

Lambing and Kidding Considerations

Tue, Dec 20, 2022 4:53PM 23:39

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

lamb, kid, animals, colostrum, milk, amy, feed, problems, barn, nursing, antibiotic, wean, longer, baby, big, wet, docking, born, teat, mastitis

SPEAKERS

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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 interviewed Dr. Amy Powell, Iowa State University Extension Outreach 4-H animal science program specialists to talk about lambing and kidding season. I'm Christa Hartsook, small farms program manager, and we hope you enjoy the show. Amy, welcome. Thanks for being back.

A Amy Powell 00:46

Thank you for having me.

C Christa Hartsook 00:48

Amy, we're headed right into the early lambing and kidding season and there are falling temps outside in Iowa right now, what's our first consideration that we need to think about with babies being born now,

A Amy Powell 01:00

the temperature is a huge issue right now. And it's not as much the temperature as it is the snow and the wet. And so we want to make sure that when our ewes or does, and nannies are giving birth that we keep an eye on them, and that we're able to get those lambs dried off quickly. And under a heat source if needed. And so that's that's really number one is just to keep prevent hypothermia. Keep those animals warm and keep a good eye on them.

C Christa Hartsook 01:28

Sure, sure. That makes sense. So if we take a step back, and we think about preparing, knowing maybe we've got a little bit of time before you know our ewes or our does are going to start kidding, what do we need to do to prepare an area for them.

A

Amy Powell 01:44

You want to set up a lambing pen or lambing jug, either term is correct. And those can be just four panels for little wooden panels that you've made, they also have commercial things that you can purchase, put it in a warm part of the barn, and that's not drafty, you if you can put it in a corner or an area that that is not close to a door, because when that draft hits, it makes those lambs cold. You also want to maybe inside that pen and the pen could be say four by four for a smaller animal or five by five for some of those big black face ewes that are really big. And the goal there is to get those used to bond with their baby lambs or kids. And also provide an area if it's really cold, you can put a heat lamp in there. And that way the baby can kind of get up under that heat lamp and the mother can lay down comfortably and move around the pen. And you can also provide individual nutrition and and you can watch those animals and make sure they're nursing and that the lambs get off to a good start. So the pen is important making sure you have the lambing pen or some some area to separate that animal out. And then just gather your supplies have a bucket of supplies that you might need with gloves, lubricant, if you do need to go in and help that animal give birth, you want to have your extra colostrum on hand, if the ewe shouldn't have maybe doesn't have enough milk or the lamb can't, can't nurse. You also want to have a stomach tube available if you need that. And then just things like towels, water, soap, those kinds of things. Iodine to treat the navels once the animals are born, you might want to have some antibiotics and syringes on hand just in case you need it most of the time, we don't. But sometimes they might need a little injection of penicillin or some type of antibiotic and a thermometer. That's the best way to know if the animal is in hypothermia or has a fever whichever way we want to go. And also providing that information to your veterinarian, you're able to get on the phone and say it's temperature is only 99 degrees. And I don't know what to do or what should I do. So those are this the basics. And if you can have those in a bucket or somewhere close by, then you don't scramble, when something is going on, and you panic and can't find what you need. It makes that transition smooth, and you know where everything's kept all the time, and you're ready.

C

Christa Hartsook 04:08

That makes really good sense. Amy, how often should we be checking our ewes or does this time of year knowing we may have delivery, you know, anytime now, or what are maybe some early signs that we need to watch for?

A

Amy Powell 04:21

Unfortunately, most of our females want to give birth in the middle of the night. And you know, here in Iowa, Yes, yesterday we had a blizzard. And so that's a perfect time for one of those animals to lay down and have a lamb. Why? I don't know. But it always seems that the worst weather and the coldest day of the year is when they want to give birth but there is some body of research that suggests that they do lamb and kid at night more frequently than they do during the day. So unfortunately that means we don't get a lot of sleep but growing up we

always checked our animals right before bed. So you know 10-11 o'clock and then two Typically we get up sometime in the middle of the night, maybe 3am. And then we check them again, first thing in the morning. And then usually we could catch most everything at that time. And now they make a lot of barn cameras, a lot of folks will have a camera system in their barn, and they can just watch from the comfort of their home, which is really nice. They didn't have those when I was a kid, I was the barn camera. So that meant getting up a lot. But we really do want to keep a good watch on them. And, and most of the time, 95% of the time, your animals are not going to have any trouble giving birth, it's a natural thing to happen, it happens, but it's making sure they get cleaned off and get warm that we want to make sure they do and sometimes even the best mothers can't get that to happen if it's super cold, or there was a draft in a barn or those kind of things.

