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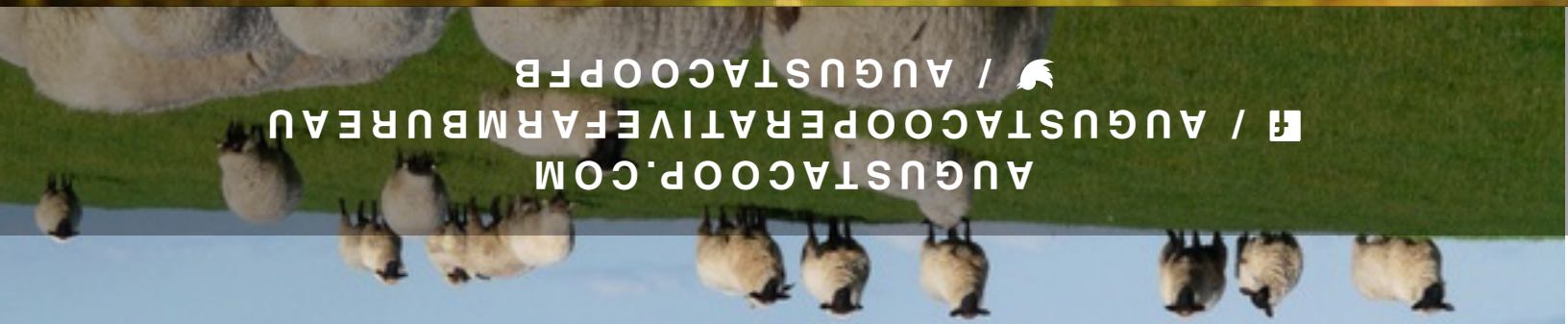

SMALL RUMINANT EDITOR

February 2026

SINCE 1929

Augusta Cooperative FARM BUREAU, INC.

LET'S WEIGH THOSE LAMBS AND KIDS!

Past Penn State 4-H Educator, Bob Brown, reviews and emphasizes the importance of weighing in your lambs and kids.

I want to discuss replacement selection, because most of you will be selling young lambs and kids off into the early spring holiday markets. You don't want to sell off animals you should be keeping for replacements because you didn't incorporate data into a more thoughtful decision making process. Selecting your replacement males and females is one of the most important management decisions that you make. The decisions you make this year affect the gene pool and genetic improvement of your flock and herd for many years.

A wise old man once told me that the most important tool on a livestock farm is a scale to weigh your animals. I have often tried to refute that, but have never been quite able to do so. Certainly, whoever invented fencing pliers was the Einstein of Agriculture. Likewise, there are times I would doubt the quality of life without duct tape. But, I have to support the fact that a scale is our most important tool. The scale enables us to evaluate rate and efficiency of weight gain. Performance is the basis of our livestock industry.

There are other important criteria besides weight to consider when selecting which lambs and kids you will keep to enter your flock and herd. You should visually evaluate structural and muscular conformation, correctness of feet and legs, breed characteristics for purebreds and fleece quality for fiber types. But, how do you evaluate rate of gain? Do you simply weigh them and the biggest ones are the best? The answer would be an emphatic NO! The scale weight only gives you a starting reference point to begin the selection process.

If you were to weigh your lambs and kids and simply select the biggest ones in the pen for replacements, you would probably pick a lot of singles born in the first week or two of your birthing season. Although these may be lambs and kids that look the best (phenotype), these are not necessarily your best offspring genetically. It is the lambs and kids with the best genetics (genotype) that you want to keep for replacements to improve your flock and herd. There will be lambs and kids that scale weigh lighter, but when you adjust their weights using the following factors, they will be genetically heavier than those that scale weigh higher.

