

## Refshaw Ramblings from the Land of the Rising Sun

*Jeremy Refshaw, President*

Greetings, I hope everyone's barns are bursting with newborn lambs this spring. I am going to address the issue of division in our association that has been going on for as long as I can remember, the division between those that show Polypay sheep and those that produce Polypay's for production only and use performance data as a tool.

Here is a little background on where I stand on the issue and how I came to my conclusions. I'm sure I will make some people upset by what I say but it is what it is. Believe it or not I used to show sheep in college and won quite a few contests, so I do know a little bit about the show ring and what goes on. I also used to judge general livestock in high school and college, so I know about judging as well. In my experience, I have observed the show ring can be greatly influenced by trends and fads such as height, size, and lack of capacity. Over time the show ring has ruined many breeds of sheep, cattle, and hogs by following these trends and fads that have no importance to the actual productivity and economic ability of the animal. I have never heard of anyone paying their feed bill with a grand champion ribbon.

The Polypay Breed of sheep was founded and developed for production purposes only. They were developed to be the most productive and economical breed of sheep for the commercial sheep industry. I have never found a judge that can determine if a ewe lamb is going to have triplets and raise them or just a single. I have never found a judge that can say if a ram's daughters are going to be good mothers and produce a lot of lambs or not. Production data or NSIP gives you that information. You can't evaluate what you don't measure. With NSIP you can find out in your flock and compare it with other flocks to determine which sheep have the most genetic potential for certain traits.

Our bylaws state specifically that we will "support the exhibition of Polypay sheep by youth as an educational and family activity." I am not against kids showing their Polypay sheep for 4H, FFA or youth activities. My kids showed their lambs at our county fair when they were in 4H and it taught them how to handle sheep properly and work hard. Showing sheep is just one way for youth to get involved in the sheep industry and to learn valuable skills. Youth should be taught the difference between show animals and production animals. I would like to challenge our membership to come up with other activities for our youth to participate in with their sheep that would emphasize the actual productivity of their sheep. Activities that evaluate sheep through NSIP or barn records to determine productivity, combined with visual evaluation of production traits would be a good way to learn about the importance of production records and NSIP. I think the future of our industry is our youth and we need to prepare them by giving them the proper tools to be successful in the future instead of rewarding them with ribbons that collect dust hanging up in their room.



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## A Fond Farewell from Hidden Valley

Those of you who know us well may recall that it was our plan to lamb our flock again this spring and then disburse the flock. Like many other plans, it had to be modified. The past two years have been filled with many surgeries as well as two series of chemotherapy. The good news is that as of December I was declared cancer free for now at least. However, the highly invasive surgery that brought me to that point also left me quite weak and recovery seemed to be progressing quite slowly in January when we received a phone call from New England Ovis with an offer to purchase our entire flock.

At age ten I received an orphan lamb and that was the beginning of a 67-year adventure with sheep. We first experienced Polypays with the purchase of four ewe lambs and a ram at the national sale in 1979. Through my ownership of sheep and working on the Purdue research farm during my college years, I had experience with many breeds of sheep. It soon became obvious that the Polypays were different. They are truly the maternal breed.

Among the many things we have enjoyed from our sheep experiences are the many friendships we have made with buyers and fellow breeders. We have especially looked forward each year to traveling to Spencer

for the Center of The Nation Sale where there are always very productive sheep for sale and a lot of friends to visit with on this annual excursion. Thank You Jerry and Mike for getting this sale started many years ago. It has been, by far, the most successful selling opportunity for many of us who have been producing the type of sheep that the commercial industry has been willing to pay good money for.

As Chris and I step away from this important facet of our lives I have one last suggestion for our Polypay board of directors. In the winter issue of the newsletter there was a note that the association was a sponsor of the junior sheep show at the South Dakota State Fair. There are strong feelings within our breeders on the merits of the show ring as an evaluation tool for production sheep. I enjoyed showing sheep as a youth activity many years ago as have our children and now grandchildren. This is a very divisive issue, and I think it wise that association funds are not used to subsidize either sheep shows or the NSIP program. Those activities need to be self-sustaining if we are to maintain good relations throughout our diverse membership. Thank You to all of you who have made our Polypay experience one of the highlights of our lives.

*Glen & Chris*

## REMINDERS

**Outstanding Member  
Recognition Nomination  
forms are *due April 30.***

Mail completed form to Jeremy Refshaw, 1339 290th St., Waubun, MI 56589. Nomination forms can be found in the *Polypay Winter 2026 Newsletter* or at <https://www.polypay.org/>

**ANNUAL POLYPAY  
SHEEP ASSOCIATION  
Annual Meeting**

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**JULY 24, 2026**

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**Clay County Fairgrounds  
Spencer, Iowa**

# A New Look for the Polypay Association?

*The Board of Directors wants your input!*

Is it time for the association to have a fresh logo or is the old logo working just fine? Follow the QR code to cast your vote to retain the current logo or update to a new look. Help decide the future of the association's branding!