C

Christa Hartsook 05:46

Sure, sure. So me if we are happen to be out and looking and as we should be, what are some of those early signs of labor that we need to watch for.

A

Amy Powell 05:56

So parturition can be a 24 hour process. And those very first signs we might not even see the ewe is obviously becoming uncomfortable. A few days before she will lamb, typically they will drop or sink in at their hips. And this would be true of does as well, they'll udder up, their udders will start to get very full with milk. And then as they move into stage one of labor, and this is something that can happen stage one can take three to four hours, it can be less, it can be longer, these are averages, but they'll be uneasy, and they might stand up Sit down a lot, they may circle, they could go off by themselves in a corner, they could kick up their sides. And it's obvious when you look at that ewe that she's uncomfortable. And so, to me, the big key is to know what your sheep look like when they're not in labor. And then you'll notice a difference, you'll notice that this she is acting differently than how she normally would act or different from the rest of the flock or herd. They also may urinate a lot more frequently. And their cervix is going to start to dilate. So you're going to see their vulva swell. And the end of stage one is when the lamb actually enters into the birth canal and the water bag is ready to come out then. Then we move into stage two, and that water bag is going to come out and then you should start to see it'll rupture. And that what that does is lubricate the birth canal. So the lamb can just slide right out. If only it was that easy. I'm sure that ewe doesn't think it just slides right out. But then you will see the starts of the little hooves and the nose sticking out and then that ewe can hopefully expel it right on out or the doe can get it out and then she's ready to go.

C

Christa Hartsook 07:31

Sure, Amy, I know from my experience, and I'm assuming true for you as well. I have not had to intervene, you know very often in any kind of delivery situation. How do we know when we need to intervene?

A

Amy Powell 07:43

Well if that first stage of labor and there's if there's nothing happening if you've watched her

well, in that first stage of labor, and there's if there's nothing happening, if you've watched her and she seems to have been in labor, really agitated upset for, you know, five, six hours, then that's probably a sign you want to go ahead and intervene, she might her cervix might not be dilating and allowing things to come out. It might also mean that you want to call the vet at that stage. And then once the water bag is out, if you don't see a lamb within about 30 minutes, then you need to go in or kid then you need to go in and see what's going on. Because it's possible maybe a foot is back maybe it's backward, maybe two, two of them are trying to come in once but that 30 minutes after that waterbed comes out. If there's no no progression, then definitely go in there and see what's going on. And your first time lambers or kidders, may take a little bit longer than one that has been in the flock or herd for a long time and has experience and she knows what to do.

C

Christa Hartsook 08:37

Sure, sure. I think that next big thing then Amy after getting kind of out and dried off is is making sure that lamb or that kid has colostrum. How soon do we need to see active nursing or when do we need to intervene there?