Adjustment Factors That Affect Scale Weights

Assuming that you weigh them at one time to minimize labor; the offspring will be different ages on the weigh day and this must be adjusted for. A 14-20 day difference in age on 30-60 day weights is huge. Selecting heavier female replacements because they were born in the beginning of the season, and assuming their mothers were more fertile, would also be a questionable decision. Reproductive traits have a low heritability. Also, you may have turned the ram or buck in a day after certain females were in heat. Therefore, a whole heat cycle on a quality female was simply missed. Additionally, choose an average age in days to adjust to that is closest to the weigh date. The usual adjustments are to 30, 60, 90, or 120 days of age. Selecting replacements on post-weaning adjusted weights (90-120 day) will result in greater genetic improvement reliability in your flock than selecting on 30-60 day weights, because the heritability of post-weaning weights is higher than those of pre-weaning weights.

1. **Age of the Dam** - The age of the mother is a reflection on potential milk production for the offspring. One year olds, or yearlings, have the greatest adjustment factors. Their udders are not fully developed, and they may not be fully grown out themselves. Two year olds and over six are considered to be similar in that they are just entering or leaving their prime. Females 3-6 years of age are in their prime and have the least adjustments.
2. **Gender** - Intact males usually grow faster than wethers, which usually grow faster than females.
3. **Type of Birth** - Record if the lamb or kid was born a single, twin, or triplet. The number delivered affects birth weights.
4. **How it was Reared** - This is a reflection on the available milk. It may be born a twin, but raised as a single. This would allow for more milk for the one(s) left.

These are several factors that greatly influence scale weights and need to be considered and calculated into your growth performance records. To do this, record keeping is a necessity. There are adjustment factor tables that you can easily find online which evaluate these parameters and allow you to correctly evaluate the genetics of your animals. Example calculations are usually with the adjustment factor tables. The calculations are easy to do and only a pocket calculator is needed. (Another good tool!!)

Now, we all know selecting livestock replacements is not an exact science. We all have seen those lambs/kids that were show stoppers at 6 months of age, but as yearlings we can't remember why we kept them. Similarly, there were the ones you kept off the truck by a coin toss, and now you hope for twin females out of her every year. However, by collecting accurate records and using the adjustment factor tables, you will be able to select your replacements with greater precision using accurate data in conjunction with visual appraisal. Evaluate your potential replacement animals on a level genetic basis. The genetic improvement of your animal operation depends on it.

Penn State Extension

TEST FORAGES TO ENSURE SHEEP OR GOAT PERFORMANCE

Producers should test forages to balance diets that promote good performance from their flock or herd.

When producers consider sheep or goat performance, their first thought likely focuses on selection practices that focus on genetics to produce lambs and kids that perform well. However, producers must also develop a nutritional program to feed pregnant and nursing females to ensure their lambs or kids perform well. This nutritional program begins with understanding the nutritional value of the forage that those ewes and does consume.

This year's weather created a considerable challenge for producers in harvesting high-quality hay. It rained, and it rained, and it rained some more last spring. By the time the rain showers slowed, the forage had matured, and quality had declined. This leads me to emphasize the importance of balancing late gestation and lactation diets using a forage analysis report.

For example, estimating your forage quality at a higher protein level than the forage contains can result in decreased milk production, leading to lower weaning weights. Let's consider a small flock of 25 ewes or does that produce 35 lambs or kids to sell, and those lambs or kids wean at an average of 5 pounds lighter than you expect. This scenario would result in a total of 175 pounds less when marketed and equate to a loss of $437.50 when sold at $2.50 per pound. You can run many forage sample analyses for $437.50! Now, look at your flock or herd and consider what you might be losing in total weaning weight when selling your lambs or kids.

You may also want to consider the impact of nutrition on lambing and kidding percentages. Suppose you feed stored forages during breeding or early gestation, and the forage quality does not meet nutritional requirements. In that case, you can expect fewer lambs and kids born on your operation that year because nutrition affects both ovulation and embryonic survival. Therefore, forage testing and balancing diets using the test results becomes even more critical to your operation's profitability.

