

Kidding Season is Here!

Tue, Dec 20, 2022 4:52PM 25:37

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

lamb, feed, amy, animals, colostrum, kids, important, milk, barn, weaning, warm, pen, problem, doe, hours, heat lamp, clean, birth, baby, lactating

SPEAKERS

Amy Powell, Christa Hartsook

C Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the small farms podcast, a production of the small farms program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life. In this episode, I interview Amy Powell, Iowa State University Extension Outreach 4-H animal science program specialist to talk about lambing and kidding season. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program coordinator, and we hope you enjoy the show. Amy, welcome. Thanks for being back.

A Amy Powell 00:47

Thanks for having me. Looking forward to it.

C Christa Hartsook 00:50

So we're talking about a topic that you and I have talked about before, and that's really getting ready for lambing and kidding season, which for a lot of folks should be starting anytime right now. I know where it's January, we're in Iowa. So it's not warm. What's our first consideration with babies being born now?

A Amy Powell 01:12

Well, as you said, it's not warm. So keeping those lambs warm the minute they hit the ground, we want to make sure that the the ewe or the doe licks them off starts getting them warmed up. And if she can't do that, or has too many to care for, then we want to be there with a towel or something to get that lamb or kid warmed up, sticking a piece of straw up its nose making it sneeze, get all that amniotic fluid out of its lungs, and then just making sure that it gets up and nurses and move them into their landing pin or kidding jug and they should be good to go.

C

Christa Hartsook 01:47

So as we prepare for that actual lambing or kidding area, what do we need to do to prepare for that? Amy, what kind of supplies should we have on hand? What do we need to think about that specific area?

A

Amy Powell 02:01

Well, prior to your first lamb or kid being born, you want to make sure that you have small pens, which we call lambing jugs, or lambing pens, kidding pens, whatever you want to call them. And the rule is, you know, you want one to about every seven to 10 females because we reuse those pens over and over again. And depending on your breeding date and kidding date, if all of them are going to give birth on the same day, then you might need a few more pens, but hypothetically, one for every seven to 10 females and then make sure that you have clean bedding, because you're going to want to fill that pen full of bedding to keep those lambs warm, keep them clean, and then clean that out. So you're going to have to have a good reserve of bedding, making sure that your buckets are there, your feeders are there that you have a heat source, whether it's a heat lamp, or if you're lucky enough to have an enclosed facility that is heated, you might not need that heat lamp. But getting that area prepared and ready to go are all important things. And then as far as items that you need to make sure that you're ready, it's always good to have a supply of colostrum on hand, just in case that ewe doesn't have or lamb. They don't have what they need, or milk replacer. As they get older, they need to be switched to milk. And then something to feed that with whether it's a bottle and a stomach tube, those type things are always important. Iodine to spray the navel and some disinfectant to keep things clean. Some form of identification, whether you're going to spray a number on the side of the kid or lamb. If you want to go ahead and ear tag them immediately. Or maybe you want to wait on that, but some way to identify them. So you can match mother and baby up. That's important. You don't want to miss that up. And then in the event that you have dystocia or troubles with the birthing process, having pullers or something to get that animal out to get that baby out of the ewe. Any type of medication you might need, whether it's antibiotics, dewormers, Pitocin, oxytocin, things to induce labor are always handy to have and something to administer that with needles, syringes, drench guns, gloves and lubricant if you do need to help with that birth process. Something to keep records on record keeping is very important. So paper pencil, or a computer or however you choose to do that. If you can have a set of scales to weigh the lambs and the kids on that, that data is really important in knowing what that birth weight was as you make decisions on down the road, about whether you want to keep that, that female and those kinds of things. Scissors to cut the umbilical cord if you need to do that. A thermometer is handy to make sure that the lamb is at the right temperature and towels and something to clean off those lambs and kids when they're first born. That's kind of an abbreviated list. There's other things you could add to that but that's kind of the the necessary Everything's to get you started.

C

Christa Hartsook 05:02

Sure. And all of those are really good practical things to kind of have on hand in that bucket when you need to go. I want to back up a little bit to, to our lambing jugs or kidding jugs. And is it necessary? I know we have producers out there who maybe are kidding or lambing in more of

a group situation. And so are those individual pens necessary? Are those helpful for that bonding process? What do you think there.