## 2026 NSIP Sponsored Sales

### NSIP Online Ram & Ewe Sale (All Breeds)

Wednesday, July 8th

Online at [PLAuctions.live](https://PLAuctions.live)

Contact [Zach@PLAuctions.live](mailto:Zach@PLAuctions.live) to consign

### Center of the Nation NSIP Sale

Saturday, July 25th

Clay County Fairgrounds, Spencer, IA

Sale Managed by Heartland Group

Contact [Zach@PLAuctions.live](mailto:Zach@PLAuctions.live) to consign

# Successful Weaning Strategies for Lambs

**Richard Ehrhardt**

*Senior Extension Specialist, Michigan State University*

## Introduction

The goal of weaning is to minimize stress on lambs and ewes to ensure high health and performance. It is possible to wean lambs under the right conditions to minimize any negative impacts on growth and to also minimize the risk of the ewe for mastitis. This involves careful consideration of lamb age at weaning and diet of both the lamb and ewe.

## Age at weaning

Unlimited access to a creep diet starting around two weeks after birth can allow for adequate consumption of creep feed by weaning age to effectively minimize any growth check over their transition from a milk diet to dry feed. Creep consumption of at least a pound per day prior to weaning ensures a seamless transition to only dry feed. Creep consumption starts to accelerate about thirty days after birth when unlimited access is offered. Lambs from well fed ewes will tend to consume less creep feed than those that are underfed. In our studies on preweaning lamb growth at MSU, we have found that lambs tend to reach a consumption of one pound of creep feed per day around forty days of age. They consume more when their dams produce less milk and less when their dams produce more milk. In our production system, we wean lambs at an average age of fifty days as weaning at this age with lambs consuming creep feed results in no change in lamb growth over the weaning period. Our lambs consume 1-1.5 lb. of creep feed at this age. We consider forty days the minimal age of weaning in lambs given access to creep feed. Lamb raised on pasture-only tend to make a better transition if weaned after sixty days of age.

## Special considerations for lambs weaned off pasture and onto a grain diet

When lambs are weaned off pasture onto a grain-based diet, there are a few additional considerations for success. Providing a by-product feed such as soy hulls to pasture-raised lambs before weaning helps in the transition and provides a safe, high-energy feed similar in quality, fiber content, and energy to pasture. Soy hulls can also serve as the base of the diet to allow blending in of the complete grain-based grower diet over a ten-day period following weaning. When soy hulls are offered to the flock a few times prior to weaning, the ewes consume them quickly, but the lambs quickly become curious and interested and begin consuming them along with their moms particularly after a second or third feeding. This allows lambs a chance to “learn” what soy hulls are which allows them to consume them more quickly right on day one of weaning. There are also important health considerations to be aware of when weaning lambs off

pasture and onto feed in terms of parasite infection. Both gastrointestinal nematodes (GIN) such as the barber pole worm as well as coccidia infections tend to increase markedly at weaning due to the lower immunity of lambs due to stress. To prevent a coccidiosis outbreak, provision of coccidiostats or a preventative treatment of amprolium in water are often warranted. It is also advised to treat with an effective anthelmintic combination to control GIN infection when weaning lambs off GIN-contaminated pasture onto dry feed into a barn or feedlot. Lambs are very susceptible to GIN at this stage and can suffer badly as existing infections become much more severe with the stress of weaning.

## Maternal diet during weaning

In the sheep management system at MSU we have developed an effective weaning protocol that minimizes stress and allows the lambs rapid growth at weaning and minimizes ewe weight loss. Minimizing weight loss of ewes is important in our program as our ewes are on an accelerated lambing system in which they can give birth every 8 months. In this system, the ewes are re-bred about three weeks after weaning. To maximize ovulation rate at mating, the ewes need to be actively gaining weight for a few weeks before ram exposure. Therefore, the loss of weight at weaning needs to be minimal to make this system work. Simultaneously, we also need to reduce milk consumption at weaning to lower the risk of mastitis.

To accomplish these goals, we have developed a seven-day protocol in which we remove lambs on day four of the protocol. Starting on day one, three days before weaning, we reduce dietary protein concentration to <11% crude protein and reduce diet energy content by about 30%. We do this by removing all protein concentrate feed and by replacing our lactation forage with wheat straw at about 40% of the diet. Another way to make a similar diet change would be to stop feeding grain and to replace lactation quality hay with poorer grass hay. The ewes will continue to achieve a high dry mater intake over this period and therefore do not behave as overly hungry; however, the energy and protein content is much lower thus reducing milk production. The lambs are given full access to a creep diet they had been consuming since their second week of life over the entire weaning period. We continue this diet to the ewes for 3 days after weaning and then we increase the energy density of the diet to start our flushing period for the next breeding cycle. In annual lambing programs, this would not be necessary.

