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A Ted Bit It's tough work preparing for a month-long orgy

C'mon, admit it— it was the headline that caught you. Now that I have your attention...

It seems this summer has been smokin' by, and with it all the summer jobs on the farm.

The most recent job The Sidekick and I have been working on is sorting the sheep into their breeding groups.

As I've written in the past, we have two sire rams— Hemi and Angus. We have a third one on the way in the coming month, but we haven't yet given him

a name— we have to see how he acts before christening him with a proper name.

We have a deadline here, as Hemi and Angus will soon be moving into the pens with the ewes, spending some 'nudge, nudge, wink, wink' time with the girls, to plant their little seeds, so to speak.

The challenge is making sure the correct ewes are exposed to the correct ram.

You see, some of the ewes in one of the breeding groups are Hemi's daugh-

ters and granddaughters (and if you go back far enough, some are related to 'Dodge' our first ram.)

And on the other side of the coin, some of Angus' daughters are in the other group.

Since our sheep are purebreds, it's kinda important that we don't have any incest in the barn— if

you get my drift. So we have to sort them out.

The magic date is September 1, when the 'boys' will be introduced to the ewes. We want our lambs to be born in mid-February, so we have to make sure the 'speed-dating' session starts on time.

For a month leading up to this date, the ewes have been fed supplements to build up their bodies, and in doing so, catch Mother Nature's attention. If the ewe is well-fed and healthy, Mother Nature says 'Oh, this young lady is in great shape— I'll make sure she has twins or triplets.'

The same with the rams. They've been receiving their ration of barley every morning and night, to buff up their

body weight.

With the rams, there's another reason. When the rams are put in with the ewes, well, they pretty much do one thing for the next few weeks— and eating ain't a part of it.

A ram can drop 15-20 lbs. of body weight during that month, so we beef 'em up a bit beforehand.

I tell ya, it's tough work preparing for a month-long orgy— well, so I've been told.

Both Angus and Hemi will have about 24 ewes each to look after.

This is where the new ram comes in. He'll be responsible for the younger lambs which are only 7-8 months old, to be bred for the first time.

He'll have about 12 ewe lambs to look after later in the fall. His 'date' is November 1, so they will lamb in the spring. A sheep's gestation period is five months, so the young ewes will deliver their lambs in April, when hypothermia is less of an is-

sue with the inexperienced moms.

The new ram is the same age and the same size as the younger ewes, so

everything 'works' well when he's paired with them. (The other rams are quite a bit bigger.)

Having three sire rams makes monitoring the flock's genetics a whole lot

easier.

With three sires, we can alternate the rams with the ewes from one year to the next, so in a worst-case-scenario, they might be breeding their third cousin— which is perfectly acceptable in sheep breeding circles.

So, as the September 1 date looms in the not-too-distant future, both Hemi and Angus have been doing a lot of bellowing and head-banging, as they can sense the females a scant 15 feet away, and are revving their little engines into an amorous state.

And I'm quite certain the boys have shivering thoughts of the upcoming month's delights, wafting through their brains.

Oh to be a young ram...

—Ted Brown can be reached at tbrown@theifp.ca



TED BROWN

'The rams will do one thing

for the next four weeks,

and eating ain't a part of it'