

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS

CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com

Shannon Brook Farm Newsletter

March 2, 2013

As a livestock farmer it's very exciting anticipating the arrival of spring. We have been counting our remaining hay bails, which will carry the flock from now until April 15th. Once we get into mid-April the grass will be growing like crazy and the sheep will be ready to go. We will move them from their winter barn, which is a large, thick plantation of naturally occurring white pines, to the southwest pasture that is wide open. They will be delighted to eat the fresh grass, gorging on the green matter, after a long, hard winter.

This time of year brings danger to the sheep in the form of bloating. Consuming too much wet green grass in too short a time can cause so much gas in the rumen that the blood flow to the sheeps' internal organs becomes restricted. Gas, that can't be released, builds up and the sheep can die within a matter of hours. One method of preventing this is to let the sheep out to green pasture for just a few hours a day then move them back to another area where they can only eat dry hay. Over a period of days they become accustomed to the change and can be let out on pasture all day, every day for months to come.

If a sheep bloats we first have to notice it in order to take action. That's harder than it sounds, though one thing I really enjoy is going out to see how the sheep are faring. Spending fifteen minutes to an hour with them I can detect most problems. It might be something subtle like a hoof that needs trimming or something dramatic like a fractured leg. If we notice a sheep is bloating there are numerous tricks of the trade to relieve the animal of the excess gas. We immediately move the animal to the barn, tying her up to a post. We then put a hollow rod in her mouth with a rope running through it. The rope is tied up behind the ears. The open position of the mouth encourages the sheep to burp. Without assistance they have difficulty doing so. Additionally we can massage her stomach, pushing the gas out as we work. A more drastic approach is to "drench" the sheep by pouring dish detergent down a tube into the sheep's stomach. Although it sounds positively disgusting the soap goes straight to the rumen so the animal doesn't taste most of it. The soap lubricates the rumen and the intestines, allowing the gas to pass out through the sheep's mouth.



Last year four of our ewes were afflicted with bloat. Fortunately we noticed and called the vet right away. She came out to observe the animals. After watching them for a minute or two she said she'd be back. She went to her truck and got the necessary supplies, returning with needles, syringes and medications. After treating each ewe she warned us that they may not get better but we would know within 24 hours. The next morning we could tell that we were out of the woods. The ewes were up and walking around, eating and acting almost normal.

We are fortunate to have a great vet who knows sheep. The few times we have had to call her she is always understanding of our situation and spends time educating us as to what has gone awry and the various options at hand. She serves as our vet, our teacher and is becoming a trusted friend. These days

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS

CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com

it is often hard to find a small ruminant vet who knowledgeable about sheep and goats and has time to take a new client. They are few and far between.



As spring rolls into view we are also assessing the flock's feed, preparing the animals for the field by trimming their hooves and starting an 8-week deworming process. The dewormer we use is two separate formulas of dried herbs. Formula one is mixed with water and given to the sheep the first week, then we switch to formula two doing the same for 7 weeks. Since we are running the sheep through the chute for 8 weeks we stop and trim the feet of 8-10 animals per session. We find this more manageable than trying to trim the hooves of 30-40 animals at a time with hand-operated hoof trimmers.

Compared to conventional dewormers, which are typically given only once per treatment, the organic method is very time and labor intensive. On the other hand it is a safe treatment for the animals and results in clean meat for people. Conventional dewormers have meat withholding times, during which the animal is not supposed to be slaughtered for human consumption, as the drug residues are thought to be harmful to human health. With the organic dewormer we don't have to worry about this as they are herbal remedies that use ingredients that we normally consume such as garlic and oregano.

There is some concern about whether organic dewormers really work for sheep so last year we decided to test the results through a Cornell University laboratory before and after treatment. To our astonishment the worm load dropped to an extremely low level following the eight week treatment. This was surprising as a many factors can change the outcome. For example, if the herbs are harvested too early or too late, the efficacy of the dewormer can change dramatically as the active ingredient in each herb can varies depending on the harvest timing. Based on our experience this past year we will continue down this path.

On another note, the follow-up on Bobo is that his leg has healed! This winter Bobo was born in very cold weather so we took him and his mother to the barn for a week to stay where they would be more comfortable out of the wind. After the week had passed and the weather warmed up I took them back to join the flock. The very next morning I went to feed the sheep only to find that the little lamb's left hind leg had been snapped in half just above the hock. Just like that. A broken leg. Not knowing what to do I thought we might have to euthanize him. What a pity – such a beautiful little ram lamb who was quite large when he was born. After getting advice from two vets and a friend who raises goats for his dairy we realized we could try to heal his leg ourselves. For three weeks we kept his leg splinted, changing the splints and the underlying cushioning every few days.

SHANNON BROOK FARM

ORGANIC • PASTURE-RAISED • LOCALICIOUS
CHICKEN & LAMB

2566 Jennings Road, Watkins Glen, NY 14891-9625 • 607.731.1840 • www.ShannonBrookFarm.com • shannon@ShannonBrookFarm.com



This past week we took his splints off and watched him walk around, the fractured leg dangling a bit. Our vet came by to check on another sheep so she took a look at Bobo as well. She thought his leg had healed. A few days later he was bouncing around his pen happy as a clam. He's getting ready for round two – time to join the flock once again. We'll be as careful as we can about when we put him in with the group but we'll also keep our fingers crossed as farming is partly a matter of luck.