Other considerations for successful weaning include ensuring that the ewes are on clean bedding at weaning and that special attention is paid to provide adequate and dry bedding for the ewes for two to three weeks after weaning. This is important to minimize the risk of mastitis. We also prefer to

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## Weaning Strategies... Continued from Page 4

remove the ewes from the lambs to keep the lambs in their familiar surroundings at weaning to minimize their stress. After about a week, the lambs can be moved to new housing if necessary.

### Summary

Historically, weaning protocols for sheep often involve severe and prolonged feed and water restrictions. These protocols are not necessary for successful weaning and may also increase disease issues such as mastitis due to the lower immunity caused by severe underfeeding. As described, it is possible to minimize stress on ewes and lambs while reducing milk production at weaning with a less severe dietary restriction. This effectively reduces milk production without compromising ewe health. When combined with a quality diet for lambs, lambs continue to grow fast and thrive immediately after weaning.

**NOTICE**  
TO PAY  
**ANNUAL DUES**

**DUES are \$30**

**PAYABLE TO:**  
**American Polypay Sheep Association**

**MAIL TO:**  
**Associated Registry**  
**3141C West Broadway Blvd.**  
**Sedalia, MO 65302**



Photo by Scott Wollin

## Refshaw Ramblings...Continued from Page 1

I welcome all members to participate in our association and help promote the Polypay breed. If any of you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or any of our board members. Thanks, and happy lambing.

## ADVERTISE

### **Advertising rates in the APSA:**

**FULL PAGE: \$85**

7.5" w x 10" h

**HALF PAGE: \$45**

7.5" w x 5" h

**QUARTER PAGE: \$25**

7.5" w x 2.5" h

3.75" w x 5" h

**2026 DEADLINES are JUNE 22 & SEPTEMBER 21**

**Ads for the next Newsletter should be sent to**

**BEV BERENS - [uphillfarm494@yahoo.com](mailto:uphillfarm494@yahoo.com)**

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# Ballot for the Board of Directors of the American Polypay Sheep Association 2027

Scott Wollin \_\_\_\_\_

Bryce Freking \_\_\_\_\_

Vote for up to two candidates.

Each active membership that has 2025 dues paid is entitled to one vote.

The APSA Annual Meeting will be held on July 24, 2026, at 7 p.m. Central Time at the Center of the Nation Sale. Mail completed ballot 10 days prior to annual mtg, to Jeremy Refshaw, 1339 290th St., Waubun, MN 56589. All ballots will be opened and counted at the annual meeting.

Mailed ballots should be returned as follows to assure a secret ballot:

1. Mark your ballot
2. Place ballot in an envelope marked "Ballot" on the outside
3. Place that envelope inside another envelope addressed to Jeremy and **include your name in the return address section.**

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## BRYCE FREKING

My name is Bryce Freking. My wife, Bobbi, and I, along with our children Allyah, Makaylee, and Carson, have operated Freking Polypay Genetics near Ceylon, Minnesota since 2011. I have raised registered sheep for over 25 years and have raised Polypays for the past 15 years.

We are proud members of the National Sheep Improvement Program (NSIP), the Pipestone Lamb and Wool Program, and several state sheep associations. Our operation maintains a closed flock of 200 registered, accelerated ewes that lamb eight months of the year. Nearly one-third of our flock belongs to our children.

Our focus is on producing structurally sound, fertile, and highly productive Polypay sheep that benefit the commercial sheep industry. Sheep from our program have made a strong impact throughout the Midwest and across the country, from Oregon to North Carolina.

I previously served as Vice President in 2022 after six years on the board. I would be honored to once again serve the Polypay breed and its membership while working to uphold the vision and inspiration originally established by the Hulet family.

*Bryce Freking*

## SCOTT WOLLIN

My name is Scott Wollin, and I am expressing my desire for a second term on the Polypay Board of Directors. I have raised sheep for 50 years and the last 30 raised Polypays. The first 64 years of my life I lived in northern Minnesota and the last three plus years in central North Carolina. I currently run about 25 registered Polypays. It is my goal to continue to promote the Polypay breed and educate what the breed has to offer for both purebred and commercial producers. I will be open-minded and welcome all thoughts and concerns from membership. I want to always remember the five primary goals the US Experiment Station had in mind when they developed the breed:

1. High lifetime prolificacy
2. Large lamb crop at one year of age
3. Ability to lamb more frequently than once per year
4. Rapid growth rate of lambs
5. Desirable carcass quality.

I would appreciate your support.

*Scott Wollin*