

Refshaw Ramblings from the Land of the Rising Sun

Jeremy Refshaw, President

Greetings fellow Polypay breeders, I hope you all are enjoying the record high lamb prices. Now is the time to capitalize and cash in on these good prices and make smart decisions on how to re-invest your profits, whether it's investing in new genetics for your flock, a new feeding system or increasing your flock size, now is the time to make some investments for the future.

In this newsletter I decided to let the members know how their membership dues and the youth grant fundraiser are being used to improve and promote the Polypay breed. I followed up with one of our youth grant recipients to find out how she is doing with her Polypay's. I hope you all enjoy the letter I received from Jessica Bartmann. Her letter is impressive and it's encouraging to see someone young who is doing so well with her flock of Polypay's. I would also like to thank Billy Hardman for doing such a great job of mentoring Jessica and helping her get off to a great start. Jessica is exactly the type of young people we need for our association and our breed.

I would like to encourage other young adults who are interested in sheep to consider applying for our youth grant, it can be very helpful for a young person trying to get a start in the sheep industry and in the Polypay Breed.

The board has selected a new youth grant recipient for 2026, Adelyn Becker from Freeman, South Dakota. She will be receiving her award at our annual meeting held in Spencer, Iowa at the Center of the Nation sale Friday, July 24th at 7:00p.m.

I would also like to announce to the members that our board also has selected our second recipient for our annual Outstanding Member Honoree for 2026. Todd Taylor from University of Wisconsin has been selected for this honor. Todd has been a great asset to our association; he has been very dedicated and instrumental in improving and promoting the Polypay Breed and mentoring many shepherds.

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A Letter from Jessica Bartmans



Three years ago, I received a Polypay Youth Grant from the American Polypay Sheep Association. Looking back, that grant helped turn an interest in sheep into a growing flock, a passion for genetic improvement, and a long-term commitment to the sheep industry. My first Polypay sheep included a gifted ewe from Houser Polypays. In addition, I purchased

two ewes from Shady Lane Polypays, two ewes from Follow One Polypays, and a ram from Refshaw Polypays at the 2023 NSIP Center of the Nation Sale. Later that year, I also purchased four ewes from Bill Hardman. Bill has been an incredible mentor and blessing throughout my Polypay journey. Since then, I have purchased an additional fifteen ewes and two rams from him. His guidance, willingness to share knowledge, and quality genetics have helped me establish a strong foundation and shape my goals for long-term genetic improvement within my flock. The Polypay Youth Grant gave me the confidence and direction to move forward with my sheep enterprise. What started as a small project has continued to grow into new goals and opportunities. Over the past three years, my flock has produced 60 registered Polypay lambs. In addition, I have begun crossbreeding commercial ewes to Polypay rams, marketing replacement ewe lambs while feeding out wethers for meat production. This has allowed me to explore both the seedstock and commercial sides of the sheep industry. Perhaps the greatest impact of the grant has been the connections it created. Through relationships with breeders, mentors, and other producers, I have gained knowledge and practical experience that have been invaluable as I pursue a degree in animal science and wildlife biology. Learning to use tools such as Excel for record keeping, breeding analysis, and data management has already proven useful in my livestock and breeding classes and has helped me better manage my own operation. Like any livestock enterprise, there have been challenges along the way. Last lambing season, my flock experienced an outbreak of Orf (Soremouth), which reinforced the importance of biosecurity. I am now much more careful when visiting other operations and when bringing equipment, especially shearing equipment, back to my own flock. Through that experience, I also developed a closer relationship with a family friend who is a veterinarian and has become an invaluable source of advice and professional insight. Another unexpected challenge was contracting Q fever last summer. While it was certainly not an experience I would recommend, it gave me a firsthand understanding of *Coxiella burnetii* and reinforced