A

Amy Powell 08:52

We really want to see that within 30 minutes of that lamb hitting the ground or that kid coming out. Now if that ewe is having multiple births which is or like our kid is having is having multiple births, then it might be a little longer because she will more than likely she'll have that first one she'll get up she'll lick it off and then she'll have the next one and so she may be in that up and down movement and the lamb or kid may not be able to nurse just yet so it you know 30 minutes is just a ballpark but you really want to make sure you strip the teats on that doe or that ewe to get the wax plugs out of the end of it. So strip the teats and that will help the the baby be able to latch on and get the milk out and then really stick your head up in there. Make sure that that baby is latched on and is getting milk. Sometimes they'll look like they're nursing, they'll stick their head up in there and their little tails will wiggle and you'll think oh they're fine, but in actuality, They latched on to something that wasn't even a teat and they're not getting the colostrum so really watch and make sure and you know when you strip that teat then you know automatically she does have milk. If they don't have milk, then you could feed with a bottle, especially if the lamb is healthy and it's up and it's able to nurse then feed them with a bottle. Otherwise, go ahead and get a stomach tube out. And if you need to milk the ewe into the tube, you can do that. Or there are some powdered colostrum so that you can purchase commercially or you can use cow colostrum, you can also if you have a ewe that just is a really good milker you can milk that out and put it into an ice cube tray and then freeze, then you can just pull it up one ice cube, thaw that out, put it in a cube and give that to the lamb.

C

Christa Hartsook 10:36

Okay, how soon if mom maybe doesn't have milk right away? You know, how soon do we need to really be worried about that. I mean, maybe we've given an initial dose of colostrum, we're still having baby with mom trying to create that latching process. When do we know Hey, this is just not going to work, she is not producing any milk.

A

Amy Powell 10:55

Just like with any mammal, it's sometimes can take a while before, before they let their milk down, continue to feed that lamb colostrum. And you know, if she never produces milk, it's still a good idea if you can to keep the ewe and lamb together the the doe and the kid together just for that bonding and for that process, and then you'll just have to bottle feed. So it's kind of hard to say. But you probably want to make sure that ewe or doe doesn't have mastitis and udder is really hard. Or if it's really hot, for some reason, there's a good chance that she might have mastitis and you want to get some antibiotic in her and there are tests you can do to see if she has mastitis. And you can also talk to your veterinarian and see if they can help with that. But that that's a good indication that something's maybe not quite right, and you want to check into that or the health of the ewe because mastitis can lead to some other problems on down the road.

C

Christa Hartsook 11:44

Sure, sure. So Amy, we've got our lambs or our kids out what is our biggest concern in watching them is that kind of starvation and making sure they're nursing is that our temperature in our barn? Are we worried about predators, what's our big concerns there?

A

Amy Powell 12:00

The two biggest reasons baby lambs don't survive past the first 24 hours is starvation and hypothermia, and one causes the other. So if that lamb doesn't get cleaned off quickly, and it's really cold, and you don't put a heat lamp on it, then it's going to get cold and all the energy that it would normally use to get up and moving is going to be used to shivering and staying warm, and then that will lead to starvation. Same thing if the lambs healthy and up, but it can't get any milk, then once again, its energy level will go to just surviving, and then it'll go into hypothermia. So those are the big two things when they're first born, another problem that can occur is if they've gotten any fluid in their lungs from when they came out. So if you'll take a little piece of straw and just stick it up their nose and tickle their nose, it makes them sneeze. And that's very helpful. And I usually do that with all baby lambs when they're born just because I want to make sure they sneeze and they get whatever is in there out. And yet another reason to check your ewes frequently, because sometimes they don't come out of the placenta. And so you'll need to go in there and rip that open and get that line out of there as quickly as possible. And the ewe may try, but she just can't get it off of the lamb. So those are those are some big things just with those brand new lambs that you want to watch out. And then beyond that hypothermia and starvation can still occur after the lamb is three or four days old, but it's not as likely, but starvation would become the big thing. And then that can lead to pneumonia and some other health concerns that we have that if they can get a belly full of milk and stay warm. They really should be fine. This time of year, we're typically keeping our ewes and does inside so predation is not going to be a big problem. Now, if your pasture lambing in the spring, that's a totally different ballgame. But then the other small problem that you could have is that if you have too many animals in a pen, that baby lambs and kids can get trampled. And you could have a broken leg. So you want to make sure you give those animals enough space. And that you provide a little area where the the kids and the lambs maybe can get and lay down where they ewes can't get in there that is also beneficial and kind of helps prevent some of the laying down on your animals or breaking of a leg or something like that.

C

Christa Hartsook 14:08

So that was going to be my next question is if newborn kids and lambs need to just be isolated with just mom or is it okay to have more of a kind of a common birthing area and then isolate them what is best practices there?

