



Hunter Nutrition

The Program That Performs

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DO YOU NEED A SPECIAL FEED FOR BREEDING?

by Jeff Hunter

THE SHORT ANSWER IS NO.

While you do not have to buy a 'special' feed or mineral—you must meet the nutritional needs of breeding animals. Nutritional needs are much greater for flushing than for the maintenance stage of production. For example: an ewe needs 45% More Dry Matter, 40% More Protein and 56% More Energy during flushing than she needs in maintenance. Addressing these increased nutritional needs can be done with our standard products. I like to see herds and flocks on year around high levels of important reproduction nutrients such as selenium, vitamin E, manganese, and zinc. This is a much better approach than minimally feeding stock during maintenance and then panicking as breeding approaches. This is when producers might be pushed into buying a special breeding supplement, the seller usually says 'for must buy this to be successful'. Whether you are breeding naturally or doing AI/ET work nutritional needs are higher, but those needs can be met with available well-fortified feeds.

The concept of flushing animals pre-breeding and during breeding is not new.

'Flushing' refers to increasing energy/nutrient intake which enhances ovulation rate, embryo survival, and birthing rate.

Since our feeding program fulfilled the needs of flushing/breeding I did not originally see the need to label a set of products as 'breeding' feeds/minerals. I do not agree with some of the marketing that other companies do. Their excessive prices, high pressure and false promises are not the way to do business.

If you are on our feeding program you are on a program which meets the demands of breeding, AI, and ET. However, in recent years I have formulated some products with even higher levels of nutrients to address some producer needs. We have made these on a custom basis, but have not marketed those products to everyone. We have feeds for producers who want an even higher fortified program, especially for those doing AI and Embryo Transfer. We have made a Custom Ewe 1200 Pellet and a Custom Ewe Supplement for those operations. These reasonably priced products will get new product names and be available during breeding season to help everyone who needs them.

CREEP FEEDING CALVES

by Jeff Hunter

It is important to get calves started on creep early. Exposure to creep feed has many benefits; rumen development, heavier weaning weights, and increased profits. A good calf creep is palatable, well-fortified, and has the correct energy and fiber balance.

Young calves will not eat very much creep at first. However early consumption of even a small amount of feed is important. This early consumption aids in rumen development and sets calves up to consume more feed and gain more weight later on in the creep feeding period. A good way to get calves started on feed, is to place the creep close to the areas where cows and calves congregate. Proper location of the creep feeder is important to the success of the creep program. If you place the feeder in an unfamiliar location, the calves may not find it. You will also get an earlier start if

the first feed is a very palatable texturized grain mix. Our product 'Beef Calf Creep w/Bovatec (Texturized)' works very well as the first feed to attract calves to the creep. After the calves are well started on feed you should switch to 14% Calf Creep Pellet.

Pelleted Calf Creep Feeds should be a 5/32" pellet and free of fines. Avoid calf creep feeds which are a blend of several kinds of pellets. These products can separate and often have fines which can cause bloat and off feed times. When 'the blended pellet' product separates you also see a decline in calf performance due to the ingredient separation. You will want a single size pellet which has all of the ingredients in that pellet and is a free of fines.



Creep feeding calves reduces calf weaning stress and produces 30-60 lbs. more weight at weaning. Additionally calf creep feeding helps cows maintain condition. Cows that are in better shape at weaning will breed back sooner.

We have several reasonably priced high quality calf creep feeds available. The pelleted feeds are available in bags, bulk bags, and in bulk. Call for details.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FREE CHOICE MINERAL FEEDING IN RUMINANTS

Cattle, Sheep and Goats depend on free choice mineral for much of their nutrition during the grazing season. During the summer grazing period free choice mineral provides necessary minerals and sometimes vitamins. Most producers are aware of the need to feed free choice mineral, however many have asked 'why is it needed'?

Free Choice Mineral feeding is unique to ruminant livestock (and horses) because they are grazing animals. Free Choice Mineral should be fed year-around, however it is of particular importance during the grazing/maintenance period. Free Choice Mineral is often the only supplemental nutrition during the grazing season which often coincides with the maintenance stage of production.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD FREE CHOICE MINERAL ARE...

- Clean, Dust Free, with uniform particle size.
- Free of or very low in 'grain products' such as distillers.
- Consumed At The Correct Rate. No Under/Over Consumption.
- Anti-Caking Agent Included.
- Contains Trace Elements, Salt, Iodine, Selenium and Macro Minerals.
- Contains adequate Manganese and Zinc for reproductive requirements.



by Jeff Hunter

Feeding Free Choice Mineral is necessary. Some of the reasons are as follows. During the grazing season and other times when concentrate is not fed, free choice mineral becomes the sole source of supplemental minerals. Forage has a variable mineral content and nutritional value. Early grazed forage is high in water content, thus it has a low mineral content. This early forage has several mineral deficiencies; an example is the low magnesium level of pasture which causes grass tetany. Mineral consumption varies according to forage and feed quality. When feed quality is low, animals will consume more mineral to meet their nutritional needs. When concentrates are fed and forage quality is higher, animals will eat less free choice mineral. Mineral feeders should always be full and never run empty.

PREPARING FOR REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS

by LeAnn Hall, and Jeff Held, Professor Emeritus of Animal Science, South Dakota State University



Reproductive success is a primary goal in any sheep operation. Failure to design and execute a solid plan for your breeding program results in lower lamb numbers and decreased profits. While managing a breeding program can feel like playing the lottery and hoping for the best, there are several key areas that make a difference and improve the odds for a successful breeding season.