A

Amy Powell 05:29

um, in my opinion, it's a useful tool, it does help that mother and baby bond, it also allows you to provide individual attention specific nutrition to that animal, you know, exactly that that ewe ate, and how much she ate, you know that she's drinking water, if it's individual to her, whereas when they're in a group, you just know, the feed got cleaned up, and you don't know who ate it. So I feel like that's important. And it's also easier to keep records and keep it with that animal because they're in an individual pen. And it's easier for the baby lamb or kid to find the mother and figure out how to nurse and there's not so many ewes in the pen that that they get lost or confused. So I personally think it's a great tool to have, you may not be able to do that it's not the end of the world if you're not able to put them into small pens. But I certainly think it's a it's a good bonding experience. It's a great way to give individualized attention to those animals and ensure they're off to a good start.

C

Christa Hartsook 06:31

Absolutely. Amy let's go to that actual lambing process itself, then. And so right now we're spending a lot of time checking, right, we're checking those ewes we're checking those, does for some of those early signs of labor and impending birth. What are we really looking for there? And how often should we be checking?

A

Amy Powell 06:52

Um, the textbook answer is three to four hours. So you want to check them every three to four hours, we all lot of us work in jobs, because if you have sheep or goats, you probably need another job to support your habit of loving goats and sheep. So we can't be there. But with the advent of barn cameras, if you're able to afford one of those, that's a great tool that can help you keep an eye on those animals without actually being there. And most of our animals like to give birth at night. And so if you can check them right before you go to bed, and then first thing when you get up if no one's showing any signs. And those signs would be they get off by themselves. They're sunken in at their hips, that you may see a mucus discharge coming out they may nest or paw at the ground. And and straining you know, if they look like they're in distress, not distress, but but just contracting, then those are all signs that the laborer is in an imminent and then lamb or a kid should appear. So if you see that at 11 o'clock, right before you go to bed, probably a good idea to get up in the middle of the night and check on them again. But otherwise, you could wait till you wake up in the morning and head out to the barn first thing.

C

Christa Hartsook 08:04

How about intervening, Amy? Let's talk about when it might become necessary? Or how would we know you know, we've seen some of those early signs, we can easily see that she is going through contractions, we're not seeing a lot of progress. What's what's our good rule of thumb

on that.

A

Amy Powell 08:21

And as you said, if there's no problem, we don't want to intervene. Intervening is not healthy for ewe unless there's a problem. So keep that in mind, and as a first time, if you're raising animals for the first time, you really want to get in there, you want to make sure that everything's okay. And it's hard sometimes to stay out. But um, if you have noticed that the ewe is straining for more than an hour and there's nothing happening, then it would be wise to go in and feel around and see what's going on in there. Or if the water bag has appeared. Once that water bag has appeared, you should have a lamb within 45 to 60 minutes. And if that hasn't happened, or you see no feet, you don't see a little nose you don't see anything, then go in and help that ewe out. See what's the problem is because you know, it might be as simple that she just needs a little tug. But there might be something worse going on in there. And once you see the front feet, then you should have a lamb or kid within about 30 to 40 minutes. So if you're not seeing that, then that's an indication you need to just go ahead and pull that lamb out. And a lot of our ewes and does will have multiples. So if you are pretty sure she's going to have twins, she should have that second lamb within about 30 minutes. So if you notice still straining or no afterbirth has come out, once again, you want to go in there and check and make sure there's not another lamb in there that the placenta isn't retained, retained or some of those issues that might occur.

C

Christa Hartsook 09:46

That kid or that lamb. Amy really needs that first dose of colostrum pretty quickly. Now, at what point do we get worried if that animal is not up and nursing or at what point do we think oh, we need to tube feed here.

