

News Column

by Greg McClure, KSU-Riley County Extension Agriculture Agent  
110 Courthouse Plaza  
Manhattan, KS 66502

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Phone: 785/537-6350  
Fax: 785/537-6353

## LAMBING PREPARATIONS

My wife does nearly all the shopping in our family. I'm good at buying a few farm supplies and an occasional tool if I really need it, and she is good at buying everything else. Consequently, I stay out of the way.

Pam loves gift shopping and I love making her happy, so I let her buy all the Christmas gifts. To be honest, I actually kind of hate gift shopping, so I'm glad she enjoys it. If she gets to buy gifts without me, she has a good time, and I'm not tortured. It is a good arrangement.

Occasionally – maybe every five years or so – there will be a big gift that strikes me as something she needs and I'll step up and make it happen. Great gifts that come to mind are the cow I bought her a year or two after we were married, the really expensive oak table we bought in 2007, and the two loads of rock she got for her birthday in 2009.

I admit that the oak table was kind of an out-of-character purchase, but there's a story behind that gift. You see, I had been telling her for over a year that the white plastic folding table was all we could afford for our dining room, after building (and paying for) our new house. Then, I bought what she thought was an expensive new ram,...and you know what happened next!

This year Pam is getting her best gift ever — a new barn! Am I a great husband, or what?

The barn looks complete, but there is still a lot to do before we start lambing the third week in January. We hope to have water and electricity soon, but those are actually minor

details. The closest water hydrant is about 150 feet away, so I can make that work. And, electricity is just a luxury. We can lamb without it.

The next job on our list is to build pens. For now, we'll build runs to the south of the barn using 16 foot long by 52 inch tall cattle panels. It's a design-as-you-go project, but I'm guessing each pen will be three or four panels long, either 48 or 64 feet.

The new barn has a 20 foot deep lean-to on the south that will be the primary shelter for our sheep. During lambing season we'll have drop pens inside that are about 16 feet by 20 feet. I'll use 34 inch tall hog panels to build those so I can step over when needed, or reach over to grab a lamb.

Inside, next to the drop pens will be rows of 5 foot by 5 foot lambing jugs. Lambing jugs are needed for ewes with twins or triplets so they can spend a few days bonding before being kicked out into a mixing pen.

Drop pens, by the way, are so named because that's where the ewes drop their lambs when giving birth. Ewes and lambs are moved to lambing jugs after lambs are born. Most will spend 24 to 48 hours in the lambing jugs, but some need more time. Others get kicked out faster when the jug is needed by another new mother.

Our highest priority at lambing is to provide a space that is dry and out of the wind. With adequate bedding and no wind, I don't even worry about newborn lambs if the temperature is 20 degrees or above. Unless something has gone wrong nutritionally, or a disease is at work, newborn lambs should be up and going without me losing any sleep.

Because I have another job that keeps me away from the barn all day, the one thing we do differently than a commercial sheep operation is to tube feed nearly every lamb. Lambs aren't generally as smart as cattle, so it is important to make sure they have nursed.

Instead of wasting time trying to attach a lamb to a teat, we can catch the ewe, milk her directly into a large syringe, and tube feed colostrum to her lambs in about 15 minutes. When I come home at night, or when I get up in the morning, those lambs will have figured it out. All they need is to be dry and to have that first shot of colostrum in their bellies, then they should be fine.

If you're looking for a nice Christmas gift for a new shepherd, I recommend a 140 cc (5 ounce) syringe and a red rubber lamb feeding tube. Together, they'll cost you less than \$10.

Another gift option – if you can afford to spend just a bit more – would be a new barn.

If you have questions, you can reach me at the Riley County Extension Office at 785/537-6350. Or, you can send e-mail to [gmcclore@ksu.edu](mailto:gmcclore@ksu.edu).

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