Accurate results on the forage analysis report begin with properly sampling forages. Hay quality can vary significantly from one field to the next, and from one cutting to the next. Therefore, it is essential to sample correctly to achieve accurate results that will be used to balance diets. Penn State's publication "Forage Quality Testing: Why, How and Where" recommends sampling each field and cutting separately using a bale corer. Sample at least 20 bales dispersed throughout the lot. Mix the samples in a clean bucket and place a subsample into a clean plastic bag. Be sure to label the bag with your name, address, forage description, cutting, and the date it was harvested. The sample should be stored in a cool area until it is submitted to an accredited laboratory for analysis.

The National Forage Testing Association certifies laboratories for near-infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) testing and wet chemistry. You can find a testing laboratory in your location by searching the National Forage Testing Association website or contacting your local Penn State Extension office. These laboratories pass performance standards to ensure the accuracy of forage testing analysis procedures and results. Standard nutritional components listed on a forage analysis report include dry matter, crude protein, total digestible nutrients (energy), fiber, and minerals.

Diets should be balanced using these nutritional components, particularly during late gestation and lactation, when sheep and goats are likely to consume stored forages. Balancing the diet can ensure that the females perform to their genetic potential and that the lambs and kids perform well from birth to weaning. Diets lacking sufficient protein, energy, or essential minerals will likely result in lower performance and could impact the vigor of lambs and kids at birth.

A research study by Ahmed et.al, "Effect of pre- and post-partum dietary crude protein level on the performance of ewes and their lambs," noted that increasing the dietary protein level increased milk production. The study also indicated that higher dietary protein levels "cause an increase in the amount of protein leaving the rumen and thus alter the amounts and proportions of amino acids available for absorption in the plasma, which improve udder development and milk production." Their study showed a 31.3% increase in milk yield for medium protein levels and a 52.6% increase for high protein levels compared to low protein levels. The study also noted that ewes fed medium and high levels of protein pre- and post-partum weaned heavier lambs.

What producer wouldn't want more lambs or kids that weigh more at weaning? Now is a great time to collect forage samples and send them to a laboratory for analysis. Use that information to balance diets, ensuring the health of your pregnant ewes or does and promoting higher milk production that leads to heavier lambs or kids at weaning.

Penn State Extension

LAMBING SEASON: DON'T FORGET "CLIP, DIP, AND STRIP"

To see that your lambs get off to a good start, be sure you incorporate "clip, dip, and strip" in the lambing jug.

Clip refers to trimming the umbilical cord. When a lamb is born, it will have an umbilical cord of varying length still attached to the belly, and it's an open highway for bacteria. Also, if the umbilical cord is too long, the lamb could step on it, causing severe bleeding. Use sterile scissors to clip the cord to a length of 1–2 inches.

Once the cord is clipped, treat the navel area with iodine to prevent infection. This is where the dip comes in. Keep a wide-mouth baby food jar filled with iodine near the lambing pens. Hold the lamb belly side down, place the jar over the clipped cord and against the lamb's body. Then raise the lamb with the jar held firmly against its belly so that the whole navel area is treated with iodine.

Finally, the strip. Put the ewe on her rump and make sure you can get a stream of milk from each teat. A wax plug forms in the end of the teat during pregnancy, and it's important to get the plug out and see that the ewe has milk. If the udder is hard or inflamed, she may have mastitis and you might have a bottle baby on your hands — good luck.

Get your lambs off to a good start by using clip, dip, and strip in the lambing jug.

Penn State Extension

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4 POINTS OF C.A.R.E. FOR YOUR BACKYARD GOAT

Whether your backyard goats are considered pets and part of the family, or they provide milk for your household or business, it is essential to remember these four key points to ensure proper CARE.