Step 1: MAKE A PLAN

There are a myriad of “ideal” lambing systems, ranging from once/year to 3 times/2 years to 5 times/3 years. Only you can determine what works best for your operation. Having a conversation with your local lamb buyer or point of sale is often a good place to start. Once you know your market advantage, evaluate your program to determine how best to optimize your facilities, labor, and management while accounting for weather, feed sources, and the genetics of your flock. Once the lambing schedule is determined, work backward 145-150 days to establish the ram turn-out date. Set up a calendar to keep track of important management tasks throughout the year. Remember Benjamin Franklin’s advice, “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.” A good plan goes a long way in setting up your flock for reproductive success.

Step 2: PREPARE IN THE OFF-SEASON

The best time to begin preparations for the upcoming breeding season is at the conclusion of the last lambing season. Pen rams away from sight, sound, and smell of ewes to aid in estrous induction at breeding. Cull ewes who didn’t milk or raise their lambs well. Evaluate your lambing data and converse with your veterinarian to determine if pregnancy/abortion disease vaccinations are recommended. Mark these on your calendar, as some are given weeks-months before as well as during mid-gestation. Evaluate the health of your flock. Now is the perfect time to address any issues such as foot rot or other chronic disease,

in rams as well as ewes. Address and control any pests and parasites. Evaluate the body condition score (BCS) of your animals. On a scale of 1-5, the ideal BCS at breeding is 2.5-3 for ewes, and 3.5-4 for rams. Thin or over-conditioned ewes will result in lower fertility, while thin or over-conditioned rams will have lower libido and higher incidence of illness and injury. On average, one increment of BCS is equal to 10% body weight. Expect a one-increment change in BCS to take between 4-8 weeks, depending on plane of nutrition. Provide mineral and vitamin supplementation specifically formulated for sheep. Attention to the health and nutrition status of your animals during this time enhances reproductive success.

Step 3: APPROACHING BREEDING

Conduct a breeding soundness exam on your rams, including semen evaluation by a qualified professional. Complete any de-worming, lameness or chronic illness treatments, and abortion disease vaccinations. Now is a good time to cull any problem animals, those who despite your efforts didn’t regain condition or remain chronically lame or ill. If your operation is in a hot and/or humid environment, shearing both the ewes and rams can be beneficial. If so, fly and other pest control is particularly important. Two-three weeks prior to your established ram turn-out date, increase your ewes’ nutrition by supplying grain supplementation between ½ -1 lb/head/day, good quality hay, or new pasture to induce a “flushing” effect. Take care to gradually introduce and increase grain over a week’s time to prevent acidosis or digestive upset. Stay on this plane of nutrition through at least the first 4 weeks of the breeding season. Continue to provide a quality sheep mineral and vitamin supplementation through the production cycle. If you are using CIDRs for estrous cycle synchronization, insert them approximately 12 days prior to your ram turn-out date. Shorter duration can result in fewer ewes responding to the

CIDRs, while longer duration increases the chance of infection, although this is still unlikely. Administer campylobacter vaccine to first-time lambing ewes.

Step 4: BREEDING SEASON

Turn those rams out! But wait, put a marking harness or other form of breeding marker on them first! Changing the crayon color on the marking harness every 14-16 days allows tracking of rebreeding to determine both ewe and ram fertility, and gives approximate lambing dates. Ratios of rams: ewes should not exceed 1:25 for ram lambs, and 1:50 for mature rams. Continue feeding the higher plane of nutrition, “flushing” ration, for 4-6 weeks, and provide a quality sheep mineral at all times. Remove rams according to your lambing schedule. For identification of less fertile ewes and condensing the lambing season, particularly important for accelerated lambing programs, remove rams after 45-day breeding period. Administer any vaccines as recommended, including campylobacter in mid-gestation (60 – 90 days after first dose for first-time ewes) and over-eating (CDT) in late-gestation. Use ultrasound or blood tests for pregnancy confirmation.

For more information:

Lambing systems: Sheep 201: Lambing systems (sheep101.info)

Body Condition Scoring: Sheep Body Condition Score Barn Reference (sdstate.edu)

Nutrition Guidelines: Nutrient Requirements of Sheep and Goats - Alabama Cooperative Extension System (aces.edu)

Breeding Soundness Exam: Breeding Soundness Examinations of Rams and Bucks (purdue.edu)

Pregnancy detection, blood tests: Genex Catalog - DG29® Blood Pregnancy Test

Sheep Pregnancy Testing | Sage Ag Labs

BioPRYN for Sheep & Goat - the blood pregnancy test | BioPRYN

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HAY ALTERNATIVES

**HAY SAVER
PELLETS**

**SOY HULL
PELLETS**

**ALFALFA
PELLETS**



With today's high hay prices, a lack of hay, and the possibility of needing to feed a lower quality hay, many people have asked us about hay alternatives. We manufacture three pelleted sources of fiber that could replace about 50-60% of your hay. Example: If you were feeding 4# hay to gestating ewes – you should still feed 2# of hay, plus 2# of a pelleted fiber source. Some advantages of our pelleted fiber sources are consistency and the zero waste of product. Even the best hay has a percentage of waste, which increases its true cost. Pellets Available Bulk or bagged.

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