the importance of livestock and human health precautions. One of the most important lessons I have learned is that purebred Polypays are relatively uncommon in much of the western United States, yet there is still a strong need for the breed. The Polypay's maternal ability, productivity, and adaptability make it an excellent fit for many operations. As I continue my education, I am exploring new ways to market Polypays to both range producers and small flock owners. This year, I have placed greater emphasis on wool quality, which is particularly important to producers in my region. After having my wool professionally graded this spring, I sold most of my fleeces to Whit Stewart at the University of Wyoming. This experience has encouraged me to continue improving wool traits alongside maternal and production characteristics within my flock. This opportunity has helped me develop a wide range of practical skills. I have expanded my knowledge of sheep health, nutrition, breeding management, and record keeping. I continue to refine my breeding program and evaluate management decisions from year to year. I have also worked to improve my financial and health records through spreadsheets and performance tracking. One of the most rewarding skills I have gained is shearing. In the fall of 2023, I attended the Montana Wool Harvesting School, and today I shear my own flock of approximately 80 sheep as well as several small flocks throughout northern Colorado. Learning this skill has given me a greater appreciation for wool production and has helped me become more self-sufficient as a sheep producer. The accomplishment I am most proud of is the direction my flock is heading. Thanks in large part to the foundation genetics I acquired from Bill Hardman and other breeders, I am now retaining replacement ewe lambs that I am excited about and rams that I am confident marketing to other producers. Seeing those improvements from one generation to the next has been incredibly rewarding. Looking ahead, I plan to continue raising Polypays and expanding my operation. While I remain committed to registered seedstock production, I am also working toward developing a larger commercial Polypay-based flock that can provide productive replacement females for producers who need sheep in greater numbers. Professionally, my goal remains to work in wildlife conservation, ideally in a role that allows me to advocate for livestock producers. For young people considering applying for the Polypay Youth Grant, my advice is simple: apply. You never know what opportunities may come from it. There are many people willing to help, whether through the American Polypay Sheep Association, local Extension offices, breeders, or mentors. Don't be afraid to ask questions, especially when learning about NSIP and genetic selection. The knowledge, experience, and connections you gain are often just as valuable as the financial support. I am incredibly grateful to the American Polypay Sheep Association for investing in young producers like me. The Polypay Youth Grant provided much more than financial assistance, it helped launch a flock that continues to grow and has strengthened my commitment to the future of the sheep industry. I look forward to continuing to promote the breed, improve my flock, and contribute to the sheep industry for years to come.

Flushing Basics for Improved Lambing Percentage

Richard Ehrhardt
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The practice of flushing to improve lambing percentage has been adopted by shepherds for one hundred years, perhaps longer. It is likely that shepherds knew that improved nutrition prior to breeding gave them more lambs before researchers were able to document this with confidence. I have written about this in the past, but I am circling back to revisit this now to better clarify recommendations based on recent research and a deeper dive into past research.

Major Phases of Flushing

The response of ewes to improved nutrition prior to breeding (flushing) often produces inconsistent results. To understand this inconsistency, it is helpful to understand that there are three phases of flushing that impact animal response. One is called the static effect, and it starts up to six months before breeding. At the level of the ovary, sheep that are fed at a higher plane of nutrition and steadily gain weight over this long period, tend to have more follicles recruited from the primordial pool. This translates into an improvement of about 10% in lambing percentage for each ten pounds of body weight gain over this long-term period (or 1% for every pound of gain). The static effect of flushing is highly repeatable.

The second response is often called the dynamic phase or dynamic response. This occurs over the 1-2 heat periods prior to ram introduction (17-34 days). Changes in body weight and fatness over this shorter period are less repeatable but they can be highly significant. The dynamic effect is often synonymous with what most shepherds call the flushing effect. In our studies at MSU, we have seen increases of up to 25% in lambing percentage when feeding a high energy diet to produce a gain of 6-7 lbs. of body weight over the 3-week period just before breeding. We have observed this in both spring and fall matings, but the responses can be inconsistent and hard to consistently repeat. Part of this inconsistency may be because ewes in better body condition or weight at the beginning of the dynamic phase show far lower responses to improved nutrition. To say this differently, the static effect impacts the response observed to the dynamic effect.