1. **Companionship:** Goats are herd animals and do better with a companion to support their overall well-being.
2. **Animal Health:** Backyard goats can get the same diseases as those in a commercial setting. Work with your local veterinarian to ensure they receive the vaccinations needed for your area and are monitored for parasites routinely. One of the biggest health concerns in male goats is urinary stones. To help decrease the chance of urinary stones, feed a high-forage diet, ensure the total diet has a calcium to phosphorus ratio of greater than 2, feed a diet that contains a urinary acidifier (such as ammonium chloride or ammonium sulfate), and make available free-choice water and mineral with salt.
3. **Requirements for Nutrients and Energy:** Even if your backyard goats are pets and are not growing or producing milk, they still have requirements for water, protein, fat, carbohydrates, minerals and vitamins. Provide a diet that is appropriate and meet their energy and nutrient needs. For many goats at 'maintenance', not growing or in production, good quality hay or browse along with a good quality goat-specific free-choice mineral is what they need. If they are producing goat kids or milk, their nutrient requirements are greater and will need nutrient and energy supplementation to meet their enhanced needs. Never forget about water. Water is the most important nutrient. It needs to be fresh and always available. If the water is too warm or frozen, the goats will not consume enough to meet their needs.

4. **Environment:** Provide shelter that will allow the goats to get out of the wind and the rain. They should be housed on a substrate that allows them to wear down their hooves and does not get too muddy. It is said that goats live in a 3-dimensional world, so they benefit from a climbing structure. Goats are also escape artists, so make sure the fencing is proper for your goat's size.

As you plan to get goats or they are part of your backyard farm, remember these 4 points of C.A.R.E. to keep your goats happy and healthy.

Purina Mills

SMALL RUMINANT HOUSING: PROPER AIRFLOW IS IMPORTANT

During different parts of the year, producers have many creative and practical solutions to animal housing. Living in Pennsylvania, winter is the focal point for producers to pay maximum attention to housing details. During this time, animals are moved to a more confined housing situation, with limited access to a dry lot for exercise. In consideration of that fact, it's important to not only consider if there is enough floor space, bunk space, feeding space, and lighting, but also if there will be adequate ventilation.

According to Carol Delaney, who is the Small Ruminant Dairy Specialist at the University of Vermont, optimal airflow should be around 4–15 room volume air exchanges per hour, or 20 cubic feet per minute per animal. This means that while you're working in the barn doing chores for an hour, the air in the building should have exchanged with fresh air between 4 and 15 times. This amount of airflow will be enough to adequately remove the stagnant air, but not so much that it causes drafts and reduces the temperature of the housing to drop below optimal standards of 50–60°F for adults and 54–65°F for the young (Delaney, p.1).

If optimal airflow is not achieved, the environment inside the barn will accumulate higher levels of airborne pathogens, dust particles, moisture, gases (such as ammonia), and heat. During the winter months, most producers will choose to bed pack their manure inside the housing structures to help insulate and warm the barn. Some of the disadvantages to this type of system, if the ventilation is poor, would be that if the bed pack is not taken care of properly, it will release more moisture, and there will be a buildup of ammonia and other gases from the breakdown of fecal material. The environment that exists with poor ventilation is perfect for respiratory disease.

The most common respiratory disease observed in sheep and goats is pneumonia, which can either be bacterial, viral, or caused by a parasite. In consideration of the above conditions that occur due to poor airflow, this type of impure air contributes mainly to bacterial pneumonia infections.

According to Delaney, pneumonia is progressive, chronic, or acute in its infliction. Even after successful treatment of pneumonia, underlying damage will remain in their respiratory tracts. Sheep and goats that are processed and have had a respiratory disease sometime during their life will show scarring, discoloration, and in severe cases, the lungs will be deformed and 'pasted' to the rib cage. Animals that are not lost will always have this hindrance and tend to be poor producers, lack efficiency, and end up on the cull list. For breeders, especially those with smaller herds, this can claim a significant portion of breeding or replacement stock and have a heavy economic impact.

If you find that when walking into your housing structure, there is a strong smell of ammonia, an accumulation of condensation on the walls and ceiling, or you notice there is excessive coughing and/or nasal discharge coming from your animals, you most likely have poor ventilation.

