

How to start Dorper farming?

Many years ago young farmer sent in a questionnaire on how to start with Dorper farming, one of our inspectors, one of our Inspectors, a very practical farmer, replied in a user-friendly manner.

Just lately we have been using this article with great success for beginner farmers therefore it is once again finding it's way into the Dorper news.

** Changes in the industry since the questions were answered.*

1. How often, how, when and against what must I inoculate or dose my sheep. We have lots of ticks. Please do not give scientific names but brand names.

Reply: It is advisable to contact your local vet as parasites differ from region to region. In the meantime, my advise would be to use a broad spectrum remedy every six to eight weeks. I use Valbantel and Ivomec which I alternate. It is important to dose against Nasal worm in the middle of winter when this parasite is in a dormant stage. We find Ranide the best. Although the broad spectrum remedies are supposed to cover nasal worm it is advisable to keep a can of Ranide handy to dose those sheep who show signs of nasal worm infestation immediately.

Lambs are dosed at 8 weeks and again at 12 weeks or older. I first give Valbantel and Lintex and with the second dose Ivomec and Lintex. PLEASE NOTE - DO NOT MIX THE DOSE.

TO CONTROL TICKS THE BEST METHOD IS STILL to dip every two weeks. By applying this method I have ticks on my farm totally under control. There a various excellent product available - ask at you local co-op for advice. Look for a product which sterilizes the female tick.

1. How often, how , when and against what must I inoculate?

Reply: The three inoculations which must definitely be done is Pasturella, Pulpey Kidney (twice a year) and Rev 1 - Brucella Ovis for ram lambs My program is as follows:

All ewes are done every 6 months for Pulpey Kidney and Pasturella and also for Pasturella and blue udder four weeks before lambing. Straight after lambing we do Blue tongue strictly according to prescription.

All lambs get Pasturella at age 2 weeks and again at six weeks. At three months we do Rev 1 and Pulpey kidney and at six months we do Blue tongue.

You must however find out from you local vet which diseases appear in your area and which remedies must be used. Read all instructions on remedies well and follow the instructions with care.

2. Is it true that sheep must only be let out of the pens late in the morning and if so, why?

Reply: My experience is that sheep prefer to graze in the cool early morning or late afternoon. They rest in the shade during the warmest part of the day. The perception that sheep must not graze in the dew must stem from a problem with foot-rot which is caused by excess damp. If you have a problem with that, it is advisable to always add zink sulphate to your dip (5 kg on 1000 liter water) Trim the hooves regularly too.

3. How must the ideal sheep crawl be planned, erected and administered including foot-baths, dips, place for lambing ewes, race, water - and feed troughs and whatever else is needed which I do not know about?

Reply: Plans available from Colleges or the Society.

5. Why do I get more ram lambs than ewe lambs? Is it punishment for my sins or can it be controlled?

Reply: There is no way by which the sex of lambs can be determined. It is common that over a year 50% will be ewes and 50% rams.

6. How does a person know whether a new born lamb is healthy and whether or not you have to give additional bottle feeding? What do you feed with - cow's milk?

Reply: When a lamb is weak or appears flat in the stomach the causes can be starvation due to lack of milk. First examine the ewes udder to see whether there is enough , clean milk. If the milk is OK the lamb must be sick and the vet can be called in.

NB If the ewe's milk is not good (watery, lumpy, infected or have no milk) the lamb will probably have to be reared by hand. The best to use is Surromel or something similar. Often only one side of the udder is affected and the ewe will rear one lamb but not twins. NB A ewe with mastitis (infection of the udder) must be treated under instructions of a vet.

On the first day of lactation the ewe produces Colostrum which is yellowish and greasy in appearance. This is quite normal.

7 & 8. Must lambs be tailed? Castration?

Reply: There are various reasons why tails are amputated. One being preventing flies from entering under the tail and laying eggs which then cause infections.

