

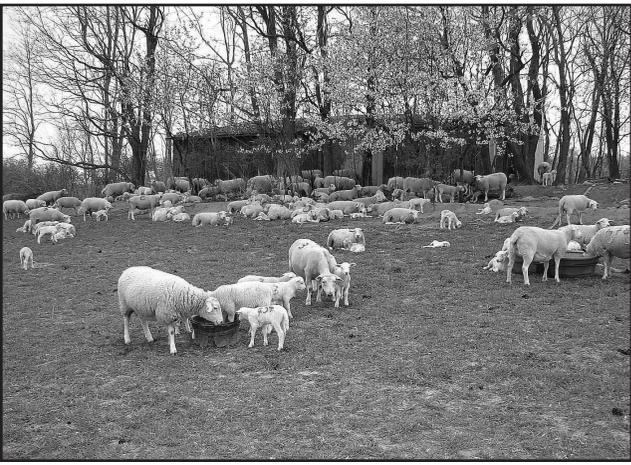
**NON-DAIRY LIVESTOCK****When do Sheep Need Shelter?**

By Ulf Kintzel

An unpleasant day in the middle of February of 2009 prompted me to write this article. It was a very windy day with driving rain, snow, sleet and ice. The temperatures fell from the lower 40s to just above freezing. The wind gusts exceeded 50 mph. We lost power several times. In short, it was nasty.

I had bedded my sheep the night before at an Eastward facing slope that wraps halfway around a homestead, knowing that the wind would shift from Southwest to Northwest. This way I was confident the sheep would have enough shelter from the wind. Yet, being the shepherd that I am, I was still a bit concerned in the morning when I heard the wind howling and the rain beating on the window.

The moment it got light I drove out to the flock. To my amazement some of the sheep hadn't sought shelter from the wind at all. They not only were lying down in the middle of the flat part of the pasture, they were also facing the wind chewing their cud - a clear sign of feeling comfortable.



*These ewes that are in part freshly shorn and their young lambs have access to the shed behind them and will seek it should it start raining or get cold and windy*

Last September marked my 25th anniversary in sheep farming. Yet, sheep still are able to surprise me. So, how tough are sheep really when it comes to the weather? When is shelter from the elements appropriate and when should we not be tempted to spoil the flock?

Right now we are in the midst of winter which brings cold weather and snow. Sheep cope without any problems with temperatures in the single digits and below zero as long as there is no wind. Wind changes everything. Temperatures in the teens are hard to handle if the wind blows at significant speed. However, that does not mean at all that we need to put the sheep in a barn because of this. An old shed, a thick hedgerow or even a little hill that breaks the wind are entirely enough to make it comfortable for the flock.



*Shade and fresh drinking water provide comfort on hot days*

In early spring sheep that are just shorn and young lambs alike are sensitive to cold or rainy days. This can lead to hypothermia which can lead to pneumonia. The flock should have access to shelter like a barn or a shed. Just getting behind the hedgerow might not do it on a rainy day. In fact, I believe this is the most critical time when it comes to the necessity of shelter for the flock.

Late spring is usually not a time that one has to worry about weather conditions. The sheep usually re-grew some wool. The lambs are big enough to withstand the elements simply by their body mass. However, I do remember a very wet June in the late 90s when I was still in Northwest New Jersey. It rained heavily several days in a row and the ewes and lambs never got a chance to dry out between rain showers. The adults and the older lambs coped with these conditions very well. Younger lambs ran the risk of catching pneumonia.

Summer brings a different set of weather conditions to think about. Dry heat is often not a thing to worry about until the temperatures reach the high 80s. However, when the humidity



*It was 5 degrees that February morning but no wind. Obviously, the sheep are not bothered by the cold weather*

*Photos by Ulf Kintzel*

is high sheep feel already uncomfortable in the high 70s and low 80s. Shade may not be a necessity but the flock will feel more comfortable if the noon hours can be spent in a hedgerow or under a few trees. It is definitely time to offer shade when the sheep start panting and seek shade next to each other. Milk production and gain of weight are in my opinion likely to be higher when the sheep are offered this comfort.

Fall is usually a worry free month. It is neither too warm nor too cold. Windy and/or rainy conditions have little to no impact on the sheep. It is simply not cold enough, the sheep have a long enough fleece and the lambs are big enough.

Generally speaking, as long as the sheep are given a choice, whether it is shade in the summer or a windbreak in the winter - they will choose what is right for them as long as they know it is there. If the wind howls or the sun shines and the sheep don't seek the option we offered - don't worry about it. They know best. Forcing them into a barn can bring a whole new set of problems since bacteria that thrive in the moist air of a barn may cause the disease we tried to avoid.

Remember, just because we feel comfortable or uncomfortable in a certain kind of weather does not at all mean the sheep feel the same way.

Of course, my assessment is based on healthy, well fed and well cared sheep. Sheep that are too skinny, have parasites, are sick, or limp may not be as resilient as described in this article.

*Ulf Kintzel owns and manages White Clover Sheep Farm (www.whitecloversheepfarm.com) in Rushville, NY where he breeds grass-fed White Dorper sheep. He can be reached at 585-554-3313 or by e-mail at ulf@whitecloversheepfarm.com.*

**HOME AND FAMILY****Help for Home Owners****USDA's Single Family Home Repair Loan and Grant Program**

By Thomas Becker

Dean and Betty Bieber own and operate a dairy farm outside of Prattsburgh, New York. The farmhouse (circa 1817) is historically known as the Pratt House from Captain Joel Pratt, settler of the Prattsburgh area. Last summer, the roof of the house started to leak and with the low milk prices, the Biebers

could not afford to replace the roof. USDA Rural Development provided a 1% loan for 20 years to finance the roof replacement. This loan was part of the Single Family Home Repair Loan and Grant Program.

"We are glad that Rural Development had this program, and the staff was very helpful in getting the application processed" said Betty



*Pratt House, side view.*



*Pratt House, front view.*

Bieber. As we go into winter, the Biebers have a dry home and this historical site is protected from the elements. For more information on USDA Rural Development programs, contact the Rural Development state office at

(315) 477-6400 or visit Rural Development's web site at [www.rurdev.usda.gov/ny](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ny).

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