

Monthly Newsletter – August 2021

Grain

Grain Storage Tips

1. **Cleaning** – The importance of cleaning out old grain is well-known, but it is more than simply sweeping out an empty bin. Augers, trucks, pits, bucket elevators, and areas around belts can get overlooked. Cleaning is important throughout the year, but when the bins are at the lowest inventory levels prior to harvest, that is the best time to get the hard-to-reach areas. Simple use of brooms, dustpans, and explosion-proof vacuums can eliminate a significant amount of risk.
2. **Inspecting** – It is easier to inspect the condition of all handling equipment when the inventory is low, so right before harvest is a good time to double-check things as well. Some reminders for things to inspect include: anything that moves or rotates, generates or encounters dust, touches grain, was recently repaired, or could create a safety hazard. Pay particular attention to any bearings and wiring. Worn bearings cause heat, which can lead to fires, and can cause moving parts to fail completely. Grain drying and aeration systems should be checked annually to ensure that they are in proper working order. If the grain does not get dried correctly or get proper aeration, the spoilage can cut into the revenues very quickly.
3. **Storing** – Once you have done the final cleaning, inspecting, and repairing of your grain storage systems, it will soon be time for harvest, when grain storage begins. The leading cause of post-harvest spoilage is the mismanagement of the grain temperature. Maintaining proper control of temperatures will prevent moisture from moving throughout the bin and accumulating in the cooler grain. Mold spores in the grain become more active in the warmer temperature also. Grain is typically cooled at an approximate temperature of 35 degrees Fahrenheit. Cooling the grain below 32 degrees should be avoided to prevent the potential development of a frozen mass of grain in the spring. Warm, moist spring air introduced to the grain below 32 degrees can result in condensation, then freezing. Stored grain should be cooled gradually. Ideally, the temperature of the grain should stay within approximately 10 degrees of the average outside temperature until the grain hits the 35-degree target. One method to increase the efficiency of aeration fans is to utilize grain spreaders or a coring procedure to manage the concentration of fines. It is critical that the fans, roof vents, and roof exhaust systems are matched to work together in conjunction with the size of the storage bin and the type of commodity being stored.
4. **Summary** – Before harvest, it is best to make sure your grain storage system is clean and functional. For storage, use your dryer and aeration systems to keep grain in good condition; aim for the 35–40-degree target. Finally, use eyesight, smell, and hearing to identify issues throughout the storage season.

Feed

Starting a Sheep Enterprise

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Why Raise Sheep? - There are several reasons why you might want to consider raising sheep. Sheep are more efficient than beef cattle in the conversion of forage to retail product. The initial investment required to begin a sheep enterprise is relatively low. Expensive sheds and barns are not necessary; often buildings you already have will provide the dry, clean shelter needed by sheep. Sheep production is not limited only to meat production, because wool also provides a portion of the income. Fall lambing has provided marketing of lambs during the peak of spring lamb prices. These factors have made the sheep operation a very profitable enterprise over the last several years.

Anyone considering getting into the sheep business should consider several things before actually purchasing any sheep. One of the first things to consider is the initial size of the flock. Do you begin with a commercial size flock of 200-300 ewes or a smaller flock of 20-50 ewes. Of course, the feed supply available will be a major contributing factor in this decision. Sheep are not difficult animals to raise; however, they do require a higher level of management than beef cattle. Therefore, if you have never raised sheep before, the first suggestion would be to begin with 20-50 ewes and then increase numbers in future years, if the sheep business is for you.

Pasture - Another factor to consider is the kind of pasture available. There are certain kinds of pasture that sheep like, such as sod type grasses that are fairly fine stemmed and high quality. They do not favor coarse grasses such as bluestems or love grass. Well fertilized and managed bermudagrass can be utilized very efficiently with sheep. Such pastures are excellent only during May through July. In August and September, adequate dry matter is available; however, the protein level in the Bermudagrass is low and additional protein should be supplemented. In fact, five to ten ewes per acre can usually be maintained during this period under central and eastern Oklahoma conditions. Buffalo and grama grasses are excellent pastures for sheep, but have a lower carrying capacity than Bermudagrass.

Small grain pastures, such as wheat, rye, and rye grass make excellent fall and winter pastures for lactating ewes. Many producers working with smaller acreages have begun to over seed their Bermuda pastures in the fall with Marshall rye grass or wheat to utilize those acreages with year-round forage. These practices require more intensive management practices, but return good dividends if done correctly.

Another way to have year-round forage is with the implementation of cool season perennials to your pastures. The USDA-ARS, Grazinglands Research Laboratory at El Reno has been

performing studies on these types of pastures. These cool season grasses begin their fall growth in September and have had crude protein levels ranging from 20%-25% in October. These grasses continue their growth through June and some species appear to maintaining a high crude protein level the majority of the growing season. These grasses include 'Paiute' orchard grass, Lincoln Smooth Brome grass, and 'Luna' pubescent wheatgrass.

