



Sheep Institute Happenings

Buying Breeding Ewes

Here are some things to look for when buying breeding stock

- 1. Body:** Look for you that are the size animal you want to raise. They should have a sound mouth, good udder, and legs. Reject ewes that have a broken mouth (teeth missing, broken or ground down). Make sure the udder is soft and pliable and has two well- developed teats. If the ewes are older make sure that they have both teats because they may have gotten cut off sometime in their life by shearing. If the udder has any lumps in it may have had infection sometime in their life and will easily get an infection again. If the sheep are lame for any reason do not purchase. Try to get ewes that are strong, broad and deep and have deep loins, straight legs, and good muscling.
- 2. Wool:** If you are buying wool breeds check to see that the fleece is uniform and dense and free of black fibers or spots.
- 3. Head:** Make sure that the teeth on the lower incisors of the mouth and the upper dental pad meet correctly. The teeth should not be in front of or behind the pad.
- 4. Legs:** The legs should be strong, straight and with good feet.
- 5. Production records:** If production records are available from the producer make good use of them to help you in your selection. Try to purchase ewes that are twins and have had twins in their producing years.

How many ewes do you purchase? If you are just getting into the business I would suggest you get proven ewes but you can purchase ewe lambs and feed them a very good ration to try to get them to breed but you will probably get a lower percentage of them lambing the first year than the older ewes. This is your choice to make. I would recommend that you not buy more than 50 to 60 head the first year. Most people can handle this many without to much additional help. You will also need to purchase rams and you should figure that a ram can service 25 to 40 head of ewes. It is very important to have at least on extra ram in case one of the rams may not be fertile or becomes injured for some reason.

Lambing System

Before you purchase your ewes you decide what lambing system to use. Here are some factors that need to be considered.

1. Climatic condition in the area and consider the breed that will adapt to the temperature in your area.
2. Environmental conditions such as the type and topography of the land.
3. How available is feed in your area.
4. Is there skilled labor to help you?
5. How easy is your record keeping system?
6. What about disease problems in your area.
7. Predators?
8. How much did you pay for your animals?

Your next choice is when and where you want to lamb. If you shed lamb you have the expenses of the buildings and facilities. Your weaning percentages will be higher because your lamb losses can be controlled through better management along with health problems that can be treated easier and in a timely manner.

Range lambing has less capital investment such as buildings, corrals and equipment but you may have lower lambing percentages and you would probably lamb later in the year. Range lambing can have more predator problems and weather can get severe in certain areas which both can give your large losses. The lambs and ewes are harder to treat if they get sick

Keep all of these things in mind as you consider buying ewes or lambs and don't be afraid to ask an experienced sheep person to go with you to help pick out your animals. With good management and animal care you can be successful in the sheep business.