

A GUIDE FOR SHEEP AND FARM LIFE

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Romanov Breeders.....Be Aware

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This warning may be too late for many Romanov breeders who got the surprise of their life when their young ewe lambs became impregnated at three months of age and lambed when they were merely eight months old, roughly the time they were supposed to be bred. The warning will be helpful to the numerous new Romanov breeders who probably are not aware of the extremely early maturity of the Romanovs. At Lennoxville we learned this lesson the difficult and painful way.

We knew that Romanov ewes mature early. Several reports from Russia indicated that lambs can reach puberty as early as four months of age. Accordingly, we set our breeding program to mate them at seven months of age as recommended by several research works conducted in Europe, then every eight months thereafter. Normally, lambs were

weaned at 70 days of age plus or minus three days and penned separately by sex. However, as a result of shortage of space, lambs from 14 litters of the October 1984 lambing season were left with their mothers for 30 more days after weaning, and guess what happened? To our great disbelief, we discovered a few months later that of 19 ewe lambs present 11 had conceived to male lambs born in the same litters, the youngest being only 75 days old. When the pregnancy of the 11 ewes was discovered, we tried to get some research results out of a disastrous situation. We grouped these ewes with their sisters which did not conceive and gave them all the same management, except before lambing and during lactation when the feeding was increased for the group which lambed. Mating of the lambs which did not become pregnant was

delayed so that their performance could be compared to those which did become pregnant.

The eleven pregnant ewes lambed in May-June 1985 and the litters were weaned as usual at 70 days. The 11 ewes which lambed and the eight which did not were exposed to rams again in early 1986 at 11 months of age. We collected data on litter size and weight at birth and at weaning and age of ewes at lambing.

The results of the study are shown in the accompanying table. The sexually precocious ewe lambs (which conceived) were born 2.8 days earlier, were 0.66 lb. heavier at birth and 7.0 lb. heavier at 70 days than those which did not conceive. When mated, they weighed approximately 44 lb. and were about 90 days old. All lambings were at term and 6 out of the 11 produced twins, though two twin lambs died at birth and two more before weaning. Lamb weights averaged 5.7 lb. at birth and 45.6 lb. at 70 days.

While all eight ewes which did not conceive in 1985 conceived in 1986, 3 of the 11 which did conceive in 1985 failed to conceive again in 1986, which represents 27% failure. Both groups of ewes had similar body weight and lambed at the same age. At 18 months of age when both groups had weaned their lambs it became evident that the ewes which were lambing for the first time had larger and heavier litters at birth and weaning than those lambing for the second time. The average lamb weight was also heavier.

It was interesting to evaluate the accumulative performance of the two groups of ewes at 18 months of age when both groups had weaned their litters, one with two lambings of rather reduced performance and the second with only one lambing of normal performance. The results were slightly in favor of the precocious ewes which lambed twice, but the two groups were similar in pounds of lambs weaned at a specific time.

The lessons we learned from this experience were that Romanov lambs may reach puberty at the extremely early age of 2.5-3 months of age and that males and females should be separated at or before 60 days of age to avoid the risk of sib mating (we changed our management to wean at 50 days after this experience). The results indicated that although early mating did not have marked adverse effect on the growth or reproduction of ewes up to 18 months of age, this practice is not recommended for typical farms involved in lamb production. The recommendation is still to breed well-grown ewe lambs at 7 months of age to lamb when

Reproductive performance of Romanov ewes lambing at 8 and 16 months of age.

	1985		1986	
	Lambled	Open	Lambled in 1985	Open in 1985
No. of ewes	11	8	11	8
Birth date	6.6 Oct.	9.4 Oct.		
Birth weight	6.6lb.	5.6 lb.		
70-day weight	41.7	34.6 lb.		
Ewe lambing/ewe exposed			72.7%	100.0%
Lambs born/ewe lambing	1.54		2.50	3.25
Lambs born alive	1.36		2.12	2.62
Lambs weaned	1.18		2.00	2.38
Litter birth wt.	7.9 lb.		13.0 lb.	18.3 lb.
Litter 70 day wt.	53.8 lb.		88.2 lb.	116.0 lb.
Ewe wt. at lambing	86.4 lb.		117.1 lb.	115.7 lb.
Ewe age at lambing	233 days		500 days	499 days
Combined productivity per ewe exposed				
Lambs born			3.35	3.25
Lambs born alive			2.90	2.62
No. of lambs weaned			2.63	2.38
Wt. of lambs at birth			17.3 lb.	18.3 lb.
Wt. of lambs weaned			117.9 lb.	116.0 lb.

they are one year old. So the end message to Romanov breeders is to be aware of the possibilities and be careful to avoid surprises.

Managing Sheep Pastures in The Midwest

To get optimum results from your flock, you must know how to manage your pastures. Should you interseed corn with oats or rape? What's the difference between perennial and annual pastures, legumes and non-legumes? How can you maximize your flock's grazing habits?

For information on sheep pasture management see North Central Regional Extension publication 368, "Sheep Pastures for the Midwest." The publication costs \$1.10 and can be ordered from Agricultural Bulletin, Room 245, 30 N. Murray St., Madison, Wis. 53715, (608) 262-3346. Make checks payable to UW-Extension. This publication is also available at some county Extension offices.

PETA Calls For Boycott of Lamb And Wool Industry

What started off as a protest by a regional group has now spread into a nationwide boycott of lamb and wool products.

More than a year ago, the Rocky Mountain chapter of the Humane Society (RMHS) started the protest after learning about the sheep industry's use of 1080 collars. PETA, or People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, then got into the act.

Both groups claim the 1080 compound endangers surrounding wildlife, contaminates water supplies, threatens predators that might feed on poisoned coyotes and is totally unnecessary since guard dogs may be used.

"Their facts differ widely from what we, as sheep producers, know is true," said Roger Thacker, chairman of the American Sheep Industry Association's Animal Welfare Committee.

"We're responding with the facts—that only three states, Texas, New Mexico and Wyoming—are licensed to use 1080 collars and that the device is used only in areas hit hardest by predation," he said.

Animal Damage Control is backing ASI's claim, adding that contrary to what RMHS and PETA think, the collar has no secondary effects on other wildlife.



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