Another possibility for cattle producers is the use of co-specie grazing practices. Cattle are very finicky and do not eat many kinds of weeds. Sheep, on the other hand, like to browse and very often will eat many different kinds of weeds that cattle will not eat. Sheep eat rag weeds very well and can be grazed with cattle. Research has shown that producers can run one to two ewes per cow with no additional feed costs and no detrimental effects on native pastures. In fact, many pastures have been improved with co-specie grazing.

Building and Fences - Another factor to consider before entering the sheep business is the availability of buildings, corrals, and fences to adequately protect and control the sheep. Buildings do not need to be elaborate, but need to provide adequate space to keep the sheep dry and comfortable. Space requirements vary depending on the breed and size of the ewes. A good rule of thumb is 10-12 square feet of shelter space per ewe, 12-16 square feet per ewe and lamb pair, and 6-8 square feet per feeder lamb. Adequate fencing is needed to keep the various groups of sheep in their specific pastures. Barbed wire fences are usually adequate for ewes; however, lambs have a tendency to move through barbed wire quite easily. Hog wire fencing is probably the best permanent wire fencing (excluding electric fencing) to keep all ages and sizes of sheep in place. Electric fencing is excellent to keep sheep in and predators out if constructed correctly.

Internal Parasites - Internal parasites can be a very serious problem to sheep producers, if they do not realize the danger and take management steps to keep the threat at a minimum. Parasites are maintained in the sheep and on the ground. Mature sheep have parasites in their digestive systems and pass eggs onto the pasture. If the weather and moisture conditions are right, the eggs hatch and the larvae crawl up onto the plants. Sheep that ingest these plants get these larvae into their systems. It is in this manner that lambs pick up parasites from the adult sheep in the flock.

Lambs are highly susceptible to sickness and even death from too many parasites.

Consequently, it is good management to try to minimize or totally prevent the lambs from getting parasites before they are 3-4 months of age. Ideal conditions for spreading parasites from adult sheep to lambs exist when lambs are running with their mothers on permanent pasture. In fact, the problem is very serious for lambs born in March and early April. A good management scheme, to prevent the lambs from becoming heavily parasitized, is to not let them out on permanent pastures with their mothers.

Early spring and late summer conditions are the worst for parasite infestations. At other times of the year, such as during the hot dry weather in the summer, the pasture conditions are not as conducive for spreading parasites from adult sheep to lambs. In the winter there are fewer

problems because the parasites do not undergo the life cycle changes from egg to larvae nearly as rapidly as under the warm, moist spring conditions.

Another management tool is the use of temporary pastures as much as possible. There is not much danger of lambs becoming parasite infested if they are on wheat pasture where the land has been plowed. Also, rotational grazing of summer pastures can help reduce some of the parasite problems associated with permanent pastures. A well-planned parasite control program, involving timely drenching of ewes along with pasture management, can keep the problem under control.

Marketing - Another factor to consider when entering the sheep business is the availability of markets. With 20-50 ewes, it might be possible to distribute the market lambs locally through direct marketing. This marketing strategy has worked very well for producers in other areas of the United States. Find a slaughter plant in the area that will work with you and sell whole or half lambs to people in the neighborhood who like lamb. Because lamb is not readily available in many communities, many people buy a lamb in this manner in order to have lamb available for food consumption.

Those considering a two or three hundred ewe flock usually cannot distribute their lambs in this manner and will have to find a market where they can sell 50-100 lambs at one time. Oklahoma has developed an effective computer marketing program which allows producers to pool their lambs together and then market these lambs in truckload lots. This allows producers to receive a good market price for their lambs. More information on telemarketing and computer marketing can be obtained from your extension sheep specialist.

Summary - The factors to consider before going into the sheep business include the amount and kind of feed available, the availability of fences and buildings to protect and manage the flock, and predator control. One should also consider lambing the sheep at a time that is coordinated with the best feed supply for the lactating ewes.

It is important to get the kind of sheep that will work best under existing conditions. The owner who can raise their own replacements, or has a constant and reliable source of replacements, will increase the chance of having highly productive sheep.

Managing pastures and drenching to control parasites is very important, as well as working with other sheep producers to improve marketing alternatives.

Anyone who can use all of these tools can use sheep as a profitable enterprise. Sheep enterprises reward the producer who uses intelligence, experience, and good management skills. If one is beginning a sheep enterprise to make money, that individual should learn as much as possible about the business ahead of the time, so that correct timely management decisions can be made.