



Lambing in Iowa

How sheep are raised varies by farm and geographic location. This is how many of the lambs in Iowa are raised.

The "sheep year" usually starts in the fall when the rams are put in with the ewes for breeding. Most ewes will get pregnant in the first 17 days (the length of one heat cycle). The flock will stay on pasture, corn stalks or bean stubble until it becomes snow covered or the feed is eaten. During the winter months, the sheep are housed in barns or **hoop buildings**, a greenhouse-like structure with an arched metal frame and fabric covering. They eat hay and grain. Most days they are able to go outside for exercise. In the event of a snow storm they are able to have shelter in the barn or hoop building.

Most of the lambs are born in the spring. Ewes give birth to their lambs in a large community pen. Sometimes, if the weather is nice, the ewes will have their lambs outside. Ewes usually lamb on their own, without any assistance or interference. Most of the ewes give birth to twins or triplets. The lambs are quick to get up and have their first meal, usually before they are one hour old.

After the lambs are born, they are put in a small pen (5 ft. x 5 ft.) called a "**jug**" with their mother. Being together in the jug helps the lambs and ewe bond and provides for easy observation by the shepherd. Within the first 24 hours, the lambs are usually weighed and eartagged. The birth date, sex, weight, and ear tag number of each lamb is recorded and lambs are **docked** and **castrated**. Lambs will generally stay in the jugs for 1 to 3 days.



After several days, the lambs and ewes are moved to **mixing pens**: larger pens with approximately four ewes and their lambs. After being butted a few times by other ewes, the lambs quickly learn how to recognize their own mothers. Once they get used to each other, the lambs will huddle together to sleep and keep warm.

After a week or so in the mixing pens, the group of lambs and ewes are put with other groups of lambs and ewes. The lambs will be able to go anywhere in the barn, ewes nursing triplet lambs are usually separated from ewes nursing twins and singles, because they receive extra grain to produce milk for their extra lamb.

By the time the lambs are 10 days old, they will have access to a **creep** area for creep feeding. A creep is a pen that is fenced so that young animals can enter but adults cannot. If the adult sheep got inside the creep they would eat all of the creep feed. **Creep feed** is feed given to young nursing lambs. The creep feed is usually a mixture of soybean meal and cracked corn that is high in energy and helps the lambs to get started on regular feed. The lambs will also have access to fresh water, high quality hay, and minerals in the creep area. Even when they are not eating, the creep area is a place where the lambs like to hang out.

. . . New Words . . .

Hoop building - a "barn" with an arched metal frame and fabric covering - you might think it looks like a greenhouse.

Jug - a small pen where a ewe and her newborn lambs are kept for a few days after birth.

Dock - to cut off part of the tail - this prevents manure build up, leading to maggot infestation around the tail.

Castrate - remove the testicals of a male animal.

Mixing pen - a pen where a small number of ewes and their lambs are kept before mixing them with whole flock.

Creep - a pen that is fenced so that young animals can enter but adults cannot.

Creep feed - feed given to young animals in a creep area.