A

Amy Powell 14:22

Typically as soon as they're born, we and and they're they're dried off, then we'll put them into a lambing pen and you can leave them there for two to three days. If you've got a problem, you would leave them in longer if they seem to be healthy and thriving, then you can go ahead and put them into a common pen with other lambs, so it's perfectly fine to comingle those if you want to keep them in stages so that you've got a group of lambs, maybe you have all the lambs that were born in the last two weeks in one area so that you don't have lambs that are maybe a month old in with a lamb that's a week old and that that can sometimes cause problems, but the first few days are critical. And then after that you really can turn them out with with a larger group of ewes and lambs. And you can even let them go outside at that point, as long as it's not super wet, I feel like the rain or the snow, while they have wool on them, and they'll be okay or they have hair on them, it's bringing all that mud and wet back into the barn when you feed them, that causes problems. And then you've got manure and mud and all of that in your barns. And that can also create some bacteria problems, foot problems, those kind of things. So my rule of thumb is if it's really really snowy, and wet outside, I just leave the sheep up, or the I would leave the goats up to in the barn for that day. But if it's a sunny day, even if it's cold, you can still turn turn them out, because if they've gotten enough milk, and they're getting a fleece on them, or a hair coat on them, they should be fine outside, even if it's cold.

C

Christa Hartsook 15:50

Okay, Amy are there vaccines that need to be given immediately to newborn lambs and kids? Do we need to worry about anything, there?

A

Amy Powell 15:58

usually, oh, about four weeks prior to giving birth, we will vaccinate the pregnant ewe with the Clostridium perfringens type CMD and it also typically has tetanus mixed in there. And that will pass the immunity on to the lambs so that we don't have to vaccinate them when they're teeny tiny. So you're gonna give a booster shot of that when they're about six weeks old. And so really, there's nothing's that we have to do a common practice several years ago was to give up the baby lamb, a cc of penicillin, or the kid and then we don't do that anymore because we really want to be judicious about our use of antibiotics. And so now we only give antibiotic if it's needed. If the lamb has a little cough or the kid has a runny nose. It's certainly acceptable but we don't do it now is kind of a preventive measure. But there are some electrolytes oe baby lamb nutritive drench baby kid nutritive drench type things that you could give a kid or a lamb when they're first born. And they're, they're just oral that you give them in the mouth. And they

must be sweet because they're very sticky. To get them to swallow them. And so if you feel like we want to give them something to give them a little boost of immunity, those items seem to work fairly well.

C Christa Hartsook 17:09

Okay, how about mom, Amy you were giving that annual CMD. You know, before delivery, are there anything else that we need to do post delivery to really ensure mom stays healthy,

A Amy Powell 17:20

we just need to make sure that we're feeding her the right amount of nutrition, she is lactating. And so her level of nutrition needs to go up. And you also want to feed them according to the number of lambs that they're nursing or kids that their nursing a ewe or doe that is raising one kid or lamb doesn't need as much feed as one that has triplets on her. If you can't sort your your animals out by the number of lambs or kids that they have. That's, that's a good idea. So an example would be, you know, 150 pound ewe with a single lamb needs about five and a half pounds of feed a day. But if she's raising twins, she needs about six and a half pounds of feed a day. So that's a, you know, that's a pound difference, and could make a huge difference. And if she's not getting the nutrients she needs, then she's going to become very thin, and she's not going to produce as much milk. And so those are some things that we want to make sure that we are doing is providing enough nutrition to our animals. And then the other thing about that, that ewe is that you do want to make sure that she fully expelled everything that was in her the placenta, everything needs to come out. And so if you don't see an afterbirth coming out, after that lamb is born, you know, within an hour after the lamb or kid is born, then you probably want to go in there and fish around for it and see if you can pull it out. If you notice the next day a foul smell coming, or some discharge that shouldn't be there, then you want to go in there and try to clean her out. So that's another thing we want to watch out for is just that she's gotten everything out that shouldn't be there. And if you're having trouble with that, call your veterinarian and they can help you with that situation.

