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Dystocia (Difficult Lambing)

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Animal Health Fact Sheet

DYSTOCIA (DIFFICULT LAMBING)

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If the flock is lambed on the range, assistance is not given to individual ewes. Catching those needing help causes so much disruption of ewes with normal lambs and results in so many orphans, it is detrimental. One of the primary advantages of shed lambing a range flock is being able to better assist during birth and those first crucial hours of life.

A. When to help (examine ewe if):

1. Ewe is uneasy (colicky) for 2–3 hours, even if nothing visible at vulva.
2. Ewe has been straining or water sac (fetal membranes) have been evident for 1/2–1 hour with little progress.

B. Capture, Confinement and Restraint:

1. Don't disrupt other ewes and newborn lambs.
2. Quietly haze to catch-pen or use long sheep hook.
3. Lay ewe down on her side which favors use of your preferred right or left hand.

C. Examination:

1. Wash ewe's rectal-vaginal area and your hands and arms.
2. Use mild soap or shortening as lubricant.
3. Keep fingers and hand in a cone shape.
4. Examine for dilation of cervix. If not dilated, allow more time.
5. If cervix dilated—identify presentation and posture of lamb.

D. "Presentation" of Lamb (frontwards or backwards):

1. Both are normal—don't try to turn around.
2. Identify whether front or rear legs by comparing joints of lamb to those of dam.

E. "Posture" of Lamb (placement of feet and head):

1. Normal
   a. Frontward presentation—Both front feet and head together; "diving" posture.
   b. Backward presentation—Both hind feet coming together.
2. Abnormal Posture
   a. Small lambs can sometimes be pulled with one front leg back.
   b. Causes more injuries to ewe and lamb.
   c. Best to correct the posture and then pull.
3. Correcting "Posture"
   a. Push lamb back into uterus with slow, steady push (rough may rupture uterus).
   b. Cover mouth or hoof with hand to avoid cuts and abrasions while turning part.
   c. Apply rope, snare or O.B. chain to assist with turning body part.
   d. Remember—Lamb may still be alive even if it shows no movement.

F. Traction:

1. Apply snare, small nylon rope, or O.B. chains
   a. To head (behind ears and inside mouth) and on each front leg (frontward).
   b. To each hind leg (backward).
2. Pull slow and steady; with contractions when possible.
3. If hard pull, push against ewe by putting foot below vulva and then pull. Don't break leg, etc.
4. Pull one body part at a time when very tight with slow progress.
5. Stretch lips of vulva back over the head of the lamb.
6. Towel and clean off head and face, so it can breathe when delivered.
7. After delivery, check uterus for another lamb.

G. Aftercare:

1. Clip navel and apply iodine.
2. Assist ewe to stand and squirt small strip of milk from each teat.
3. Put lamb by ewe's head and leave quietly.
4. Be sure it gets colostrum soon after.

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