There is also a third phase called the acute or immediate effect. In this case, changes in energy status over the 4-8-day phase before breeding can also lead to improved ovulation without any measurable change in body weight or fatness. This period coincides with the follicular wave of egg development just prior to ovulation. Both long- and short-term changes in body energy status create signals that communicate with both the ovary and brain to regulate ovulation.

Flushing Management Recommendations to Improve Lambing Percentage

Given this background, what is the most effective and feasible way to improve lambing percentage through pre-breeding nutritional management? The answer to this is dependent on your production system. In flocks that lamb annually, this means sorting off thin ewes (less than a body condition score of 2) following weaning and managing them as separate group to get them up to a BCS of at least 2.5. Once that are at the level, they can be comingled with the rest of the ewe flock. It is best to manage the ewes during the long period following weaning to achieve a BCS of at least 2.75 by 3 weeks prior to the breeding season. For accelerated flocks with ewes lambing at 7-8-month intervals, this means providing adequate nutrition during the prior lactation to keep ewes above a BCS of 2.5.

For all production systems, we recommend improving the plane of energy nutrition to two times maintenance energy intake for the 3-week period prior to ram introduction. For an average size ewe (165 lbs.), this should result in a body weight increase of 6-7 lbs. Feeding at this level is higher than recommended in current feeding standards. This program has been applied to many flocks over the past eight years, and field reports indicate that it is making a significant impact in improving lambing percentage compared to feeding at that indicated in current National Research Council (NRC 2007) feeding standards (1.1 times maintenance energy intake for three weeks prior to mating).

Following ram introduction, energy intake can be reduced to 1.1 times maintenance. Feeding a high energy diet into early pregnancy will not improve results and may even reduce lambing percentage due to an increase in progesterone clearance resulting in less support for pregnancy. Also, feeding a high energy diet into early pregnancy will increase the cost of this practice and may result in obesity which can put ewes at risk for ketosis and lambing difficulties later.

Summary

Improving pre-breeding nutrition can improve lambing percentage and this impact begins several months before breeding. Keeping ewes out of thin conditions for the 6-month period prior to lambing is important and then providing a 3-week energy boost just prior to mating will optimize lambing percentage. The plane of nutrition following ram introduction can be reduced to just above maintenance. These pre-breeding nutrition management practices have a large return on investment with improvements in lambing percentage of up to 25% documented in research trials and in the field.

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This membership directory includes members whose dues are paid up as of 1/1/2026

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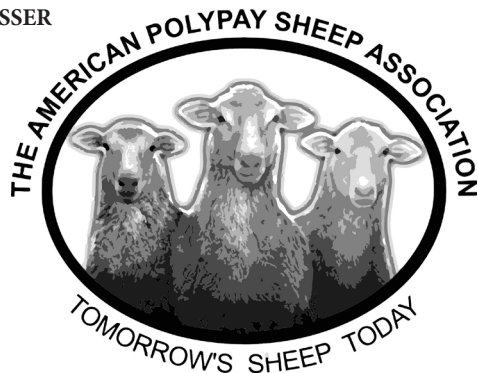
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Refshaw Ramblings... *Continued from Page 1*

In the last newsletter the members were allowed to vote on a new logo for our association, the results of the vote are in, and the new logo was voted down. So, if any member would like to submit a new logo or has any other suggestions for the board, we would welcome them. We would like to give our logo a fresh new look that everyone likes and is willing to use to promote our breed.

I would like to remind everyone that our annual meeting will be held in Spencer, Iowa again this year at the Center of the Nation sale. It will be on Friday, July 24th at 7:00 p.m. We will try to have a virtual meeting set up so people can join our meeting virtually. I hope many of you can attend. Thanks again to everyone who contributes to our association and our breed and have a great summer.

ANNUAL POLYPAY SHEEP ASSOCIATION

Annual Meeting

JULY 24, 2026 7 P.M. - 8 P.M.

Clay County Fairgrounds — Spencer, Iowa

or by Google Meet: <https://meet.google.com/nbw-bnzy-nnn>

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More phone numbers: <https://tel.meet/nbw-bnzy-nnn?pin=4364862561833>

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