

# Livestock Notes

## Managing Pastures For Optimum Production

Pasture season is just around the corner. Sheep producers need to have productive pastures to provide a cheap source of feed for six to eight months of the year.

Well-managed pastures can greatly reduce feed bills. Poorly managed pastures can lead to nutritional deficiencies, poor reproduction, and fields that look like deserts.

The first step in managing your pastures is to get a soil test every two or three years. We have no way of knowing what your pasture needs in the way of lime and fertilizer unless the soil is tested.

All Penn State Extension offices sell soil test kits. The cost is only \$6, and it's the best six bucks you'll ever spend.

Follow the directions on taking your sample and sending it off to the lab. You will receive a report that indicates how much lime and fertilizer your pastures require. You might also check with your fertilizer dealer, as some will test your fields for you.

Most soils require limestone every few years. Lime changes the soil pH by reducing acidity. For pastures, we like to see a pH between 6.0 and 7.0. This provides an environment in the soil where the proper chemical reactions can take place to allow the plants to absorb the nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium and other nutrients required for growth. When the pH gets too low, the nutrients tend to be bound to the soil particles and are not available.

Pastures need to be fertilized every year. Preferably, they should be fertilized twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall. Pastures need nutrients to grow and compete with weeds. If you don't supply those nutrients, your pasture grasses and legumes will eventually be crowded out by weeds and other undesirable species.

If your pastures are mainly grasses, you will need to supply nitrogen as well as potassium and phosphorus. If you have a good

grass, legume mix (clovers), you may be able to get away without supplying any nitrogen. Some soils may have a large amount of phosphorus and potassium in them and need little supplementation. The only way to know is to take a soil test.

Lime and fertilizer are only part of managing your pastures. Another consideration is stocking rate. The stocking rate is simply the number of animals your pastures can support without being over grazed. Stocking rate is expressed in animal units. One animal unit is one cow or one horse or 5 sheep.

If you have old pastures that have never been renovated and you don't lime and fertilize, you may have to plan on 3-4 acres per animal unit. If, on the other hand, you have renovated pastures that are highly managed, and you use a good pasture rotation system, that

same animal unit may need only 1/2-1 acre. The level of management greatly affects the number of sheep you can put on pastures.

Don't forget about weed control. When you rotate sheep out of a pasture, go in and mow that pasture to clip the weeds and allow the grasses to compete. You may also find it necessary to spray herbicides at times to control weeds. There are some excellent pasture herbicides on the market. While you may not be equipped to spray the herbicide yourself, there are commercial companies who will do it for you. Contact your county agent or feed or fertilizer dealer for the names of those companies.

Pasture is a crop, just like corn, soybeans or wheat, and it needs to be managed as such. The success of your pasture management will have a very large impact on the overall success of your sheep operation.

### Ten Medication Use Tips

It seems like every time you pick up the newspaper or turn on the television, you find a story about contamination in our food chain. While lamb is not a major player in the nation's meat consumption, it still behooves us to

make sure that our meat is safe.

Every once in a while you may find it necessary to medicate your sheep. It may be as simple as treating for internal parasites, or as complex as trying to clear up pneumonia or mastitis with antibiotics. Whenever you use medications, follow these simple rules.

1. Read the label carefully — labeling directions change frequently.

2. Use drugs only in animal species listed on the label—drugs used in other species may cause adverse reactions or illegal residues, and possible animal deaths. Only your veterinarian can prescribe "extra label" uses.

3. Use the proper dose for the species and size of animal to be treated - overdosing can cause illegal residues.

4. Calculate pre slaughter drug withdrawal times accurately — withdrawal time begins with the last drug administration.

5. Use the correct route of administration — giving drugs incorrectly can lead to drug ineffectiveness, adverse reactions, illegal residues, and possible animal deaths.

6. Do not "double does" — using the same drug in the feed and by injection can cause illegal residues.

7. Select needle size and injection sites carefully — misuse can lead to tissue damage, reduced effectiveness, and/or illegal residues.

8. Allow proper withdrawal times for feed containing drugs — during the withdrawal time, storage bins and feeders must be completely free of medicated feed and only drug-free feed should be used or illegal residues may result.

9. Keep accurate records of drugs used and animals treated — poor records can be costly if drug residue violations occur.

10. Seek the advice of your veterinarian — your records will allow him/her to provide safer and more effective treatment and save you money by preventing illegal residues.

### Ivermectin And Reproduction In Ewes

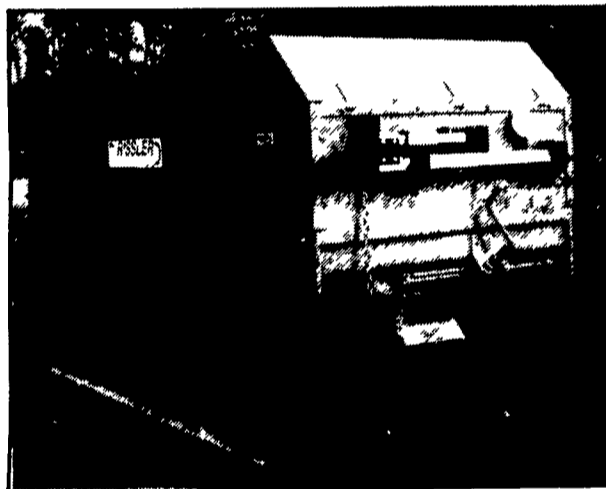
Ivermectin is a potent anthelmintic (dewormer) which was approved for use in sheep in 1990. Since then, producer concerns

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