I dock tails at 2 weeks of age and castrate the lambs that must be done at the same time. I use castrating rings for both purposes. To castrate, ensure that both testicles are in the scrotum and pull the elastic right over to the narrowing of the scrotum. It is important not to dock tails too short. Apply elastic about 15 mm from the body over the tail. Both tail and testicle rings must then be sprayed well with healing- / wound oil to keep flies away and should be repeated until the body-parts fall off and is healed.

9. What must sheep be fed with? We have lots of grass and they are fat, but what should I plant as additional feed when I want to keep more sheep per hectare?

What about kikuyu or life grass which they advertise so much? I have a little bit of bana-grass but I think it is too tall for a sheep.

Reply: I find dry, baled Lucerne is always a good feed which can be given at any time. The Dorper is not a selective grazer and can utilize most grasses and green feed provided there is enough of it winter and summer. You may find a lick in block form useful seeing that such grasses lack quite a bit of the essential elements. I find that sheep on green feed also need dry feed. It is therefore a good practice to also put out a bale of dry Lucerne in the day as well as in the crawl at night.

10. Should I leave the ram between the ewes and let nature take its course or must I interfere? Agricultural publications speak of the group method, hand method and sponging but this is all Greek to me! What does it mean, which method must I use, how and why?

Reply: The ewe's ovulation cycle is 17 days. Therefore it is a popular practice to put the ram in for 6 weeks and take him out for 6 weeks. This has the following advantages:

- a. The lambs fall in groups which makes your work easier
- b. You can alternate different rams and will know exactly which one's lambs are arriving
- c. Should a ewe for some reason or other not "take" six weeks is not a terribly long period to wait before putting the ram in again.
- d. Six weeks allows the ewes two ovulations while the rams are with them

12. I have one or two sheep with runny noses. People tell me this is nasal worm. Is there such a thing, what does it look like, where does it come from and what do I do about it?

Reply: This was addressed under Question 1

13. How do I know when a sheep is sick, how do I determine which disease it has and how do I cure it?

Reply: In most cases the sheep appears uneasy and lethargic or a problem will be clearly visible like a wound, swelling or abscess.

When the sheep shows no visible symptoms but looks ill, the first step is to take the temperature which should be 39,5 degrees. High temperature indicates infection and antibiotics should be administered. It could also be blue tongue or heart water (if your area is prone to these). In the beginning I often called the vet. This is an expensive way of learning, but an excellent way. Now I am able to diagnose most diseases which my sheep may get, myself and to treat it effectively.

Abscesses are highly infectious and I recommend that you ask your vet to show you the correct method of lancing and treating these.

14. I would like to keep record of my sheep to ensure that I do not keep "passengers" but productive animals. What must I record, how do I do it and how do I interpret it?

Reply: The basic requirement of recording is to record each ewe's lambing rate and to identify and eliminate weak producers.

Firstly a ewe must be tagged with her own number (I started at no 1) and you have to have a card for her. All lambs which arrive must then be tagged and recorded on the mother's card. Important information is date of birth, sex, father (a) weaning date and weaning weight.

(There are record cards available from the Society)

*(Electronic technology can be implemented for this purpose today)

15. I want to number the sheep in such a way that I do not have to carry a book to identify the family. Is there a sensible number system according to which this can be done?

Reply: It is impossible to place all the information you need in a crawl on a ear tag. I suggest you use the following number system:

(a) Mark your thirty ewes from 1 - 30 (meaning all that will appear on their tags will be a number between 1 and 30)

(b) All new ewes purchase will then be from 31 onward

(c) Number your lambs according to the year in which they arrive plus a cereal number for example 92.1, 92.2, 92.3 etc

My tags look like this top: 92.1 RC

Bottom 315 X

92.1 RC = Year-cereal number plus the father's code
(RC= "Rocky")

315 X = Family number plus X which indicates one
of a twin

Single lambs get nothing and triplets get XX

The "family number" is the number of the very first ewe which started that line on my farm. It is carried over to each lamb and to the female off-spring like a man's surname is carried by his children.

16. Somebody says I must use Aussie-tags to number the sheep. How do I work with these?

Reply: I use metal tags but engrave my own information on it.

(* there are various tags available today- even micro chips!)

