

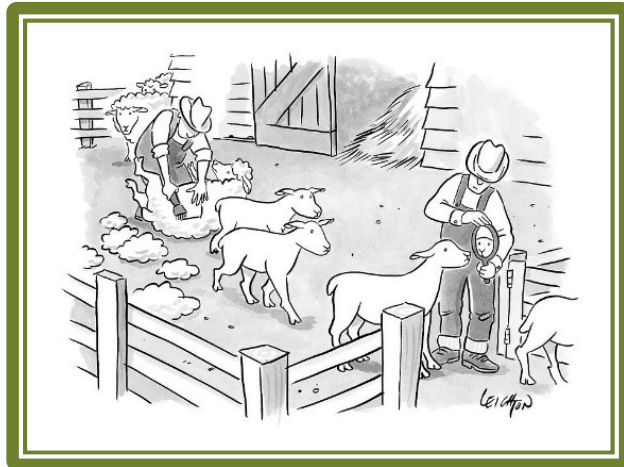
FLYING ROWAN FARM



SHEARING DAY!

JANUARY 26, 2025

10AM TO 6PM



AN EVENT THE WHOLE FAMILY WILL ENJOY!

FARM-FRESH FOOD BONFIRE

*OUTDOORS - DRESS FOR THE WEATHER!
PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN BEVERAGES & LAWN CHAIRS*

***FLYING ROWAN FARM
4300 WHEELER ROAD
FOWLerville, MI 48836***

*ONCE YOU'RE ON WHEELER ROAD, WATCH THE MAILBOXES!
(GOOGLE MAPS WILL PUT YOU TOO FAR DOWN THE ROAD).*

*WE'RE IN A WHITE FARMHOUSE ON A SMALL HILL ON THE
LEFT-HAND SIDE OF THE ROAD,*

*PARK TO THE LEFT OF THE DRIVEWAY.
EVENT IN THE BACK FIELD.*

*TO FIND US (AND THE SHEEP), WALK UP THE DRIVEWAY, PASS
THE GARAGE ON YOUR RIGHT, CONTINUE STRAIGHT AHEAD
THROUGH THE TREES AND TOWARDS THE BONFIRE*

WHY DO WE SHEAR THE SHEEP?

*Excerpted from MI State University Extension small ruminant website.
Authored by Dr Richard Ehrhardt, Small Ruminant Extension Specialist*

Shearing before lambing is a practice that benefits the welfare of the sheep as well as making management easier and increasing flock productivity.

- 1. Drier environment.** *Wool holds considerable moisture, with a full fleece capable of absorbing a lot of water under humid climates, even when sheep are housed indoors. This moisture holding capacity of wool creates a microclimate close to the lamb that is relatively damp, thus creating a prime environment for hosting pathogens and allowing them to proliferate. Both the relative humidity of the barn and the microclimate near the lamb are drier when ewes are shorn, creating a healthier environment that is less conducive to pathogen growth.*
- 2. Cleaner environment.** *Wool also has the capacity to hold mud and manure as well as absorb fluids from the birth process, all of which can harbor and promote the growth of pathogens. A short fleece minimizes this situation, creating a much cleaner environment for the benefit of both the ewe and her lamb(s).*
- 3. Increased lamb birth weight.** *It has been well established that shearing during mid-pregnancy improves lamb birth weight. The increase observed is substantial, often in the 15-25% range. The improvement in birth weight is most evident in ewes with multiple births, although it has also been documented in ewes with singletons as well. The mechanism for this increase in birth weight is not entirely clear. Some studies indicate that an increase of voluntary feed intake by shorn ewes may be responsible, whereas other studies show no change in intake yet an increase in birth weight. The increase in feed intake is likely greater in cooler weather, as the ewes will eat more to maintain body temperature (often 15-25% more feed is needed in shorn compared to unshorn ewes). It is clear that in some studies, the increase in feed intake is not enough to explain the increase in birth weight, suggesting a metabolic adaptation by the ewe to partition more nutrients to the lambs. Whatever the case, it is a biological phenomenon that we can use to our advantage as shepherds. Birth weight is a limiting factor for lamb survival, particularly in multiple births, so any management tool available to increase it should be utilized.*
- 4. Improved fleece quality.** *Pre-lambing shearing improves wool quality in two distinct ways. The metabolic stress that occurs in late pregnancy and especially in early lactation creates a weakness in the wool fiber often referred to as "wool break". The wool may not actually break, but it will weaken due to the surges in cortisol that inhibit the wool growth process and also because of the lower flow of nutrients to the wool follicle bulb from decreased skin blood flow in the cold. With pre-lamb shearing, the wool break occurs at the very tips of the fiber; therefore it is not of consequence in terms of textile properties of the fiber. The other improvement in wool quality brought on by pre-lamb shearing is a reduction in vegetative matter in the fleece. This is especially observed in flocks that lamb indoors in winter, since in shorn ewes the vast majority of the winter feeding period occurs with the ewes in short fleece, which does not trap much vegetative matter from hay or silage. In some flocks, it is possible to move ewes off the winter grazing of annuals such as turnips and directly into the barn for shearing before lambing, thus avoiding any forage feeding contamination and allowing for harvest of full length staple that is nearly free of vegetative matter.*
- 5. Ewes have better access to feeders.** *Shorn ewes take up far less room at the feed bunk (15-20% less space), allowing better feed access for more of the flock. This allows for a more efficient feeding program and reduces the constraint for bunk access that is often observed in smaller ewes. It also contributes to better feed intake in late pregnancy when intake is often a limiting factor for lamb growth/development.*
- 6. Barn is warmer for winter lambing.** *For winter lambing, pre-lamb shearing allows for greater housing density and greater liberation of heat, thus increasing the temperature of the barn significantly. This can be especially helpful in improving survival in indoor lambing programs. Simply shearing ewes and insulating your barn can create a birth environment just above freezing, which greatly lowers the risk of losing newborns to the combination of hypothermia/starvation.*
- 7. Lambs access the teat easier.** *Lambs that can quickly seek and find the teat have a much greater chance of survival. A full fleece reduces access to the udder, making it hard for the wet newborn to find it. In addition, it is not uncommon to see lambs literally sucking on tags of wool instead of the teat in full fleeced ewes. Shearing removes this obstacle, creating easier access.*
- 8. Ewes seek protection in bad weather.** *Shorn ewes are much more likely to find a more protected and less exposed birth site, as they naturally need to seek such protection to maximize their own comfort. This greatly reduces loss to hypothermia/starvation in early life.*
- 9. Ewes are easier to shear.** *Shearing ewes prior to lambing is much easier than during lactation. As the ewe reaches peak lactation, around a month after lambing, the lanolin in the fleece becomes much more "sticky", with a higher melting point. In addition, ewes lose weight, becoming less smooth to run a comb over during shearing.*
- 10. Ewes are more active and easier to observe for health and nutritional status.** *When shorn, it is much easier to observe the ewes for body condition and also to tell when they are about to lamb. Shorn ewes are also more active than those in full fleece, and this exercise may improve maternal health in late pregnancy. Shorn ewes are also less likely to become cast or stuck on their backs during late pregnancy.*
- 11. Shorn ewes are better mothers.** *Beneficial maternal behavior including grooming of lambs are enhanced in shorn ewes at birth. This improves maternal bonding and decreases the risk of mis-mothering and starvation/exposure in early life.*