

Gearing up for Lambing and Kidding Seasons



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Preparing for healthy kids and lambs starts long before kidding and lambing seasons begin. It is vital for gestating animals to have a well balanced ration that provides the appropriate minerals and vitamins not only for their

own health, but for their developing young as well. Because sheep and goats have different nutrient requirements, Crystal Creek® offers both a Goat and a Sheep Mineral. Both formulas are packed with readily bioavailable vitamins and minerals specifically balanced for each species. The purchase of either mineral comes with custom ration balancing services that ensure quality, cost effective diets.

As goats and sheep get ready to give birth, it is important to be familiar with the physical and behavioral signs associated with the onset of labor. Just prior to birth, does and ewes will typically decrease their feed intake and begin to isolate themselves from the herd. They will show signs of restlessness and discomfort and the vulva may become swollen. Once the water bag is visible, the young should be born within thirty minutes.

Be prepared for the arrival of the young with the following materials:

- **A weigh scale and bucket:** These can be used to weigh each individual youngling. A recorded birth weight is necessary to calculate the amount of colostrum that should be fed and to determine rate of gain.
- **Ear tags and tagger:** Immediately after birth is a good time to tag the animals that will need identification. Be sure to check your state's regulations regarding Scrapie identification, as they may provide tags or require animals to be tagged a specific way.
- **Iodine:** It is important to dip the navel with a 7% iodine solution right away to prevent a navel infection.



- **Towels:** Rub the young dry, paying special attention to cleaning the face and nose. This will help them breathe easier and keep them warmer. A heat lamp may also be necessary, depending on climate. Take caution to ensure the young cannot play with or be harmed by the heat lamp.
- **Feeding tube and 60 ml dosing syringe:** It is important to know how to tube feed a kid or lamb in case of an emergency. A 60 ml dosing syringe holds 2 ounces of colostrum which can flow freely down a feeding tube (do not use the syringe plunger to force colostrum down tube). For step by step instruction, reference Washington State University's publication "Tube Feeding Neonatal Small Ruminants"¹.
- **Colostrum replacer:** This is necessary in cases of emergency when there is no available fresh or frozen colostrum. Make sure it is a true colostrum replacement and not a supplement. Crystal Creek's Genesis Plus™ is a true colostrum replacement that contains all the necessary ingredients for a nutrient-dense first meal.
- **BO-SE® shot:** Producers in selenium deficient areas should consult a veterinarian to determine if this step is necessary.

After the birthing process, strip the dam's teats to remove the wax plug. Allow the kid/lamb to nurse, or milk the dam and feed via either a bottle and nipple or a feeding tube and syringe. Each youngling should receive 10% of its birth weight in colostrum within the first 12-24 hours. Colostrum should be fed at 102-103°F in 2-4 ounce quantities every 3-4 hours.

For example, a 5 lb. kid should consume a half pound of colostrum, or about a half pint (8 oz), within the first 12-24 hours.

Bovine colostrum can be used as a colostrum replacement, but lambs will need one third more than what they would normally require because sheep colostrum has a higher fat density than cow's. The best doe and ewe colostrum will come from the 2nd+ lactation animals that are CD&T vaccinated. It is advised to save and freeze excess colostrum, which is especially likely to come from dams with only one youngling. Freezing colostrum in ice cube trays containing about one ounce quantities is a convenient way to store and thaw colostrum efficiently. Colostrum should not be refrozen once it has been allowed to thaw.

Disease Management: Colostrum should not be used or saved from dams positive for Ovine Progressive Pneumonia (OPP) or Caprine Arthritic Encephalitis (CAE), as these diseases can be transmitted to the young through the colostrum and milk. If using bovine colostrum, it is best to ensure it is coming from a cow that is Johne's negative.

There are two methods by which younglings can be raised on milk: natural milk feeding and artificial milk feeding. Research shows that there is no difference in weight gain between the two methods². In instances of a high lambing or kidding percentage, it is best to leave the stronger, bigger younglings on the dam and to artificially rear the smaller, weaker younglings. Another option could be to cross foster the smaller, weaker younglings to dams that only have one offspring.

When choosing natural milk feeding, the young can be left on the dam and are free to feed whenever they can. Make sure that both halves are efficiently being used and that the dam is being milked out sufficiently.

When artificially feeding milk, whole milk (cow, goat, or sheep) or milk replacer can be fed. Milk should be fed cold (43-50°F, 6-10°C) to prevent overeating, bloat, and diarrhea. Kids and lambs grow the best when milk is fed free choice around the clock, so feed as often as time and economics permit. Producers commonly construct bucket feeders

with several nipples for group pens or choose to individually bottle feed if they only have a few younglings. During the first few days of life, feedings should occur frequently and then be reduced as needed. Generally, younglings will consume 10-15% of their body weight every day. If cases of diarrhea do occur, administer electrolytes such as Replena-Lytes® to restore lost energy and electrolyte balance.

Creep feed should be introduced at about three weeks of age. A coarsely ground 18-20% crude protein texturized feed is best. Producers are challenged with constructing feeders that younglings cannot play or stand in. If housed with the dams, creep pens will encourage the younglings to consume solid feed.

All kids and lambs should be vaccinated for *Clostridium perfringens* type C + D and tetanus with a CD&T vaccine. Talk to your veterinarian about implementing a proper vaccination protocol.

Weaning strategies vary, but the most common method is to wean abruptly. Weaning decisions should be made based upon weight rather than age. Lambs should be 2.5-3x their birth weight and kids should be 2-2.5x their birth weight. If choosing to wean early, such as three weeks of age, the weaning period should be a stepwise process to ensure that younglings are consuming at least 30 grams of dry feed per day. After the weaning period, supplemental feed can be reduced from the 18-20% crude protein to a 16% formula.

In conclusion, preparing for new lambs and kids begins long before their birth. It is important to pay close attention to the diets of gestating animals to ensure that they are consuming all of their required nutrients. Once the lambs and kids arrive it is equally important to maintain proper nutrition as they continue to grow and develop. Call us at 1-888-376-6777 to talk with the knowledgeable staff at Crystal Creek® about raising healthy kids and lambs through quality nutrition.

Sources:

1. Kerr, Susan. "Tube Feeding Small Ruminants." Washington State University Extension: Farming the Northwest EB 1998 (2005). Web.
2. A. Louca, A. Mavrogenis, and M. J. Lawlor. "The Effect of Early Weaning on the Lactation Performance of Damascus Goats and the Growth Rate of the Kids." *Animal Production* 20.02 (1975): 213-18. Web.