

News Column

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

For Release 03/02/20
Phone: 785/537-6350
Fax: 785/537-6353

BABY LAMBS

When we were building our house 14 years ago my wife probably thought the mud room was going to be a place for me to leave my dirty shoes, and a place to hang my chore clothes. It seems logical, doesn't it?

I admit that I even thought I was moving up in the world and would get to put on warm coveralls and warm shoes in a warm room, instead of dressing in cold clothes in a cold garage. Unfortunately, I learned pretty quickly that warm chore clothes smell like a barn.

And, I learned pretty quickly that my wife was going to continue to throw my stinky clothes back out in the cold garage, no matter how many times I left them on the floor in the mud room to warm up.

What Pam didn't know about having a mud room was that it would be the nursery for chilled and hungry baby animals – in our case, baby lambs. And, let me tell you something. A warmed up baby lamb will quickly stink up the house a whole lot worse than my coveralls could on their worst day.

For most of the year, my wife isn't the best farm girl. She only does chores when everybody else is at 4-H camp, and she keeps all the windows closed in our house so no pollen can get in to activate her allergies. The farm isn't quite her thing.

However, during lambing season, Pam is a champ! She is so maternal that I can get away with just about anything. When there are babies needing help, she's on it!

Earlier this winter, when I had twin lambs – the absolute worst smelling pair of lambs ever – in the mud room for two days, she never complained. I, on the other hand, exited through the front door so I wouldn't have to smell lamb odor on my clothes all day at work.

Pam will check the barn on a cold day if she is home and I'm not, and she will tube lambs for me when I'm gone, to keep them going until I get home in the evening. We don't mess around with a bottle during the first 48 hours of a lamb's life. We just run a tube down them and put 5 to 10 ounces of milk right in their stomachs.

We brought 22 lambs – about half of them – to the house a year ago when it was so cold for so long during lambing season. This year we have only had four lambs in the house.

When a lamb comes to the house, it is usually because it is chilled. We warm them up, tube them, and when they are standing up and making enough noise to wake me up, they go back to the barn.

When the mature ewes are lambing, I don't even check the barn at night if the temperature is above 20 degrees Fahrenheit. Lambs are born in a larger drop pen, then newborn lambs are penned with their mothers in 5' x 5' lambing jugs, usually for 24 to 48 hours. We strip teats to be sure the ewe has milk and the teats aren't plugged, and we tube most lambs if they haven't already nursed when we find them.

A full-time shepherd wouldn't tube as many lambs as we tube, but I like going to work knowing a newborn has a full belly and will be fine for the 10 hours that I'm gone. At night, we tube them so I can go to bed and sleep instead of checking the barn again in the middle of the night.

My first bit of advice to new shepherds is the same advice I was given 20 years ago when we started this project — buy a tube and large syringe and learn to tube lambs. It's easy. My

youngest started tubing lambs when he was about eight years old.

The second piece of advice is something I learned on my own. Move your wife's coat out of the mud room before bringing lambs in for the night. She won't be happy if her clothes smell like a barn,....and she won't forget about it before she gets home from work that evening either.

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 gmclure@ksu.edu.

K-State Research and Extension is an equal opportunity provider and employer.