



# SHEEP SHEET

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For all lambs (and mammals) 'colostrum' the first milk provided by the dam to its offspring is critical not only for the lamb's basic nutritional needs, but to live and survive the multitude of environmental factors that may expedite the lambs death.

I consider nursing by the early neonatal lamb(s) to be the first important intrinsic desire and action a lamb must initiate for its eventual life beyond its dam sustenance and nurturing. Obviously, the act of suckling and the associated action of the ewe require a two-way exchange of communication between the ewe and her lamb. This communication is combined with action. The small noises coming forth from the newborn(s) responded by the ewes baa's help enhance the neural-hormonal activity of lactation or more importantly the ingestion of that critical first meal by the lamb(s).

## Colostrum functions as a multi-role product for the new lambs.

1. **NUTRITIONAL VALUE** - its nutritional value is unique providing a wealth of proteins and energy for the lamb's physiological processes to began functioning on their own following its departure from the uterine environment (womb).
2. **LAXATIVE PROPERTIES** - the moving of food digestive end-products through the newborn lamb is a tough proposition. Intestinal motility is also a critical action that must take place for life to go beyond the first hours

## When Lambs Fail to Nurse!

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following birth. The first intestinal products to exit the gastro-intestinal tract of the lamb is called meconium. Meconium is very thick, sticky, and difficult material to expel. It is not uncommon for the early digestive end-products to become lodged, or non-motile in the newborn lamb and cause serious side-effects, one which is death. Another common lamb ailment caused by the thick excreta is called "pinning." Pinning is where thick, heavy, sticky fecal material does not leave the anal opening and sticks to the outside part of the anus and also causes the undocked tail to adhere to the fecal material as well. The long tail as a result becomes 'pinned' (or stuck) to the anus. This can become a serious health problem if not attended to by the shepherd. Thus, colostrum contains unique and key ingredients that accelerate and enhance intestinal motility and reduce the likelihood of the new lambs becoming constipated.

3. **ANTIBODY PROPERTIES & PASSIVE IMMUNITY** - Perhaps this is the primary reason by each ewe should provide her own colostrum to her own lamb(s). The immunological properties of colostrum is host-specific, or in other words, the antibodies found in her colostrum are uniquely each ewe's and are the most beneficial to her own genetic offspring. This is the ideal situation. However, any colostrum milk to a lamb regardless of dam is more important than ignoring the offering of non-host specific colostrum. Colostrum has far too many valuable properties to ignore utilizing an other ewe's colostrum, or that from a goat doe, and/or a cow. It is a good idea to have a supply of frozen colostrum stored for those unplanned emergencies. I also consider it crucial that in order for a lamb to maximize the access to those important antibodies, that the lamb have its first

suckle within 30 minutes post-partum, and no later than 12 hours post-partum. After 12 hours, the porosity of the intestinal wall that takes these important antibodies through, began to reduce in size, thereby reducing the intake of the antibodies necessary to develop the passive immunity to protect the lamb from basic sheep diseases, until its own begins to function 10-14 days post-partum.

What if the ewe and the shepherd are doing their best job to ensure the suckling take place? What are possible reasons for these non-nursing lambs? What happens.....

### **When Lambs Fail to Nurse!**

#### **Maternal Causes:**

- Unshorn or uncrotched. Lamb(s) fails to find and locate teat(s).
- Lack of maternal instincts. Ewe fails to permit the lamb(s) to nurse.
- Lack of milk. Ewe may be nutritionally deficient during gestation, or hormonally imbalanced.
- Mastitis (mammary gland infection) or chronic induration from previous mastitis.
- Teats occluded (plugged). Anatomically, due to trauma, teat plug, and/or a shearing cut with adhesions or scar tissue blocking the teat canal.
- Ewe confined to lambing jug/jail or pen. Ewe may become separated from lamb(s). This often occurs with the second of a set of twins. The 'first-born' is able to move about with the ewe, but the 'second-born' is often left lying by the ewe wandering off or just paying attention to the 'first-born.'

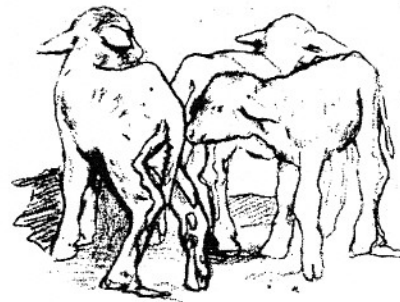
#### **Fetal Causes:**

- Failure of the lamb to find the udder and/or teat.
- Inability of lamb to remove wax teat plug.
- Inability to suck:
  - 1) Edema of head and/or tongue, possibly due to a difficult birth.
  - 2) Possible fracture of the jaw.
  - 3) Cleft-palate.
- Dummies:
  - 1) Defects and/or abnormalities in the Central Nervous System.
  - 2) Hereditary defects.

- 3) Defects due to the ingestion of toxic substances by the ewe during pregnancy, i.e. false hellebore, a.k.a. 'skunk cabbage.'

Thus, one can see that the timely consumption of that critical product called 'colostrum' plays an important role in baby lamb survival. In addition to the ewe being responsible in making access to that 'critical first meal' for her offspring, the shepherd must also assume some degree of responsibility to ensure that ALL lambs have an equal chance and access to their ewes colostrum meal on hooves!

Other issues of "Sheep Sheets" will address this important subject.



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