A

Amy Powell 10:01

So if that lamb is not up with your kid within the first hour of birth, then I would go ahead and give it some supplemental colostrum. And you can do that by milking the ewe out. Or if you have colostrum stored, if you're you doesn't have enough milk than you can, can stomach tube it that way, you want to give it about 10% of its body weight within 24 hours. So if you have a 10 pound lamb, you're going to want to feed them 16 ounces of colostrum within those first 24 hours. But obviously, we're not going to do it all at once. Small, small amounts every two hours or so until they can get up on their own. And some research has suggested that even if they can take a bottle, it's best to give them the stomach tube, that's not as comfortable and therefore they'll be more likely to go to the ewe and and suck on that teat rather than the bottle, the bottle mimics the teat and sometimes they may bond to you instead of the mother. So there's a little body of research out there that suggests stomach tubing is the best way to give colostrum in those first hours of birth.

C

Christa Hartsook 11:10

Amy there's times I know, especially for first time moms, when it takes a little bit of time before there's really colostrum and let them milk there in that ewe or that doe. At what point do we

there's really colostrum and let them milk, there in that ewe or that doe. At what point do we get worried? Or as a producer? When do we intervene and really make that flip to that bottle feed? Or do we continually try and put them back on mom hoping that that milk will come in?

A

Amy Powell 11:34

Well, for the first 24-48 hours continually milk her because that will stimulate milk let down that that action of nursing, whether it's the lamb nursing, are you physically doing it, you know, after 48 hours, if you still don't have anything coming out, then I would suggest you probably need to make sure you have a storage of of milk replacer. But you know, the lamb is going to naturally try to nurse, typically or kid whether you're bottle feeding or not, because they like to eat a lot more regularly than we're going to provide a bottle. So that should stimulate stimulate her without you having to intervene at that point in time. But you definitely don't want the the baby to go too long without milk. Obviously that's not going to help matters.

C

Christa Hartsook 12:19

Absolutely. What do you think our biggest concern is with newborn lambs and kids this time of year? Amy, are we worried more about starvation? Do we worry about cold and draught? What do we need to really be concerned about and watch for there? Yeah,

A

Amy Powell 12:35

both of those things. So starvation and hypothermia are the two major reasons that lambs don't survive. The first are kids the first 24 hours. And so those are the two things that we're looking for. And especially if it's cold or drafty, if you can get them in a barn where there's no drafts, that draft is really going to cause some issues. So getting them dried off immediately is key. If you can't or they're not warming up, you want to take their temperature. And 102 is a normal temperature. So if it's dropping below that, you're getting into hypothermia, and we want to make sure we warm that lamb up and you can you can put them into a box and put a hairdryer on them and warm them up real quickly. But we don't want to do it too fast. We definitely don't want to, quote cook the baby, that that's negative don't want any animals to perish because we overheated them. But if you can warm them up slowly. heat lamps also work. But sometimes when they're suffering from hypothermia, getting them into a box with warm air circulating around them is going to bring their temperature up much faster. But you can lay them on hot water bottles, you can put a heat pad underneath them lots of ways and some people even bring them into their house and I would kind of consider that a last resort because you really want them to stay with with the mom and bond with the mom. But of course, in the end, it's more important that we have a live lamb. So if you need to bring them into your house, that's another option as well.

C

Christa Hartsook 14:04

Amy, let's talk about vaccines. And so you mentioned the iodine right away really getting at that naval. What else do we need to think about in terms of our newborn lambs and kids?

A

Amy Powell 14:17

Hopefully you vaccinated your does and ewes prior to lambing with the Clostridium perfringens type cmd and that should carry passive immunity to those lambs through the milk. So if you did that there aren't any vaccines that are given to a newborn lamb. However, if that wasn't done or if you bought a ewe and weren't sure, you know, if she came to you vaccinated, then you'd want to give a tetanus toxoid and a tetanus antitoxin, shot to the to the lamb, especially before you dock it and then also castrate so you'd want to do it to a kid to before you castrate just to prevent lock jaw or any type of tetanus problem and then you'll vaccinate all the time. I am sad about six weeks of age with that CD and T Clostridium perfringens type CMD.

C

Christa Hartsook 15:06

What about mama herself? Amy how do we make sure that she is staying in that optimum health after delivery so that she's continuing that high level of milk production and making sure that she's good, and does she need any vaccinations at this time.

