

Sheep Research Flock

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Introduction

The McNay sheep research flock was established in 1989 when the flock was relocated from the Beaconsfield research farm. Currently, the flock is composed of 200 white-faced, prolific crossbred ewes. Past work has demonstrated the management needed for an intensive lambing schedule with commercial flocks in Iowa. This flock accomplished over 70% accelerated lambing. One area of research that dramatically improved spring conception rates was light priming of the rams during the four months prior to breeding.

Current Program

Because of budget and staff reductions, the McNay flock now lambs once per year starting February 1. This shift in production practices utilizes the reduced staff more effectively. Many researchers have conducted work at McNay or have purchased animals from McNay for use on campus. Additionally, a senior block course from the ISU College of Veterinary Medicine has utilized this flock as an intensive two-day, hands-on learning laboratory for the past five years. Students learn blood and fecal collection, body condition scoring, ewe tipping, and ewe restraining. This farm also serves as a resource for Veterinary Continuing Education and producer meetings. Visitors are always welcome at the sheep research unit and arrangements can be made by contacting Jim Secor, McNay Research Farm Superintendent at 641-766-6465.

Current research projects are evaluating the use of dried distillers grains with solubles (DDGS) as an escape protein source for lactating ewe rations. Ewes rearing triplets and twins are assigned to a high quality hay:corn diet or a high quality hay:DDGS diet. This study is being summarized and results will be in next year's

report. The second study is evaluating feeding methods to reduce feed cost for finishing lambs. Currently, lamb market weights are averaging over 130 pounds, and some producers have expressed concerns about lambs stalling out when fed on a corn/pelleted protein supplement diet. Phase feeding of protein by three-week periods is also being evaluated compared with a 16% crude protein ration fed throughout to a market weight of 135 pounds. Additionally, half the pens are being fed long stem hay at 10% of the diet to evaluate its impact on performance and cost of gain. Lambs are fed for 84 days starting two weeks post-weaning and are transported to the Iowa Lamb Corporation for carcass data collection. This study is currently underway and will also be in next year's report.

Production levels in this flock are outstanding. In 2003, the average number of lambs born per ewe that gave birth was 2.35 lambs for mature ewes and 1.79 lambs for ewe lambs. Lamb survival from birth to weaning was 87%, which indicates a high level of shepherding from the farm staff and a strong genetic ability to survive. Starting in 2004, the entire lamb crop produced at McNay will be sired by white-faced maternal rams. We plan to offer replacement females for sale to the Iowa sheep industry. Availability of large groups of high-health status females has been identified as a need in Iowa. Ewes will be priced at \$25-50 over market depending on the existence of the government ewe lamb payment. Producers interested in purchasing ewe lambs in 2004 should contact Jim Secor at 641-766-6465 or Dan Morrical at 515-294-2904.