importance to the lamb during drouth conditions or when early weaning is not practical.
- Early weaning requires separate pastures or drylot facilities.
- Rate of gain may be slowed down for about 2 weeks following weaning unless creep feeding has been practiced.
- It may be difficult to stock pastures with enough lambs to prevent forage from becoming too rank for young lambs during seasons of lush growth.

Experimental results show that lambs weaned at 8 to 10 weeks of age make more rapid gains and use feed more efficiently than lambs weaned at 4 to 6 months of age. Early weaned lambs will gain 1 pound with 3 to 6 pounds of feed while lambs weaned later require 7 to 10 pounds of feed.

LAMB FEEDING

Buying Lambs

A good knowledge of sheep is essential to a successful lamb-feeding project. Services of a good commission man can contribute to efficient lamb feeding. Several alternatives are listed.

- Secure early weaned lambs from flocks of sheep practicing good breeding programs and finish in drylot on high quality rations.
- Secure heavy lambs, graze on stubble or supplemental pastures and finish with a short feeding period.
- Secure lambs weaned at 5 to 6 months of age and finish on small grain or native pastures. Market these lambs the following spring at approximately 1 year of age.
- Purchase healthy lambs that have not become "potty" or "dogied." Avoid buying

lambs carrying a heavy parasite load or that show disease symptoms.

Selling Slaughter Lambs

Sell by private treaty to a packing company or its representative. Feeders should acquaint themselves with the desirable amount of finish and weight required by the packers. Market lambs as they reach a desirable finish and weight. Packers usually discriminate against heavy lambs weighing over 105 pounds.

Facilities

- Provide a minimum of 12 square feet of pen space per lamb.
- Hand feeding—1 linear foot of trough space per lamb.
- Self feeding—five lambs per linear foot of trough space.
- When feeding in a shed or barn provide a minimum of 4 square feet per lamb.

Initial Care in Feedlot

- Give lambs a fill with good quality hay.
- Sort lambs into size groups.
- Isolate sick or crippled lambs.
- Vaccinate lambs for overeating disease.
- When lambs are on feed drench for internal parasites (if necessary) and shear. Sheared lambs gain faster and utilize feed more efficiently. Badly parasitized lambs may require more than one drenching.

Feeds

Roughage is a big problem for Texas feeders, therefore, most lamb feeders use high concentrate rations.

Roughages

- Alfalfa is the outstanding roughage for lamb rations when available and reasonably priced.
- When roughage must be purchased, cottonseed hulls are the most popular.

- Peanut hulls produce better results than their analyses indicate when making up less than 40 percent of the ration.
- Peanut hay is an excellent roughage provided it is not too sandy.
- Other roughages such as cane hay, prairie hay and other grass hays may be used but are better utilized when ground.

Concentrates

- Grain sorghum is, by far, the most popular grain for fattening lambs in Texas. It can be fed whole or ground. Grinding produces slightly higher gains than unground grain. Grain sorghum may also be flaked or popped but whether the increased gains will offset processing costs is questionable.
- Corn, slightly higher in feed value than grain sorghum, is unsurpassed as a lamb fattening feed.
- Barley may produce photosensitization or swell head when making up more than one third of the concentrate. It produces a firm finish.
- Wheat is nearly equal to corn or grain sorghum in feeding value. Do not grind for lambs as it becomes pasty and less palatable. Because of this, more wheat passes through lambs whole than other grains. Crimping may be helpful if cost permits.
- Oats is an excellent lamb feed and provides some roughage as well. When oats is the principal concentrate the finish on lambs may be soft.

Protein Supplements

- Cottonseed meal is the most available and most popular protein supplement for lambs.
- Peanut and soybean meals may be substituted for cottonseed meal when available.
- Urea may be used safely when it makes up no more than one third of the ration's total protein.
- Many feeders prefer to use a protein supplement containing antibiotics and stilbestrol. These are difficult to mix in the ration without special equipment.

Water

- Clean fresh water is essential to successful lamb feeding.
- When water is allowed to drip, lambs learn to drink more quickly as they are attracted to dripping water.
- Equip drinking troughs with overflow pipes so that water is kept fresh and dusty scum floats off.
- When lambs refuse to drink in the drylot return them to pasture a few days; then bring them back. Usually after additional time on pasture no further difficulty is encountered.

Salt and Minerals

- Provide salt and minerals as needed free choice.
- It is especially important that lamb rations have calcium and phosphorus in balance. A proper ratio is 2:1 of calcium and phosphorus. Rations containing large amounts of grain sorghum require the addition of 1/2 of 1 percent ground limestone.

Suggested Rations

Many lamb feedlots use a series of rations, changing them rapidly until the lambs are on full feed. A suggested ration series is given.

Ration Number	1	2	3	4	5
32% protein supplement*	250	250	250	200	200
Maize**	600	850	1000	1200	1400
Molasses	100	100	200	200	200
Ground roughage	1050	800	550	400	200

*32 percent protein supplement containing 5 milligrams diethylstilbestrol per pound. It also contains 10 percent equivalent protein from nonprotein nitrogens.

**Maize is ground.

If lambs have been warmed up or have been creep fed, do not use all five rations. The lambs' condition and size influence the number of rations used.

Feeding

- Handfeed at regular intervals. Three times per day is better than twice a day. Feeding regularity is extremely important. Feed the lambs only what they will clean up in about 30 minutes.

- When self-feeding lambs, keep feed clean and fresh. Do not allow feed to remain in trough or feeders more than 2 days.
- Start lambs on a mixture of 50 percent roughage, 50 percent concentrates.
- When lambs are on feed, shear, drench and vaccinate for overeating disease.
- Vaccination may be omitted when antibiotics are included in the ration.
- Lambs badly infested with internal parasites may require more than one drenching.
- Change rations every 7 to 10 days depending upon the lambs' ability to adjust to change.
- Gradually increase concentrates and decrease roughage as suggested in the above rations. The ration for most lambs will be changed every 7 to 10 days depending upon their ability to adjust.
- Finish lambs on a ration of 90 percent concentrates and 10 percent roughage.
- A protein supplement containing stilbestrol helps secure maximum gains. A 3 milligram implant may be used when stilbestrol is not added to the ration.

- Feed 1/4 ounce of ammonium chloride per head daily to prevent urinary calculi.
- Pelleting rations generally does not produce sufficient increase in gain to pay for the pelleting.

Marketing

- Sell lambs directly to the packer or to a packer order buyer.
- Sell lambs when they reach the proper degree of finish.
- **Do not** hold lambs past 110 pounds live weight — packers usually discount heavy lambs.

Records

- Keep accurate records on amount of feed, daily gain, feed per pound of gain, profit or loss.
- These records will help with future lamb purchases.
- When possible secure records of lamb yields and grades from packers.

Economic Data

Costs	
Costs or value of lambs	_____
Feed and minerals	_____
Labor	_____
Interest	_____
Shearing, transportation and other expenses	_____
Profit or loss	_____

Returns	
Sale of wool	_____
Sale of lambs	_____
Incentive payment	_____

Feeding Information

Date in _____	Date out _____	Days on feed _____
Weight in _____	Weight out _____	Gain _____
Total feed _____	Feed cost _____	
Feed per pound gain _____		
Cost per pound gain _____		