

Lamb Vigour Scoring System

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) has developed a scoring system that will enable producers to select animals for traits that will increase survival and the need for interference at lambing. Each lamb should be scored for the three traits - birth difficulty, lamb vigour and sucking assistance.

If you are unable to identify individual lambs after the first two scores give separate sucking scores to each lamb and then determine a litter score for that trait.

Birth Difficulty Score

Score the difficulty of birth of each lamb. If you normally assist all deliveries then this is based on lamb presentation and amount of effort taken to deliver the lamb. If you do not routinely assist all ewes then score whether the ewe did need assistance or not, and how much assistance was required. Scores are as follows:

0. Unassisted delivery or easy, uncomplicated delivery with labour of less than 30 minutes. Lambs were presented correctly and little or no effort was required to deliver the lamb.
1. Unassisted delivery or easy, uncomplicated delivery with labour of longer than 30 minutes. Lambs were presented correctly and little or no effort was required to deliver the lamb.
2. Minor assistance was required. Lamb may be incorrectly presented so assistance required was mainly straightforward correction of presentation before the lamb was delivered with little effort.
3. Major assistance required. Lamb is either incorrectly presented and some effort was required to correct presentation and deliver lamb, or lamb was correctly presented and stuck requiring effort to deliver the lamb.
4. Veterinary assistance was required. It was not possible to deliver the lamb without veterinary assistance/ Caesarean section (or a decision was made to cull the ewe due to a difficult delivery).

Lamb Vigour Score

Each lamb should be scored for activity and vigour at 5 minutes after birth. If you would normally give supplementary colostrum by stomach tube at birth of all lambs then scores should be taken BEFORE colostrum is given. Score each lamb as follows:

0. Extremely active and vigorous lamb. Lamb is standing on all 4 feet, or has stood within 5 minutes of birth, and may be trying to find udder.
1. Very active and vigorous lamb. Holding head up, and on knees, trying to stand up (e.g. balanced on knees and back legs), moving towards ewes and may be trying to find udder.
2. Active, vigorous lamb. Holding head up, rolled onto chest with knees underneath, maybe pushing up onto knees but not yet trying to stand.
3. Weak lamb. Still lying fairly flat although able to hold up head. Not yet trying to raise chest from the ground by pushing up onto knees.
4. Very weak lamb. Not yet raised head, may be having difficulty breathing, either no movements or only weak and uncoordinated movements (e.g. paddling).

Lamb Vigour Scoring System

Sucking Assistance Score

Each lamb should be given a score for how much assistance was required for the lamb to suck from the ewe. If you normally give supplementary colostrum routinely to all lambs at birth then this score is for any ADDITIONAL assistance that you need to give to that lamb (i.e. don't count your initial tubing as sucking assistance). Lambs are scored as follows:

0. Lamb sucking well without assistance and was seen sucking within 1 hour of birth. Lamb always appears full when checked and no time is required to help the lamb suck from the ewe.
1. Lamb sucking well unaided, but first sucked more than 1 hour after birth. Lamb always appears full when checked and no time is required to help the lamb suck from the ewe.
2. Lamb required some help to suck (no more than 2 occasions) from the ewe in the first 24 hours of life.
3. Lamb needed help to suck from the ewe more than twice, and for more than 24 hours, but less than three days.
4. Lamb needed help to suck from the ewe for more than three days.

Using this scoring system to evaluate sires of progeny and flock genetics will enable farmers to select animals that will produce lambs that are vigorous at birth.

With thanks to Dr. Cathy Dwyer, Team Leader, and Professor of Animal Welfare and Behaviour, Scotland's Rural College.



130 Malcolm Rd
Guelph, ON N1K 1B1
(519) 836-0043 general@ontariosheep.org
www.OntarioSheep.org

