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A Shepherd's Dilemma
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Persuading a ewe to claim her lamb or lambs can sometimes be a real headache. This is generally more of a problem with ewes lambing for the first time than it is with older ewes. If you have trouble with a ewe 2 years in a row, it would be best to sell her.

There is no cut and dried answer as to why ewes fail to claim their offspring. Some of the situations that may lead to a ewe disowning 1 or all of her lambs are as follows:

1. A ewe may deliver one lamb in one part of the barn and deliver a second lamb in another part of the barn.
2. One of a set of twins may wander away from its mother before she has fully recovered from delivery.
3. The ewe may have a very painful udder due to swelling, caking, or infection.
4. The teats may be cut or chapped causing the ewe a great deal of discomfort.
5. A ewe that has been in labor for a long period of time may not be interested in her lamb for quite awhile after delivery.
6. Sometimes a ewe may run a high temperature for several days after lambing, and consequently not show much interest in her lambs.
7. Sometimes you may have problems with ewes that are very nervous and flighty.
8. Some young ewes lambing for the first time may be frightened by the lambs they have given birth to.

It takes a lot of patience to work effectively with a ewe that disowns her lamb. Keep in mind that it is much easier for the ewe to raise her lamb than for you to raise an orphan. There is no guaranteed method of getting a ewe to claim her offspring; however, flockowners have reported satisfactory results with one or a combination of the following measures:

1. Tie the ewe in the pen until she allows the lamb to nurse.
2. Bring a dog into, or near, the pen with the ewe and lamb.
3. Rub the ewe's nose and the lamb with some of her own milk or with kerosene or oil.
4. Household deodorizer sprays may also be used to spray the lamb and the ewe's nose.
5. Blindfolding the ewe has also been helpful at times.

Now comes the problem of what to do if the ewe wins and you have an orphan lamb on your hands. One thing that helps to get a lamb off to a good start is if it can get some colostrum, either from its mother or another ewe that has lambed about the same time. If you have a ewe lose her lamb within a day of birth, milk her out and freeze the colostrum; then you can use it when needed. Colostrum provides the lamb with energy, protein, vitamins, and minerals as well as antibodies that help it to resist infection.

Caring For the Orphan

If you use cow's milk for the lamb, add 1 ounce of corn syrup to each pint of whole milk. Diluted or skimmed cow's milk should not be used since ewe's milk is normally much richer than cow's milk (ewe's milk is higher in fat and total solids). Good commercial milk replacers work well; however, they should be made slightly more concentrated than recommended for calves. Evaporated milk, when partially diluted, often gives good results.

Giving the orphan lamb supplemental vitamin A in either the oral or injectable form may also help to get him off to a faster start. This single dose should be no less than 25,000 I.U. of vitamin A per lamb. If the lamb received plenty of colostrum then the vitamin A supplement might not be necessary.

Feed orphan lambs 1 to 2 ounces of milk every 2 or 3 hours from early morning until late evening for the first few days. Gradually increase the volume of milk per feeding and the length of time between feedings. After about 2 weeks feed only 3 or 4 times daily.

For feeding the lamb in the first few days a regular medicine bottle with a standard size nipple works real well. As the lamb grows older a pop bottle with a standard size nipple will be satisfactory. If quite a few pet lambs are to be fed then a multiple lamb feeder, either commercial or homemade, would be more adequate.

Provide the lambs with a creep ration when they are about 7-10 days of age. The sooner the lambs begin to eat supplemental feed the faster they will grow.