

Preparing for Lambing/Kidding Season

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Lambing and kidding season tend to be one of the most stressful times of the production year for producers. Planning for lambing and kidding season actually begins before the breeding season. Look forward to your lambing and kidding season and ask yourself a few key questions.

- Will you have labor available when lambing and kidding season arrives?
- If you work off the farm, will your lambing or kidding season coincide with a busy period at work?
- What are the weather patterns usually like when you plan to lamb or kid?
- When will your pastures provide optimal nutrition for your females and their offspring?
- When do you see your internal parasite loads start to increase and are your lambs and kids old enough and strong enough to avoid death losses due to parasite infestation?
- Is your lambing or kidding season situated to avoid labor conflicts, the worst of late winter or early spring storms, and internal parasites and still supply lambs or kids to your market?
- If not, can you move your breeding and lambing or kidding seasons to more easily manage your females during lambing and kidding?

A week or two before offspring start to arrive, check your equipment and supplies. Make sure your obstetrical tools are clean and in good repair. Scissors should be disinfected and sharp, your stainless steel bucket should be cleaned, and your obstetrical loop should be disinfected and in good shape. Restock expendable supplies like gloves, syringes and needles, lubricant, iodine (7%) navel dip, and disinfectants. Check your supply of milk replacer, colostrum replacer, or frozen colostrum from last year. Check your stomach tubes and bottle nipples to make sure they are clean and unobstructed. Feeding bottles should be disinfected and in good condition.

Clean out the shed and inspect for hazards like sharp wire ends, gaps in stalls or fences where animals can be trapped and other sources of injury. Lay out clean bedding and be sure to have plenty of replacement bedding material on hand. Make sure your heat lamps and bulbs are working. Offspring are normally very resilient, but when born in very cold, especially wet and cold, conditions they need to be moved to shelter as soon as possible to avoid hypothermia. A shelter must be available to avoid wet weather. If your offspring are born in overcrowded or unsanitary conditions, they are at risk for infection. Dip their navels in 7% iodine solution to prevent bacteria from entering their bloodstream.

Females in poor health, first time mothers, or who are poor mothers will sometimes abandon their offspring or fail to allow them to nurse. Penning the offspring with the female for a few days may help, but you must observe the offspring and female carefully to make sure they are nursing and healthy. Weak offspring and offspring from a birth with multiple offspring may have more trouble suckling or may not get enough nutrition from the female.

Predators can be a major problem around lambing and kidding time, and females with offspring may need to be penned close to the barn or house each night. While the need for all this extra effort may be costly in terms of time and labor, the return on your offspring and the knowledge you will gain of your females should help you become a better manager of your flock or herd.

By planning your breeding season to produce offspring when labor, feed, weather, and parasite conditions are optimal, preparing your equipment, supplies, and facilities before you need them so they are ready in an

emergency, providing proper nutrition for your flock or herd, and getting to know your veterinarian, you can dramatically improve your survival rate this lambing and kidding season. Then, be sure to take time to relax and enjoy all those new offspring basking, nursing, or playing in your pastures.