

## Ready, Set, Pasture

It's May 6th and the last ewe has lambed at the Extension Learning Farm in Canton. Our plan is to lamb and be done just in time to go to rotational grazing. As a matter of fact we are letting them graze some already but not really in an organized way. Just trying to get some good nutrition into them because it is hard to feed grain with that many lambs (99) running around. They are getting second cut hay, part of a day of pasture (mostly to get out of the #&%\* mud in the barnyard area) and minerals.

I would say the grass isn't quite ready here (May 6<sup>th</sup>). There is grass out there but with temps in the low 40s and 50s predicted there isn't going to be a lot of growth in the next week. Then we we'll undoubtedly get a warm spell and the grass will get ahead of us....that's the challenge of grazing.

As a farm manager you have to manage your flock, manage your pasture, manage your forages, wrangle the help, and now you have to manage you parasites, too. Let's look at some of the things you need to keep in mind to discourage the parasite load on your pasture.

In setting up your rotation you need to consider the size of the paddock and also the number of paddocks. Your sheep or goats need to have 35 days minimum (60 is better!) before they return to a paddock. They should only be in each paddock for 3-5 days so you need to have at least 8 paddocks to make this happen. It might mean just dividing some of the paddocks you have into smaller sections. More smaller paddocks is better if you can stand it.

The correct size paddock it takes for your flock to be done in 5 days depends totally on what is out there growing in the pasture, the time of year and the weather. You will have to experiment to figure it out. We can do some approximations with the rising plate meter if it is a standard grass and legume pasture.

So meanwhile, with the longer time between grazings, the quality of the pasture is lower than it could be if you went back on it sooner. There are a couple solutions to this challenge. One is to graze other types of animals on it – like cattle or horses. Goats and sheep are too similar and share parasites so you can't count them as multispecies grazers for cleaning up parasite larva.

Taking a crop off the pasture is one of the best ways to "clean it up". Hay or haylage or baleage taken off of the pasture before the next grazing takes the larva with it. They won't survive in the forage so you have cleaned them off the pasture or at least diminished their numbers. The other way to use this technique is to hay your hay fields and then use them to pasture towards the end of the summer when your main rotation is getting too contaminated.

Be careful of the barnyard. Barnyards tend to collect parasites. Getting your waterers and mineral/grain feeders out into the pastures helps keep animals from congregating near the barn. Youngstock especially will hang around the barn while the adults are out eating and nibble away on the short contaminated grass. The barnyard is especially bad in the spring and fall when there is dampness and warm weather. You can also eliminate the barnyard by getting rid of the forage there or fencing it off during part of the summer (at least 35 days...). Feeding some hay in the barn or in feeders in the barnyard at night may encourage them to eat hay rather than pick at the grass but we all know they prefer grass to anything. One of my favorite sayings is, "Your barnyard is not a pasture".

Snails can be a challenge in wet areas. It is best to avoid wet spots if possible or at least don't push the animals so hard they have to go into the very wet areas to eat. Shady hedgerows are another favorite

snail hangout. Snails (or rather the slime trails they leave) carry liver flukes from the deer that can make your sheep and goats very sick and even die later in the winter. Keep an eye out for them. There seem to be a lot of them in the spring when it is damp and then again in the fall when there is a heavy dew.

At this time there is no practical way to measure the worm larva contamination on the pasture. You can only take into account the weather and the animals you have put on it so far during the grazing season. You can monitor your animals by doing fecal egg counts and FAMACHA scoring but that is a whole other article or two.

At the Extension Learning Farm we FAMACHA check our sheep 3 or 4 times over the summer and normally only de-worm 8-10 sheep at the most. Many of those are not that bad but I don't like to take any chances with ewes feeding triplets on pasture with no supplementation. They are working hard.

It may seem like you can't do enough to help keep the parasites under control but everything you add to your arsenal will help. Strategic de-worming – the right de-wormer at the right time and only to those animals that need it – along with pasture strategies will allow you to manage the parasites on your farm.

CCE usually offers the Integrated Parasite class sometime during the summer. It includes evasive grazing, fecal egg counting and using FAMACHA scoring to selectively de-worm your animals. It goes into way more detail so watch for that class if you are interested. Also there is a good website at [www.wormx.info](http://www.wormx.info).