

“CHOKING AT FEEDING TIME IN CLUB LAMBS”

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While choking on their feed is not a common occurrence in show lambs, it does occur from time to time and you can lose that special one to choking if you’re not paying attention. Ninety % of the time, we see this in black face sheep. I have seen it happen much less frequently with finewools, crosses and downs. What is the main cause? Aggressive hungry lambs get a big gulp of feed and the big bite of dry feed compacts in the esophagus. The sheep many times will start slinging their heads and jumping in the air because they are literally choking. Sometimes they simply back up from the trough and act like they don’t like the feed and some will attempt to eat but retreat from the trough each time they try to get a bite. Many times, a badly choked lamb will bloat severely and they will hang their heads with lots of saliva and nasal discharge. One bad choking episode can set a sheep back for days because of the bloating and stress from the ordeal.

TREATMENT: When you first see this taking place, you must grab the lamb up firmly and massage the throat and esophagus manually to help break up the blockage. Many times, the lamb will shake the compacted feed by spitting it back up. Keep the affected lamb moving and trotting around in the pen after the massaging. The movement many times will free up the digestive pathway and open up normal breathing again. I want to caution you on using stomach tubes to push the blockage on down and relieve the frothy bloat. In most cases the massaging and physical removal will relieve the animal but in severe cases a stomach tube may be your last resort. Remember every time you tube one, you’re scarring the esophageal passage way and that rough surface will be predisposed to catch feed stuff which can set up a vicious cycle of choking problems. Always consult a veterinarian on these matters dealing with chronic chokers. Another piece of advice on lambs you have rescued from a choking episode is DO NOT FEED hay for 24 hours. Sometimes the swelling and inflammation following an episode can lead to more choking.

Prevention is by far the best remedy in the first place! These things contribute to an increase in choking problems: (1) Hamp/Suffolk breed types, (2) group feeding, (3) Using small round bottom elevator cup type feeders, and (4) coarse, dry feed.

Management adjustments that will help: (1) wet feeding, (2) individual feeding stalls, (3) using larger, flat bottom feeders, (4) feeding plenty of good coarse hay daily, and (5) carefully watch the lambs at each and every feeding.

PRO TIP: On very aggressive eaters, always use a larger flat bottom feeder and you can put large river rocks in the bottom where they have to nibble around the stones to get to the feed. Use stones that are smooth and at least the size of your fist. Many times, simply wet feeding in a flat bottom feeder and spreading the feed out evenly will do the trick. A word to the wise--- Cold, winter mornings are more likely to bring on the choking episodes. In extreme cases on chronic chokers, you can blend feed with warm water in a blender. Questions or concerns just give me a call. Thanks, and good luck with your show stock.