

## **ALTERNATIVE SHEEP PRODUCTION FEEDING LOCAL LAMBS**

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In an effort to utilize resources and convert these resources and available labor to something marketable, we have chosen to finish local feeder lambs. The choice was made primarily because of a limit on available labor in that I work full-time in town and find heavy physical labor to be less fun as years pass.

We try to select feeder lambs based on the pounds of gain that can be put on, finding that medium to larger framed black-faced lambs from white-faced ewes seem to perform the best for us. However, in this area, one cannot be too choosy. Purchase price then becomes a factor in total profitability.

Lambs are obtained through Equity lamb pools, direct producers, and a few through auctions or Central Livestock. Upon arrival at the farm, all lambs are vaccinated for CD & T and drenched with ivermec. Any lambs which may be rams, short scrotums, or tailed need to be avoided.

Our facility is an older dairy barn converted to group pens holding about 40 lambs per pen. Ventilation and supplemental heat is very easy to install. Temperature is kept at 38 to 40 degrees. Limited grain (1/2 lb/head/day) is fed in 6 inch wide removable troughs all around the outside perimeter of the pen. Water is provided with nipple waterers; however, one needs to use tubs for a few days until lambs learn to use the waterers. A small amount of good quality hay is also made available.

The lambs need to be shorn in our set up so that less feeder space is required. The lambs stay drier and cleaner, and I am sure the gain is improved. The second CD & T shot is given and lambs are brought up to full feed as soon as safely possible.

At full-feed, the troughs are removed and self-feeder space at 1 1/2 inches per lamb is provided.

Our ration is formed to market home-produced grain and hay. Therefore, we use a ground ear corn, ground oats, and soybean oil meal mix and add white salt, limestone, and ammonium chloride. Attention is given daily to the trough area to see that feed is clean and fresh. Our ration is ground at home with a mixer-mill and handled bulk.

Gain seems to be very relative to genetics as all lambs are treated the same and several flocks of origin are represented. The goal is to market lambs at 90 days or less. Lambs are crowded and each lamb graded for condition – which becomes the main factor in “when to market”. Weight can vary 30 to 40 lbs. depending on breeds represented.

Lambs are marketed when they grade to desired finish and are sold primarily through Equity lamb pool or Central Livestock. At the same time, it is ideal if we can find feeders to come back in at the same time. Our feeding season runs from Labor Day to Easter so generally two plus groups are moved through per season. If one wished, new crop lambs start to become available at about the time we choose to shut down, so one could continue if one so chooses.

This has been a very good enterprise for us. We use our facilities, market homegrown feed, and the labor required daily is minimal. All daily chores are inside and can be done in the dark allowing us to be gone to work for the day. Feed grinding and pen cleaning is done on Saturdays. We do have our own trucking with a capacity of 45 to 50 fat lambs, so that works well.

The biggest challenge is finding feeder lambs. Thrifty, good-doing lambs which are castrated (count to 2), docked, and have had some overeating protection are very important to the financial success of this venture.

Also, the constant search for the best market is very important. At this point, all expenses have been paid and payday is determined by quality, price and sale conditions.

#### **A. Source of Feeder Lambs**

1. Producers direct
2. Equity Lamb Pools
3. Auction markets
4. Central Livestock

#### **B. Selection of Lambs**

1. Condition and weight
2. Health
3. Genetics

#### **C. Placement**

1. Vaccinate
2. Deworm
3. Shear

#### **D. Facilities**

1. Housing
2. Feeders
  - a. limit
  - b. self
3. Hay feeders
4. Waterers
5. Manure Handling
6. Transportation
7. Feed Handling

#### **E. Ration**

1. Ground Ear Corn
2. Oats
3. S.B.O.M.
4. Salt
5. Limestone
6. Ammonium Chloride

#### **F. Marketing**

1. Weight
2. Grade-Condition
3. Price cycles
4. Location
  - a. Equity Lamb Pool
  - b. Central Livestock
  - c. Auction

