

Breeding ewe lambs and doe kids

On many small ruminant farms, breeding ewe lambs and doe kids is a way to increase productivity and profitability. If they are properly-fed and managed, ewe lambs and doelings can be bred to produce offspring by the time they are 12 to 14 months of age. While they don't tend to be as productive their first year as more mature females, they have higher life-time productivity than females that are not bred to lamb/kid until age 2.

Age at puberty (sexual maturity) is affected mostly by breed and nutrition. Some breeds reach puberty at an earlier age than others. Some breeds may not reach puberty until they are almost a year of age. Crossbred females usually mature earlier. Females born in the fall are not likely to conceive until their first fall exposure.



Ewe lambs and doe kids should be at least 7 months of age before breeding, but after that, size is more important than age when deciding when to breed. It is generally recommended that ewe lambs and doelings achieve 60 to 70 percent of their mature body weight before being bred. For this reason, it may be necessary to feed some grain to get them big enough. At the same time, full feeding of replacement females is generally not recommended. To ensure birthing ease, young females should be bred to males of the same (or smaller) breeds. Rams/bucks known to sire offspring with heavy birth weights should be avoided.



It may not be economical for all operations to breed ewes/does so early. The practice is most beneficial for intensively-managed operations with high input costs. It is less common for range-based and and/or fiber-focused enterprises.

Ideally, ewe lambs and doe kids should be bred, fed, and managed separately from mature females until the time of their second mating. These young females are still growing and don't compete as well for feed or the male's attention. Their nutritional requirements are higher. Mostly they need a more nutrient-dense diet. They should be monitored more closely for birthing problems and mothering and milk issues. They are usually more susceptible to parasitic worms and should probably be dewormed during their first periparturient period.