A

Amy Powell 15:21

So nutrition is key for lactating doe or ewe. Also having the right minerals, so providing them with a mineral mix that can help them pass some of those things on to the lamb through the milk and then water, water is key. And if we're using a lot of us, because it is Iowa, and it's cold, we use automatic waterers, maybe with a heater in it, just stick your hand in there, every once in a while, I know one time, our heat thermostat got turned up really high and the water was really hot, and the ewes were not drinking. Or if you have a short in there, you don't want to shock your ewes, been known to have that happen as well. So just stick your hand in that water occasionally make sure it's not hot water, and that you're not shocking your animals, keep that water clean. And then if you are not using an automatic system, make sure you know there is water there that it's not frozen. And that it's clean. I always say if you wouldn't drink it, then don't make your animals drink it either. But water is really key because that's you know, 98% of milk. So they need that. And just you know, as far as nutrition goes, if you think about 150 pound ewe, when she's at maintenance, she needs about two and a half pounds of dry matter a day. And of course, that could be pasture, forage, feed. But when she's lactating, and she has twins and she's lactating for twins, then we get up to like six and a half pounds of dry matter. So we want to make sure that it's, it's good that it's a high quality. And the other things that we want to keep in mind, uhm keeping that calcium to phosphorus ratio, right that two to one ratio, and most of your commercial feeds that you would purchase should have all of that correctly formulated and then feeding some high quality feed that has good energy as well as that protein in it. And making sure your hay is not moldy or old. Because that's a real important time this first six to eight weeks of lactation that's that's the key and the peak and when they're going to need most of their nutrients. As far as vaccines, we really don't have any vaccines, you may want to deworm her, especially if you're going to turn her on out because just being pregnant, they tend to parasites tend to have a heavier load here in Iowa, not as big of a problem because we have such a cold winter, but still not a not a bad idea to go ahead and deworm her before you send her out.

C

Christa Hartsook 17:39

Amy, how about castration and docking tails for Lambs? When do we need to be thinking about taking those steps?

A

Amy Powell 17:48

We want to do it as soon as possible to minimize the pain threshold for those animals. You don't want to do it the first day. If you cut that tail off, there is some research that shows for the first day that the ewe might have a little trouble bonding with that lamb so but I would say definitely within the first week to two weeks and the earlier the better especially with docking we're fairly confident that we're going to dock any wool sheep tail. So you know that's going to happen. I know with castration sometimes we would like to hold off a little bit because we're not sure if we want to keep him as a buck. Or or wether him but the sooner the better. Just just because there's less pain involved with banding early versus doing it later on.

C

Christa Hartsook 18:36

Amy, as our kids and our does and our ewes are kind of progressing. We need to give those kids and lambs some access to some creep feed. At what point do we really want to start introducing that? And then what is that? Do we need to have the higher percent protein in that feed? What are we looking at there.

A

Amy Powell 18:57

You can introduce creep feed as soon as you want. It's a good idea to start as early as possible. And for the listeners that may not know yet a creep feeder is just a place where a lamb can get through there but the ewes cannot or the does cannot get in there. And their, their digestive system is a baby is not fully developed. They don't have a fully developed rumen and they won't have it for three to four weeks. But it's still a good idea to start. Let them start nibbling and smelling the feed and figuring out where it is because it will make that transition of weaning a much less stressful process if they've been exposed to creep feeding and they're used to eating feeds. And then that feed needs to be between 16 and 18% protein so it is a much higher protein feed than what you're going to feed your ewes or even some of your older lambs. And then it's always a good idea to put a coccidiosis corid in there to prevent coccidiosis so a Deccox or Novatech product are both available and can be fed to sheep or goats. And then you can also you might want to worry a little bit about urinary calculi if you get your your phosphorus too high and don't have the calcium, right, so you can just throw some limestone in there some feed grade limestone, and mix that in with the feed. And that sort of helps prevent, hopefully, any issues you might have with kidney stones, which is what urinary calculi is,

C

Christa Hartsook 20:25

how soon then Amy you know, we've had our kids and our lambs inside, so we're kind of protected or keeping them warm, bonded with mom, how soon can they all go back outside and really adjust to those colder temps.

