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Five major concerns during kidding and lambing

By Ashley McFarland

When preparing for this critical time of the year, be open minded about the issues you may encounter.

1) Items to have on hand

There is nothing more frustrating than having a hard lambing or kidding and you are unable to find the right piece of equipment to do the job correctly. To start with after each season it is best to clean and sanitize all panels, and equipment prior to lambing/kidding. Another important item when preparing your barn is to make sure there are no drafts for these newborns. A few items to have on hand that will make your life a lot easier:

- Plastic gloves
- OB lube
- Obstetrical chains and handles
- clean dry towels
- heat lamps that are secure (with guards)
- Spare heat lamb bulbs
- Nipples
- Bottles
- Iodine (to dip navels)
- Frozen colostrum / colostrum replacer,
- Feeding tube with syringe
- Small sweaters



Making sure you have a good relationship with your vet will also be very helpful!

2) Pregnancy Toxemia - Ewes and does in the last month or so of pregnancy may have difficulty meeting the nutritional demands imposed by multiple fetuses. Signs of pregnancy toxemia include abnormally small fecal pellets (an indication that the animal is eating poorly), reluctance to stand on their own, self-isolation from the flock, and teeth grinding.

Late pregnant animals that are off feed should be checked for ketones in the urine, using commercial test strips. The strip turns purple when ketone bodies are present. For the best treatment option, I suggest contacting your veterinarian, or calling pipestone veterinary clinic in Minnesota for advice.

Prevention of pregnancy toxemia in animals pregnant with two or more offspring, requires supplying the protein and energy needs of the dam. We also need to supply the developing fetuses without causing a grain overload/indigestion situation. The secret is good quality forage, with supplementation of a pound of grain per ewe / doe per day the last 3 to 4 weeks of pregnancy. The grain needs to be introduced slowly and with adequate feeder space. Yearlings should be fed separately from adults to minimize competition.

3) Prolapse - A prolapsed uterus is easily correct with a veterinarian's supervision. The animal usually breeds back and the prolapse does not recur at the next parturition. Prolapsed vagina's on the other hand may have a hereditary link to docking the tails to short in ewes. Prolapsed vaginas frequently repeat in the next gestation, so culling the dam and offspring, if possible is best. A plastic tool shaped like a T, also known as a uterine spoon can assist in parturition. Another helpful piece of equipment is a prolapse harness. If a tool like these are used to keep the prolapse in, close supervision will be required when giving birth.



4) Normal Parturition - Despite the frequency of multiple births, most ewes and does complete parturition without any assistance. Softening and total disappearance of the ligaments around the base of the tail is a good indication that parturition will occur in the next 12 hours. The mother often waits until the barn is quiet and may isolate herself from the flock or others may back away to give her room.

5) Importance of Colostrum - How are you going to get colostrum into your new additions? What if a ewe or doe doesn't have colostrum? How will you handle orphan or bottle lambs/Kids? All of these things need to be considered. It is always suggested to get pre-packaged colostrum or freeze colostrum from a ewe who is a heavy milkier.



References:

Dr. Cassandra Plummer, DVM, Small Ruminant Veterinarian, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine
Colorado State University's small ruminant page
Managing Kidding and Lambing by Mary C. Smith, DVM