

## Miracle of Birth Center

### Sheep/Lamb FAQ

#### SHEEP TOPICS

**What breed are they?** Polypay – a Finn (for the multiple births), Dorset (milking ability and out of season breeding), Rambouillet (out of season breeding and wool quality) and Targhee (wool quality and size) cross created in Dubois, Idaho in the 1970's. A popular all-purpose breed.

**How many lambs do they have?** We strive for a 200% lamb crop so most have twins but anywhere from 1-4 is seen with triplets being very common. They can usually feed all their lambs if they are healthy.

**Do they usually lamb this time of year?** No, they normally come into heat (estrus) in the fall. With a 5-month gestation, they lamb in the spring. We have tricked them into coming into estrus in the spring so they would have lambs for the State Fair.

**Why do they breathe so fast – are they in labor?** The lambs take up a large amount of space in their abdomen as does the big hay-filled rumen (1<sup>st</sup> stomach). This causes pressure upon the diaphragm and less room for the lungs to expand – therefore they have to take short quick breaths. There just isn't enough room the last few weeks of their pregnancy! They also lose heat and "sweat" through their panting (like dogs) so breathe faster when it is warm out.

**Why are the ewes' tails short and the lambs' tails long?** We dock (cut off) the lambs' tails when they are very young to prevent flies from gathering around any manure that may cling to the lamb's rear end and laying eggs.

**What do they eat?** We feed pasture grass, hay and some corn/oats depending on the time of year and what the sheep are doing. If they are growing or making milk for 2-3 lambs, they need more energy (corn/oats).

**Do they mind if we watch them have lambs?** Sheep usually move away from the flock to have their lambs which helps prevent mis-mothering. These sheep are accustomed to people and many of them have lambed here at the fair before. They just want to have the lambs born and safe beside them – which is also our goal. I believe most mothers in labor do not really care who is in the room – they are focused on the impending birth.

**How often do you shear them?** Sheep are usually shorn once per year prior to lambing.

**Where are the daddies?** The rams are at home on the farm. They only stay with the ewes during the breeding season which lasts about 30 days.

**How long do the lambs stay nursing the ewes?** The ewes' milk supply starts to diminish after about 45 days. The lambs start eating solid food (grain and hay) after 2-4 weeks. So we wean the lambs from their mothers at about 60 days.