

## CREEP FEEDING USED IN ARTIFICIAL REARING OF LAMBS

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**Abstract.** *Being widely used in the sheep industry creep feeding is sure to increase sheep milk yields and lamb's growth rate. Winter-borne and orphaned lambs are kept by artificial rearing, special ration being needed. Lambs require proper feed sources, feeding frequency and amount to grow well. Artificial rearing with creep feeding is likely to be cost-effective in highly prolific flocks with winter lambing or multiple births.*

**Key words:** *creep feeding, artificial rearing, sheep industry, lambs, milk replacement, creep ration*

Creep feeding is a common practice in the sheep industry. In many sheep flocks milk production is a limiting factor. It is due to a lot of multiple births that is so many prolific ewes have too many lambs for the milking ability of the dam. There are orphaned lambs there. In this case, the most natural and economical way is to foster these lambs. Artificially-reared lambs should be creep fed to facilitate early weaning. Lambs are born in winter months are often creep fed. Creep feeding provides supplemental nutrition to nursing lambs. (Picture 1).



Lamb creep feeder



Creep feeder gate



Lamb using creep

**Picture 1 – A creep system of lambs additive feeding: the creep gate allows lambs to come in but ewes are blocked**

Being creep-fed lambs almost always grow faster in comparison with conventionally fed ones, especially if grain is the main source of supplemental nutrition. The faster is the growth, the younger and sooner lambs can be marketed, often at time of high demand periods. Creep feeding teaches young animals to eat all by themselves. It reduces the stress of early weaning. The rumens of artificially-reared lambs will develop earlier. Creep feeding is also advisable when pasture

quality or quantity is scarce. There are some advantages of extra nutrition: it may help to improve tolerance to internal parasites and increase marketable milk in case of removing lambs from the ewe with farther feeding milk replacer [2, 4, 5].

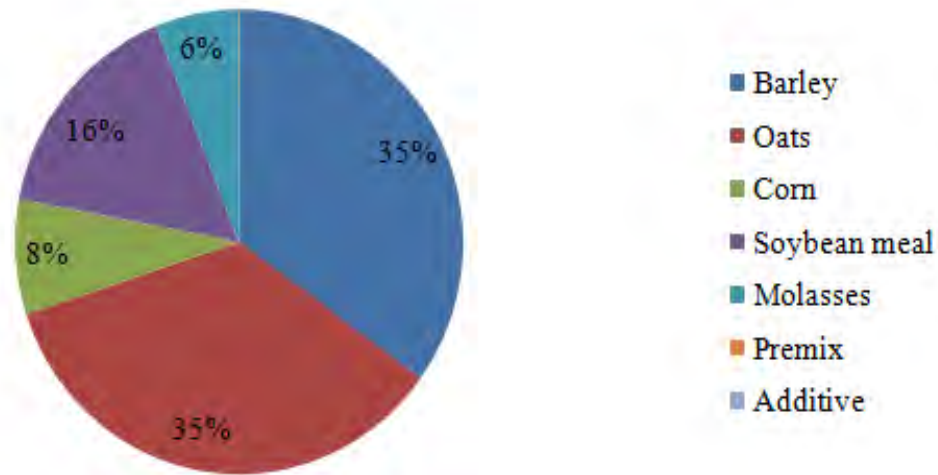
Colostrum feeding at birth is the single most critical feeding and management point in the lamb's entire life. Ideally, a lamb should receive 50ml per kg of bodyweight of its own mother's colostrum, within 1 hour after the birth. This is to promote passive protection of the lamb until its own immune system begins to perform properly. Due nutrition of the ewe during gestation period will ensure adequate colostrum quality and quantity. If there is too little colostrum it may be replaced by colostrum of a ewe from the same flock, artificial colostrum or combination of the above. Milk replace is a complete and convenient way of delivering nutrients to the lamb. Either bottles fitted with nipples, or nipple pails can be used for milk replacement. Following the practice – one nipple for each lamb – is of great importance, so that all animals have equal opportunity to consume their allotted amount of milk. The total daily feeding rate should be no more than 10% of a lamb's own body weight, and as many as four feedings per day. After the milk feeding period lambs should be introduced to creep feed, ideally by the time they are 10 days old. You can make your own creep ration or purchase a commercial product. When lambs are young, feeds with a small particle size are more palatable to them. As they get older, they prefer coarser feeds and are able to digest whole grains very efficiently [1, 3, 4, 5]. Appropriate feeding sources at proper frequencies are given in the Table.

*Table 1*

**Feed source and frequency feeding for lambs from birth to weaning**

<b>Age (days)</b>	<b>Feed source</b>	<b>Food frequency</b>
0-24 hr.	colostrum	4 to 5 times
1-3	milk replacement	3 to 4 times daily
4-7	milk replacement + creep	2 to 3 times daily
8-21	milk replacement + creep	2 times daily
21-35	milk replacement + creep or solid feed	consider weaning

Clean, fresh water must be available at all time from one or two days of age onward. Fresh water will make the animals more likely to utilize feed from troughs and bowls. The more quickly lambs can be adapted to using grain or forage, the sooner milk products can be withdrawn successfully. Creep feed should be similar to the weaning ration in composition; it must be made of high quality ingredients, with 17 to 20% crude protein (CP) [2, 4, 5]. A sample creep ration is shown at Picture 2.



Picture 2 - Creep ration for lambs

Although oats are recommended to be included, barley may be substituted one for one to replace oats without altering ration analysis. Oat inclusion in the diet should be reduced if any hay is provided, on account of the high fibre content of oats and the possibility of causing ‘hay bellies’. Corn may also be replaced by barley. Supplement vitamins and minerals should be included in the ration. Vitamin premix and mineralized salt may be added at 50g per 100 kg feed. Therapeutic medications may be given to the lamb under a veterinarian’s guidance using the feed [4, 5].

Artificial rearing with creep feeds is used by farmers to increase survival and growth rates for young stock. To be economical, the majority of feeds in the creep should be consumed and the best growth rate of lambs should be kept. Feed source and frequency feeding should be well balanced from birth to weaning. Creep feeding is a good business practice for highly prolific sheep flocks.

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