

A course in Lamb Post-Mortem 101, of sorts

Even in death, some good can come, laments Ted Brown



TED BROWN
Column

At this time of the year, I exhale a huge sigh of relief and say to The Sidekick, "We made it through another one."

I'm referring to our annual lambing season.

It's an intense two weeks, when most of the lambs are born in relatively short time. Endless early mornings and late evenings can wear one down by the time they've all arrived.

We check the barn pretty much every couple hours from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. and it can be tiring.

It's not like we have to assist with all the deliveries of the lambs, but one of us should be there, in the event there's a complication, which could threaten the lambs or their mother.

There's an old saying: 'The day a lamb is born, it's searching for a way to die.'

A line that often seems closer to the truth than we like to admit.

It's also said, if you have livestock, it's a given you'll have dead stock.

It's called lamb mortality.

This year we were lucky, only losing four lambs out of nearly 70 born. One was a birthing complication, the other three were weak lambs, or perhaps their mom happened to lay on one of them.

Ordinarily, we keep our dead lambs in cold storage until spring arrives, thaw-

ing the ground, allowing us to bury them at the back of the farm.

But this year was different.

Our veterinarians are part of the farm services of the Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) at the University of Guelph. Our sheep operation is sometimes used as a teaching venue, when the vet on duty brings along OVC students to watch him/her diagnose our sheep. They sometimes do some hands-on work, like ultrasound pregnancy-testing or drawing blood for testing.

Recently, I received an email from Dr. Paula Menzies, professor of the Ruminant Health Management Department of Population Medicine, OVC, asking if we had any dead lambs available.

Over the years, I've had a great working relationship with Menzies, and she's no stranger at our farm. If we have a sheep die of questionable circumstances, it often goes to the U of G animal lab for a post mortem.

That way, if the animal exhibited a medical problem or contagious disease, we could act on it immediately, protecting the remainder of the flock if necessary. Menzies explained she

hoped we didn't have any dead lambs, but it's pretty much a given during lambing season there are gonna be some - and she had a use for them.

I offered our four, and she sent a truck to pick them up the next day.

The lambs were to be used as part of a small ruminant (lambs and kid goats) elective for the final year OVC students to perform post mortems on lambs that had died within the first few weeks of their lives.

Sort of a 'Lamb Post Mortem 101.'

The hands-on exercise is designed to give the students experience, and to teach them to work with their farm clients.

As part of donating lambs to the program, we also provided the history about each lamb: date of birth and death, birth weight, mother's age, was it a difficult delivery. All info to give the students more pieces to the puzzle.

It's a great program, the best part being I receive a report for each of the four lambs, identifying their cause of death. That info might help us to be proactive about our operation, and ultimately save more lambs in the flock.

It's a win-win deal, as the students receive valuable experience, and I receive a cause of death.

But the best part - those four little lambs' deaths had a scientific purpose that may well save others in our flock.

- Ted Brown is a freelance writer for the IFP and can be reached at tedbit@hotmail.com.

THE WAY WE WERE



Esquesing Historical Society photo

As shown in this 1912 photo, springtime flooding from the Credit River was often a problem for Glen Williams residents. Taken from the dam bridge looking towards Cooper's Bridge, the homes in this photo include Marchement House (the white building), and on the hill, Holdroyd House, which still stands today at 552 Main St., and is listed on the Halton Hills Heritage Register. Text courtesy of Heritage Halton Hills.

OPINION

Political membership serious

So, for a \$10 "donation" I can be made to feel that I am actually part of a political party and part of a very important leadership vote.

At best this would be an ego "brag" to friends that I am someone and I care.

Balderdash! This is nothing but a donation.

Most folks donating this pittance most likely cannot talk sensibly about the issues and will likely be part of the high non-voting percentage.

All parties must start to take the process seriously by generating a responsible plan to select leaders. It is important, not a side-show in the electoral forum.

Ernie Ilson

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