Circular No. 33 - A Method of Feeding Orphan Lambs

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By

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A METHOD OF FEEDING ORPHAN LAMBS

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Orphan Lambs:—One of the big preventable losses of the Western sheep business at the present time is the orphan lamb. There are a number of conditions, any one of which may result in a motherless lamb; the ewe may die (this probably does not occur in a large number of cases); a mother may refuse to claim one of a pair of twins or even a single lamb; mother and lamb may become separated by the ordinary moving about of the band of ewes and the ewe thereby loses the scent of the lamb.

The careful shepherd soon detects the orphans, but he is powerless to save them unless provisions are made to give them the special care their successful raising demands. Even where they are taken to the home ranch the attempt to raise them without a mother is not by any means always successful.

Hand Feeding of Lambs:—To insure success in feeding young lambs four conditions must be met: (1) the lambs must be given proper substitute for their mother's milk; (2) they must be fed individually; (3) feeding must be done regularly and at frequent intervals; and (4) absolute cleanliness must be practiced.

Probably the best substitute for the ewe's milk is milk from a healthy cow. Ewe's milk is considerably richer in fat and protein than cow's milk, tho the two contain about the same proportion of sugar and mineral matter. In spite of this difference in composition cow's milk can be used successfully without modification. It should be comparatively fresh and should be warmed to blood heat each time for feeding—even freshly drawn milk should be warmed during the early days of feeding.

Until the lambs are about three weeks old they should be fed four times daily, one-half pint of milk being given each lamb at each feed. From this age to two months, gradually increase the feed to one pint three times daily. At about six weeks of age the lambs will begin to eat grain and from then on it should be kept before them in a trough. After two months the ration should be increased gradually to one quart of milk night and morning and a feed of grain at noon (about one-half pound each). Fresh hay should be kept before the lambs at all times, and as soon as pasture is available they should have access to this.

The grain mixture to feed will depend upon the available supply. A mixture of equal parts of wheat bran and ground oats
Fig. 1.—Four views of the Hansen lamb feeder, showing details of construction. (a) 1x4 inch rigid support; (b and c) 1x1 ½ inch removable strips; (d) three inch space; (f) sliding bar controlling stanchions.
is a splendid feed. To this could be added one part linseed oil meal or cottonseed meal. Two parts wheat bran to one part ground barley or corn is also good. After the lambs get well acquainted with the grain, they relish the pea size meals and the unground grains more than they do the finer more dusty feeds.

The system outlined above is practically that used successfully by Mr. W. S. Hansen of Collinston, Utah, in feeding his motherless purebred Rambouillet lambs. This ration may, under some conditions, be rather more expensive than would be justified with grade lambs. A modification of it, however, might be made by decreasing the amount of milk fed and the length of time during which it is fed. This lighter feeding will, of course, result in a smaller lamb, but it will put him on his feet, so to speak, so he will be able to complete his growth to a marketable size on pasture or on a good range.

The matter of feeding the lambs individually is of prime importance and one that proves troublesome unless provisions are made. Mr. Hansen solved this problem in lamb feeding, as he said, because it was forced upon him. The device herein described was worked out by Mr. Hansen and has resulted in a great saving of time required for feeding. In addition to this saving, the hitherto great loss of lambs while being hand-fed has been so completely overcome that practically all lambs now put on feed are saved.

The Hansen Lamb Feeder:—The device as shown by the cuts consists of a set of rigid stanchions attached to a support for
holding the feeding dishes. These dishes are the ordinary two-
quart graniteware basins and are held in holes cut in a board.
The holes are cut to fit the sloping sides of the dishes. The top
of the basins as shown in Figure 4, stand thirteen inches above
the ground. The board holding the basins is removable, which
increases the case of cleaning. The dishes and board are removed
and washed after each feeding.

Fig. 3.—The feeder in use. Lambs eat at different rates, and yet this
device insures that each lamb gets only its individual allowance of feed.

Each stanchion of the set (See Fig. 2) consists of a 1x4 inch
rigid support (a) followed by two 1x11/2 inch strips (b and c)
which can be removed as more room is needed for the lamb's
head. Next comes a 3-inch space (d) which is governed by a
1x3 inch movable strip (e) spaced two inches from the beginning
of the next stanchion. All movable strips (e) are fastened to a
sliding bar (f) which opens and closes the whole set at once.
They are attached to the sliding bar by removable pegs which
make possible the inserting or releasing of any one lamb’s head
without disturbing the others. The various holes in bar “f” make
individual adjustment easy.

The 1x11/2 inch removable strips aid in making the proper
adjustment as the lambs grow and need more room for their
heads. By removing one of these strips at a time and using one
or the other of the holes at the top and bottom of the movable
strips “e”, it is possible to adjust the stanchions to fit lambs of
almost any size.

The Feeder in use:—One 14-foot section, as shown in Figures
2 and 3, contains eleven individual stanchions. For convenience
in feeding, the stanchions are so placed between two pens that
Fig. 4.—One end of the feed, showing how the basins are held in place.

at feeding time a gate can be opened and enough lambs admitted to fill the stanchions. After one set has been fed they are passed on into another pen and others are admitted. The feed is placed in the pans each time before the lambs come in.

A lamb may be taught to drink milk by letting it suck a rubber nipple in which a rather large hole is cut, and while it is

Fig. 5.—Some of the hand-fed lambs and the boys who fed them.
still sucking this, the other end is forced into a dish of warm milk. After only one or two lessons with the nipple the lamb drinks without further trouble.

Results:—Mr. Hansen has raised orphan lambs for many years, tho the losses have always been high and the time required in feeding has been almost prohibitive. Prior to this year he estimates that fully 50 per cent of the orphans put on feed have died. This year a total of 62 lambs were put on feed and of this number all but 7 were raised successfully.

The growth of the hand-fed lambs this year has also been very satisfactory. On August 16 the average weight of representative lambs from the mother-fed group was 80 pounds a head, whereas that of the hand-fed lambs weighed on the same day was 70 pounds.

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