17. What does the tags look like which the Inspectors of the Society use?

Reply: Dorpers receive a tag with a D + the stud number on one side and a cereal number on the other side. White Dorpers has the same but only a D with a diamond frame around it.

18. How do I know when a ewe is too old to breed further?

Reply: Sheep's teeth wear off. Teeth gradually get very short and uneven. As long as there is soft food (like on lands) available, an old ewe can carry on, but should be classed out as soon as she or her lamb's condition is poor in spite of good food. Weaker producing ewes must naturally be culled as soon as their teeth seem short.

19. How do I know when I must get a ram?

20. What do I do with old rams when in-breeding becomes a possibility?

Reply: A good breeding ram can be used a number of years, always on the same ewes. He should not be put with his own ewe lambs. And therefore you will have to acquire new rams ever so often.

A Weak breeding ram or old ram you send to the abattoir. A good breeding ram which you can no longer use in your flock, can be swapped or sold.

21. What is the best method of controlling ticks? People say I must use Deadline.

Reply: I believe people use Deadline although this is not meant for sheep. I still prefer to dip as recommended in question 1

22. My crawl has a cement floor which has quite layer of manure on it. When sheep move around it creates dust. Is this healthy? Must I remove the manure and let the sheep sleep on the cement? Must a remove the cement and let the sheep sleep on the ground?

Reply: The surface on which sheep sleep is not important as long as the drainage is good. Where possible dust must be reduced or eliminated.

23. Presently my sheep lamb either in the veld or at night in the crawl. The lamb immediately joins the flock and runs to the veld with his mother from day one. It has happened that a lamb is fast asleep and the mother is running around desperately. Is this practice correct or must the ewe and lamb be kept separate from the flock? If so, how long, must it be in a grassy camp or in a crawl? If in a crawl or pen - what do I feed her?

Reply: Generally Dorper ewes are excellent mothers en seldom loses their lambs.

Now and then there is a ewe (normally with the first lamb or twins) who battle to keep the lamb with her. Such a ewe can then be put in a smaller place with her lambs in order to get used to one another. You can feed dry Lucerne.

24. Some of the ewes I purchased has biggish lambs but I have no idea how old they are. Some lambs are grazing full-out already but still suckles. Some of them are so big that they lift the ewe's hind quarter from the ground when suckling. Is this normal - must they still suckle when they are so big? Do they wean themselves or must I remove them from the mothers? Do the suckling have and effect on the ewe that she may not take ram while she has a lamb?

Reply: It is normal practice to wean a lamb at three or 4 months of age. (Remember to dose Lintex and to inject Pulpy Kidney and Rev 1)

25. Must sheep have water in their sleeping crawl?

Reply: Sheep should have free access to clean dinking water at all times. Troughs in crawls and camps should be checked daily to ensure that they are clean.

26. Some of the Ram lambs is trying to cover the ewes. Is this a sign that the older ram is not working or are the young ones just having fun?

Reply: Young ewes, rams and castrated rams are inclined to jump on one another.

This is just a game but beware! Dorper lambs are fertile from 3 -4 months and could get pregnant or cover their own mothers.

27. Here in our area theft is a problem. Is there a way to mark a sheep in order to identify the carcass , skin or head as your property?

Reply: Tattooing is law. Use the green marking ink it works on the black ears.

28. Will the ram know when a ewe lamb is “old enough” or must ewe lambs be kept separately so that they do not get pregnant too young. What is too young?

Reply: It is good practice to mate ewes only at 10 months of age. They need to be two- toothed when their lambs arrive so that they do not battle to eat when having to feed a lamb.

*(Remember to have all young rams age 10 months and older and your breeding rams tested for Brucella Ovis every year NB. Never borrow or buy untested rams)

Talk to other Dorper farmers or sheep farmers and learn from them. If you are serious about breeding it is recommended that you attend at least a Junior course on Dorpers to broaden your knowledge.

We trust this will assist many new and inexperienced farmers once again.

Never hesitate to ask questions - that is the only way you learn. Contact The Society or any inspector listed in this book.