

## Observations Relative to Raising Spring Born Lambs

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### Story in Brief

In the spring of 1967, 354 lambs were born. They had an average birth date of April 2, 1967 and an average weight of 9.6 pounds. They were weaned in an average of 72.2 days and weighed 59.0 pounds. Of these, 343 were marketed at an average of 157.5 days of age and 95.4 pounds.

Efficiency figures were 1.34 and 7.0 pounds of feed per pound of gain, preweaning and postweaning respectively. Combining these figures we have 3.74 pounds of feed per one pound of body weight produced. Average daily gain from weaning to market was 0.47 pounds.

### Introduction

A large percentage of the lambs in Oklahoma are born in the fall. The existing opinion of sheepmen is that lambs born in the spring cannot make a profit because of the high incidence of internal parasites, the lower efficiency due to higher temperature and other adverse conditions. The question that arises is, can proper management overcome these conditions and make spring lambing profitable?

The purpose of this paper is to present observations from one spring born lamb crop at the Fort Reno Livestock Research Station.

### Materials and Methods

The observations reported were obtained from the spring 1967 lamb crop of ewes lambing on a twice-yearly program at the Fort Reno Livestock Research Station. The ewe flock consisted of 275 Dorset, Rambouillet and Dorset X Rambouillet ewes. It should be kept in mind that some of these ewes lambed the previous fall.

The procedures followed for the project were:

1. The ewes were bred over a period of sixty days beginning October 20, 1966. During the winter the ewes were on pasture and were not supplemented with grain until February 13, approximately one month before lambing. The grain supplement consisted of one pound of milo per ewe per day. This supplement was continued until the lambs were weaned.

2. The breeding period was such that lambing occurred from March 15 to May 15, 1967. As the ewes lambed, they were placed in individual stalls for a period of 2-5 days depending upon the strength of the lamb. The animals were then removed from these pens and put in larger ones with up to 10 other ewes and their lambs.

In these pens the lambs were docked within 24 hours. After a three day retention the ewes and lambs were released into the main corral area.

3. The ewes were separated from the lambs once in the morning and once in the afternoon for intervals of 1½ hours and allowed to graze on bermudagrass-alfalfa pasture. The lambs were retained in the pen in an effort to reduce internal parasite infestation. As the lambs grew older, the periods lengthened to 3 hours.
4. From the time the lambs were turned into the main pen, they had access to a creep. The ration here was: 57 pounds ground milo: 10 pounds soybean oil meal: 5 pounds molasses: 28 pounds ground alfalfa hay.
5. The lambs were first weighed when the oldest reached 45 days and at 14 day intervals thereafter. They were weaned when they attained a minimum age of 66 days and weight of 50 pounds. When the number of lambs not meeting these requirements decreased to 22, all were weaned regardless of age and weight.
6. The weaned lambs were moved to a feedlot. All ewes and lambs received phenothiazene mixed with salt until the lambs were weaned, then the lambs received only salt. Also, two weeks after the last lambs were weaned, the soybean oil meal in the ration was replaced by an equal amount of alfalfa hay.
7. Observations on earlier spring lamb crops showed a decline in gains as the temperature increased. In order to avoid this as much as possible, the lambs were shorn when they showed heat stress. Since this was a cool summer, only 55 lambs were shorn on August 15, 1967.
8. The lambs were marketed as they reached a minimum of 93 pounds. Also, as in weaning procedures when the number of lambs under 93 lbs. decreased to 28, the remaining were sold regardless of weight.

## **Results and Discussion**

This report presents observations pertaining to birth, weaning, market weights and efficiency of gain of lambs born in the spring. Table I contains the average weights and ages of this lamb crop.

Table 1. Average weight and age of lambs at various life stages

Stage	Number of lambs	Average	
		Weight	Age in days
Birth	378	9.6	-----
Weaning	354	59.0	72.2
Market	343	95.4	157.5

### Birth

Of the 276 ewes in the flock, 236 lambed. Lambing began on March 15 and ended on May 15, 1967. During this period 378 lambs were born with an average birth date of April 2, 1967.

Lamb weights ranged from 4.0 to 14.7 pounds with an average of 9.6 pounds. The lambs were healthy and active on the whole and developed normally.

### Weaning

As the lambs reached a minimum age of 66 days and 50 pounds of weight, they were taken from the lambing barn to the feedlot. The last group weaned took all lambs regardless of age because of the small number (22) remaining under 66 days of age.

Of the 378 lambs born, 354 lived and were weaned. Tetanus and starvation caused the majority of deaths and no sign of internal parasites was noted. Overall weaning averages were 59.0 pounds of body weight at 72.2 days of age. The average weight adjusted to a standard at 70 days was 57.0 pounds.

### Market

Of the 354 lambs weaned, 343 were marketed. Internal parasites were not the cause of any deaths, rather 10 of the 11 lambs were destroyed because they had hemorrhoids.

The lambs were weighed at two week intervals and marketed as they reached 93 pounds. The first group was sold on July 17 and the last on November 15, 1967 which contained all remaining lambs regardless of weight. The average market date was September 9 and the average market age was 157.5 days. The average weight was 95.5 pounds.

## Efficiency

Perhaps the most significant data that can be given on any production program are feed efficiency figures. Table 2 contains average daily gains and feed efficiency figures.

These lambs gained 0.65 lb. per day or an average of 47.3 pounds of body weight from birth to weaning. This weight, 16,752 pounds, was gained on 22,500 pounds of creep feed plus mother's milk. Remembering that part of the gain was due to mother's milk before weaning, the lambs gained one pound of body weight for every 1.34 pounds of feed consumed.

More important, after weaning the lambs gained 0.47 pounds per day. They were fed 86,025 pounds of feed and gained 12,242 pounds, thus for every 7.0 pounds of feed consumed, the lambs gained one pound.

The overall daily gain was 0.53 pounds and with a gain of 28,994 pounds on 108,525 pounds of feed; therefore, for every 3.74 pounds of feed consumed, one pound was gained.

One factor should be explained. The temperature in the summer of 1967 was lower than normal. This undoubtedly affected the performance of the lambs and the number that had to be sheared to obtain satisfactory performance.

Table 2. Rate of gain and feed efficiency at various periods

Period	Daily Gain	lb. Feed/one lb. gain
Birth-weaning	0.65	1.34
Weaning-market	0.47	7.03
Birth-market	0.53	3.74