C Christa Hartsook 18:55

Absolutely. Amy, how about the next steps for kids and for our lambs? You know what, when do we need to think about castrating or docking tails for lambs. How soon do we need to do those procedures?

A Amy Powell 19:07

for docking, we want to do that as soon as possible. It is not a pain free process for a baby lamb. And so if we can do that, within the first five days of birth, we know that that they're all going to be docked. That's just the way it is. And so if you can do that in that first week, that's really good, whether you're banding them or whether you're cutting them however you choose to do that. For castration you can wait a little longer, but the sooner the better. If you know automatically that you're going to wether everything that you have, you're not going to want to keep any bucks into your flock or herd then I would do it as soon as possible. The only thing

about bucks is that their testicles may not have descended yet when they're really really young. So you just want to make sure that when you are castrating that you have two testicles in there and that you get it all but for the welfare of the animal The sooner the better for docking.

C

Christa Hartsook 19:56

Okay. How soon then Amy should land thing kids be given access to any kind of creep feed

A

Amy Powell 20:03

Lamsa kids will start eating feed as early as 10 days old, but they really won't consume large amounts of it until they're probably three to four weeks old. And so you can start as soon as you want, and they'll, they'll eat it when they're ready. The big thing is to make sure that the ration is high enough and protein. So a creep feed ration should be about 20% protein. So we want to make sure that we're getting the right nutrients in there. But you can start as soon as you want. And the sooner we can get them on feed, the easier the weaning process will be and the faster they'll gain.

C

Christa Hartsook 20:37

Okay, Amy you talked a little bit about them being able to kind of go back outside, even on cold days, as long as it wasn't wet. Any good rule of thumb there or just follow that.

A

Amy Powell 20:48

I would just follow that use your common sense. I mean, you can think about these kids and lambs, like your own children, and you want to keep them warm and safe. But use common sense would be my thought on that. If it's a sunny day and and you think they can get out there without any trouble, then go ahead, but just be cautious of it's the water, it's the wet. And then if the wind is really howling, and they get wet, then you really could have some problems.

C

Christa Hartsook 21:14

Sure, absolutely. Amy, when do we need to think about weaning lambs and kids, then

A

Amy Powell 21:20

most producers will do it when they're about two months old or 60 days, some producers will do it as early as 30 days, it's up to you as the producer, you can see where your animals are doing, how they're gaining, if they're doing exceptionally well. And you want to keep that growth potential. Realizing when you wean them, they're gonna go back a little bit because it's stressful to be taken away from their mother. So they will lose a little weight there at the beginning. But if you've been creep feeding all along, and they're you know that they're eating,

well feeding, then you can go ahead and weaning. Another reason to wean maybe a little bit earlier is if your ewes or does are not milking very well, and you feel like you're pouring out a lot of feed or resources to these females and you're not getting any benefit from it. So maybe you want to go ahead and wean earlier and push those ewes out into a maintenance diet. And then you can start your lambs on full feed and they should do okay, but do keep in mind that when you wean them it is a little stressful. And they they may lose a little weight there at the beginning but then they should take off. But that is the importance of creep feeding. You want to make sure that they are able to eat feed, they're used to eating feed and that they're ready to go on full feed and hay as well. You also need to have that hay available for them or pasture. Of course this time of year. We're not going to have any pasture. But

C Christa Hartsook 22:40

That makes good sense. Amy is there anything else we need to really think about as we are headed into lambing and kidding season here, anything we missed today?

A Amy Powell 22:50

I think we've covered it. It's for many producers, it's the most rewarding time of year because it's so much fun to bring new life into the world and to see those little lambs and kids running around the pen and jumping and bouncing. I mean, it is a fun time. It's also probably the highest management time requires the most labor and the least amount of sleep. But to me it's very rewarding and fun and I wish everybody a really wonderful lambing and kidding season.

C Christa Hartsook 23:17

All right, Amy, thanks so much for being on today. We appreciate it.

A Amy Powell 23:21

Thank you for having me.

I Iowa State University Extension and Outreach 23:22

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