Poor ventilation can be remedied by either incorporating natural ventilation through a cupola, gabled roof with eave openings, utilizing curtain walls, or through mechanical means with fans. In any case, proper ventilation should remove odors and gases, distribute fresh air proportionately, and remove respired moisture in the environment.

Proper airflow in small ruminant housing in the winter is just as important, if not more so, than having a housing facility at all. Improper airflow can cause more economic loss in a herd through long- and short-term respiratory disease than having just the basic shelter for sheep and goats to get covered during the worst of the winter weather. However, if proper airflow is achieved in your facility, it will decrease the amount of cold and weather stress an animal will endure over the winter. Minimizing stress during winter reduces nutritional maintenance requirements. In turn, this results in higher profits.

Penn State Extension

THE BENEFITS OF PURINA® WIND & RAIN® MINERAL FOR SHEEP & GOATS

Purina® Wind & Rain® mineral is designed to address the vitamin and mineral deficiencies in forage, providing a comprehensive solution for small ruminant nutrition that drives productivity and helps producers better meet their goals.

The patented manufacturing process and unique formulation offers several key "abilities" that contribute to the bottom line for every operation.

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1. Weatherability: One of the standout features of Wind & Rain® minerals is the weather-resistant formulation. The exclusive Storm® technology ensures that the minerals resist water absorption and prevent clumping, even in wet conditions. This means that the minerals remain palatable and bioavailable, reducing waste and promoting more consistent intake.

2. Bioavailability: Wind & Rain® minerals contain a balanced ratio of 14 essential minerals, including Zinpro® Availa® amino acid complex trace minerals, including zinc, manganese, and copper (in goat formulas only), which are critical for growth, immune support, and reproductive performance. The focus at Purina® is to make sure that the vitamins and minerals in Wind & Rain® products are research-proven ingredients that are of the highest quality to ensure that they are not just consumed by the animal, but that they are absorbed and utilized for maximum benefit.

3. Palatability: It's all about target intake levels. If you put a mineral out and your sheep or goats won't eat it, you are compromising the genetic potential of that animal. At the same time, if the mineral tastes like candy, they will overconsume it, leading to a thinner pocketbook. When you're evaluating your mineral options, ask for palatability research and look for studies that show mineral consumption at target intake levels. The coarse texture and high-quality ingredients used in Wind & Rain® minerals ensure that sheep and goats find them palatable enough to meet their needs, but not so palatable that they become wasteful.

4. Reliability: Consistent intake and weather-resistant properties of Wind & Rain® minerals mean that less product is wasted due to weather conditions. This makes them more economical to feed compared to conventional loose minerals, solidifying your return on investment year after year.

Purina Mills

Augusta Co-op Solution

Purina Wind & Rain Goat Mineral, 25 lbs.

A high-quality loose mineral built to achieve even the toughest production goals for all types of goats. Our special Wind & Rain technology helps prevent clumping, which reduces waste and ensures goats eat it more consistently.

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Vendor Day

Augusta Cooperative Farm Bureau, Inc.

Wednesday, February 25 • 4 PM - 7 PM

Blue Ridge Community College - Plecker Center
57 College Ln, Weyers Cave, VA 24486

The largest farming brands on site in one location! Book your 2026 items at drastically reduced rates at our annual vendor day. Door prizes, goody bags, snacks, & deals galore!

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Visit AugustaCoop.com for more details

EVENTS / CALENDAR

VENDOR DAY

Wednesday, February 25, • 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Blue Ridge Community College - Plecker Center
57 College Ln, Weyers Cave, VA 24486
The largest farming brands on site in one location! Book your 2026 items at drastically reduced rates at our annual vendor day! Door prizes, goody bags, snacks, and deals galore!

AGRONOMY CUSTOMER APPRECIATION DAY

Friday, February 6 • 11 am - 2 pm
Augusta Expo - Building 2
277 Expo Rd | Fishersville, VA 22939
Additional information: RSVP to Staci Alger at (540) 885-1265 x 253 or SAlger@AugustaCoop.com

Scan to view event details