A

Amy Powell 20:40

We'd like to say we should keep our ewes and does in a lambing pen for 24 to 48 hours, assuming they're healthy, then you would put them into a smaller pen with with a smaller group of ewes or does, and they can stay in there a few days, and then they're ready to go outside, there's really not a rule of thumb on. Now obviously, if it's a blizzard, or there's lots of wet, it's really the cold is not as important as the wet. So if they're going to get outside and get in the snow and get extremely wet, then I would suggest keeping them in the barn. But if it's a sunny day, even if it's cold, there's nothing wrong with letting them go outside. And as you know, it's always fun to turn them out for the first time because they just bounce through the fields. And it's fun to watch. And I always say vitamin D is one of the best vitamins you can give them and fresh air, because they've been cooped up in the barn. And so they should if they've had that time to bond in the lambing pen and then in a smaller pen, and then they should have no trouble going outside and staying with their, their mothers. And then as long as it's fairly dry, and there's not tons of snow on the ground, and it's not pouring rain or in a snow storm, you should be fine sending them out.

C

Christa Hartsook 21:51

And I know we could do a whole nother podcast on this next question. But let's talk a little bit about weaning and at points in time, when we really want to focus on that maybe or have a general rule of thumb.

A

Amy Powell 22:04

For lambs, you want them to be about 45 pounds. So whatever that is for the type of sheep, that you're raising different breeds grow at different rates. And that's probably going to be about 60 days. And for kids, they're probably gonna be a little bit older they and they might not be that big, because we know kids don't grow as fast as sheep, but 60 to 90 days for kids. And you can wean them earlier if you are trying to get those ewes back into condition to be rebred. So if you've got your kids or lambs, they're good at eating and the creep feed, they're eating very well, then you can wean them a little sooner. But if you're if they're not eating feed well and they haven't gained, they, I think a good rule of thumb is like three times their birth weight. If they're not three times their birth weight at the time of weaning, then you might want to leave them on. But if you do see that they're not gaining weight as fast and your ewes, it could be that your ewes or does are not producing milk. And if that's the case, if they're already drying up, then there's really no point in leaving them with the ewe or the doe and it might be beneficial to go ahead and wean them and dry those ewes off and save yourself the expense of feeding out those, those ewes and does. So it's sort of a I hate to say it depends, it's not a very good answer. But it really does depend on your production goals, where those animals are, how fast they've grown, but anywhere for sheep really anywhere between 30-60-90 days, and then kids I would push a little longer, maybe that 60 day mark.

C

Christa Hartsook 23:37

That's a good general rule of thumb anyway for people to kind of take a look at their operation and their specific animals. Um, Amy anything else that we need to talk about today, or maybe any common problems that you see, that we really want to watch out for in terms of kidding

and lambing season?

A

Amy Powell 23:56

No, I think we've pretty much covered it. Um, you know, one thing I didn't mention when you are preparing your ewes is to make sure you either share them completely or share the areas around their rear and their udder. So those lambs can latch on to the udder and not latch onto a piece of dirty wool and then get coccidia and all these problems. So keeping things clean is really important. And as sterile as possible when we're in a barn situation and that's that's true of does too if we can keep that area clean and obviously we're not sharing out a doe but those are some things that are important and and then if you can, if you have enough space in your barn to be able to feed your animals based on the the number of lambs or kids that they have. So if you can separate at least pull the twins and triplets separate from the singles and that will help you cut down on your feed bill because a ewe with a single lamb does not need to be fed as much as one with twins or triplets. So just some other rules of thumb because we know feed is our most expensive input for any livestock project. And if we can Reduce that at all, while not giving up any quality, that's that's a little little tip that you can do. But some of us don't have the space in the barn to be able to do that.

C

Christa Hartsook 25:08

But a great goal to work towards if you can, and you can kind of create or make that space to really separate that out and track that feed consumption. Amy, thanks for being on. It's always a pleasure.

A

Amy Powell 25:19

Thanks for having me.

C

Christa Hartsook 25:20

This program is brought to you by Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. This institution is an equal opportunity provider for the full non discrimination statement or accommodation inquiries, go to [www dot extension dot iastate.edu/diversity/ext](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/diversity/ext).