These female lambs will be well over 100 lbs in the fall and can be bred at the age of 7 months. 

FEED AND ENVIRONMENT

You may have heard about flushing. Flushing means that the ewes are offered better food two to three weeks prior to breeding. This can be better pasture as well as an increase in grain feeding. Mother Nature then tells the sheep's body that times are good and that the ewe can raise more lambs. The ovulation rate increases. The effectiveness of flushing is limited when the ewes are already in good condition. However, it is still a good idea to put the ewes in good pasture prior to and during breeding.

It is equally important to reduce any stress during that time. Stressed ewes ovulate less. In addition, many lambs are lost just after they have been conceived if the ewe is stressed. Stress can be caused by heat, pain, thirst, parasites etc. I suggest a pasture that offers shade if there may be still warm weather in September or October. It is not so much because the sheep couldn't raise a lamb with 80 degrees without shade. It is merely for their comfort.

The question of when to start breeding is best answered by another question: When do you want your lambing season to start? Then you count 145 days backwards and you have your starting day of breeding season.

LAMBS

A ewe cycles anywhere between every 14 to 21 days, with the average being 17 to 19 days. That means the bulk of the lambing season can be done within three weeks. A few ewes will return to season when they didn't get pregnant the first time around. Just a few ewes should return to season. If many do, it is likely that there are fertility or conception problems. I cull any adult ewe that returns to season a second time.

I routinely breed female lambs that were born in the spring of the same year. Since I start my main breeding season in November, these lambs are between 7 and 8 months old. About 90 to 95 percent of these lambs get impregnated the first year. The remaining percentage will breed the year after. However, one has to take into account that a good percentage of these lambs may not cycle in November just yet and will breed later in December and January. Ewes should be in good body condition just before and during breeding season. It is obvious to many that a ewe that is too skinny may be a problem. It is less obvious to some that a ewe which is too fat can be just as much of a problem. Fat ewes have often a hard time getting pregnant.

Many publications suggest not putting sheep into pasture with lots of Red Clover since its estrogen-like substance will keep the ewes from breeding or will reduce the ovulation rate. I have not had this experience. I recall a study that was made in East Germany (where I grew up) that concluded that there was no such influence of Red Clover. I have grazed my sheep on pasture with very high Red Clover content and have concluded that there was no such influence of Red Clover or will reduce the ovulation rate. I have many publications suggesting not putting sheep into pasture with lots of Red Clover since its estrogen-like substance will keep the ewes from breeding or will reduce the ovulation rate. I have not had this experience. I recall a study that was made in East Germany (where I grew up) that concluded that there was no such influence of Red Clover. I have grazed my sheep on pasture with very high Red Clover content and have concluded that there was no such influence of Red Clover. I have also de-worm all my breeding ewes. This will reduce the activity of my herding dogs to a certain level. There may be still warm weather in September or October. It is not so much because the sheep couldn't raise a lamb with 80 degrees without shade. It is merely for their comfort.

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