Virginia Cooperative Extension

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Sheep

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Virginia Spring-Lambing Budget

Steven H. Umberger and Bill R. McKinnon*

Lambing in the spring capitalizes on the reproductive efficiency of a spring-lambing flock and takes advantage of spring, summer, and fall forages for lamb production. Spring lambing occurs during the months of March, April, and May. Lambs graze with their dams in the spring and throughout most of the summer. Many lambs are marketed directly off the ewe as feeder lambs or slaughter lambs in the late summer and fall. Historically, lamb prices are lower in the fall than the spring (Figure 1).

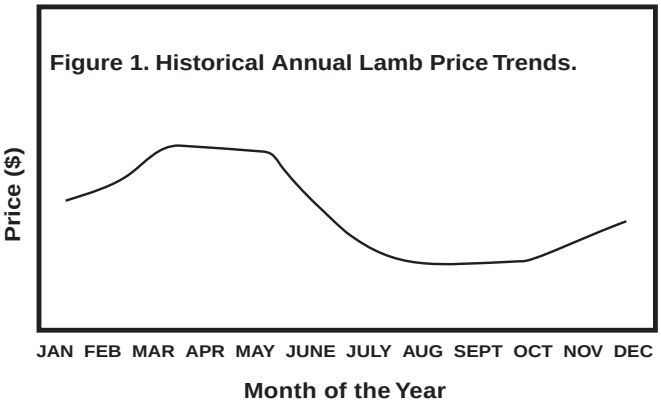

Figure 1. Historical Annual Lamb Price Trends.

However, this seasonal difference in price is usually offset by the lower costs of production and the increased lambing percentages associated with a spring-lambing program. Advantages for spring lambing include:

1. More desirable weather conditions for lambing.
2. Lower requirements for labor and covered facilities.
3. Higher levels of ewe fertility and prolificacy.
4. Larger proportion of lamb gain derived from spring, summer, and fall forages.

For new sheep producers, spring lambing is the production system of choice. Compared with fall- and winter-lambing programs, breeding, lambing, and feeding management practices are less intensive with spring lambing. However, a higher magnitude of importance must be placed on internal parasite and predator control programs. Failure to do so adversely affects economic returns as a result of increased incidences of lamb death loss.

Before the onset of spring pasture, ewes receive hay and grain supplementation starting four to six weeks before lambing and continuing through early lactation. Once on spring pasture, all hay and grain supplementation is discontinued. Lambs are sheared in late June or early July to minimize heat stress and enhance performance. They should not be weaned before four months of age, and may remain with their dams until one month before the start of breeding. Starting in May and continuing through October, lambs are treated for internal parasites once every three weeks. Feeder lambs are marketed from late August through November. To avoid the historically low prices that are paid during September and October, the marketing of slaughter lambs is delayed until mid- to late-fall by leaving lambs on fall pasture, grazing aftermath hay fields, supplementing grain on pasture, or moving lambs to a feedlot. An additional benefit of this delayed marketing strategy is the increase in lamb weight that occurs as a result of the prolonged grazing and (or) feeding period. For this budget, lamb marketing was delayed till late fall, and an average of 100 lbs of a high concentrate diet was fed per lamb.

The information provided in this publication is best used as a guideline for decision-making. Market prices for lamb and wool vary, and every farm has different costs of production. A separate line is provided beside each variable to be used for the calculation of individual farm expenses and receipts. Bottom-line figures are based on return to land, labor, and investment. Other than market price, the percentage of lambs marketed per ewe per year has the greatest impact on profitability of production. Conception rate, lambing rate, lambing percentage (lambs born/ewe lambing), and lamb survival rate are all important flock performance characteristics affecting the percentage of lamb crop marketed. No single system of production is right for everyone. However, every system must emphasize those practices that enhance the overall well-being of the sheep flock.

*Extension Animal Scientists, Virginia Tech

Virginia Tech
VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

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VIRGINIA STATE UNIVERSITY

SPRING LAMBING[a]

Market Lamb Production
140% Lamb Crop Weaned
(120 lambs sold; 20 ewe lambs retained for replacements)

Receipts	**Per Ewe**	**100 Ewe Flock**	**Your Farm**
Choice, Yield Grade 1-3 (115 lbs x 108 hd x $0.65/lb)	$81	$8073	_____
Feeder Lambs (90 lbs x 12 hd x $0.70/lb)	$ 7	$ 756	_____
Cull Ewes and Rams (150 lbs x 18 hd x $0.30/lb)	$ 8	$ 810	_____
Clear Wool (6.5 lbs x 103 hd x $0.90/lb)	$ 6	$ 603	_____
Lambs' Wool (1.8 lbs x 140 hd x $0.75/lb)	$ 2	$ 189	_____
Total Receipts	$104	$10431	_____
Expenses			
Hay - 23 tons @ $60/ton[b]	$14	$1380	_____
Corn - 145 bu @ $3/bu[c]	$ 4	$ 435	_____
Whole-Grain Diet - 7 tons @ $142/ton[d]	$10	$ 994	_____
Replacement Ram	$3.5	$ 350	_____
Vitamins and Minerals	$ 3	$ 300	_____
Health	$ 4	$ 400	_____
Supplies	$ 2	$ 200	_____
Pasture - 40 acres @ $20/acre	$ 8	$ 800	_____
Building and Fence Repair	$ 2	$ 200	_____
Shearing (Ewes and Lambs)	$ 4	$ 400	_____
Miscellaneous Costs	$ 1	$ 100	_____
Interest on Operating Capital - 6 mos @ 12%	$3.5	$ 352	_____
Hauling and Marketing	$ 3	$ 300	_____
Total Expenses	$62	$6211	_____

[a] April - May Lambing
[b] *450 lbs hay/ewe/year; $60 cost of production*
[c] *80 lbs corn/ewe/year*
[d] *100 lbs whole-grain diet per lamb*

Financial Implications at Selected Percentages of Lamb Crop Weaned Expressed As Income Per Ewe

Item	120%	140%	160%	180%
Receipts	$91	$104	$116	$129
Expenses	$60	$62	$63.50	$65
Return to Land, Labor and Capital or Amount to Service Debt	$31	$42	$52.50	$64