

FLUSHING EWES: Don't start too late or stop too soon

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Increasing the plane of nutrition for ewes 2 – 3 weeks prior to and 3 weeks into the breeding season can improve lamb crop in some instances.

Flushing works best on mature ewes that are in moderate to good body condition. Very thin or overly fat ewes have lower response. Ewes that are maintained in very good condition on relatively high planes of nutrition throughout the year are also less likely to respond to flushing.

Time of breeding season also influences the response to flushing. It is more beneficial to flush early (or late) in the breeding season when ovulation rates are naturally lower compared to mid-breeding season.

Flushing not only increases the number of ovulations (eggs) in the ewe, but also improves survival of the lamb embryo. What happens is that more eggs are available for fertilization and those that are fertilized have an improved chance to survive the early life stage that is so delicate. The end result is that more lambs are born.

Corn is usually used, but there are other options that can work; one is irrigated pasture. What is actually needed is an increase in energy content of the ewe's diet. Protein levels in the diet are also usually increased at this time.

Under maintenance conditions a 154 lb ewe at will need about 2.6 lbs of dry matter



(Photo by Stillmeadow Finn Sheep)

(dried feed), including 1.5 lb TDN (energy) and 0.25 lb of protein. During flushing that same ewe will need 4 lbs of dry matter, including 2.3 lb of TDN and 0.36 lb protein (Nutrient Requirements for Sheep, NRC 1985). One pound of corn (90% TDN, 10 % protein) can provide this extra energy (0.9 lb TDN) and protein (0.1 lb CP).

Increasing productivity through nutrition may improve return per ewe.