

THE EFFECT OF AGE OF EWES AND LAMBING SEASON ON LITTER SIZE AND WEIGHT OF LAMBS

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Summary. In 2000, a study was conducted to determine the effect of age of Lithuanian Blackface sheep and lambing season on the fertility of sheep and weight of lambs at the state enterprise “Šeduvos avininkystė”. The data of 5 - years studies have been analysed. The influence of various factors on vitality and survival rate of newborn lambs until their weaning has been also studied. Ewes from 5 to 7 years of age were most fertile and dropped 0.4 lamb (39.0%) more ($P < 0.001$) than 1 to 1.5 - year-old sheep and had by 11.5% higher fertility than 2 to 4 - year and 8 year and older ewes. Besides, older ewes dropped 0.6 kg ($P < 0.001$) heavier lambs compared with the young ones and at weaning their lambs weighed also 2.3 kg ($P < 0.001$) more. It should be noted that ewes lambing in winter were by 10.4% ($P < 0.01$) more fertile than those lambing in spring. Winter lambs were by 0.2 kg heavier at birth and by 2.8 kg ($P < 0.01$) heavier at weaning than spring lambs.

It is most expedient to mate Lithuanian Blackface sheep at the end of summer (in order to have winter lambing) and to keep higher number of 4 to 6-year-old ewes in a flock. Ewes should be mostly cared about at the second half of pregnancy (100 days), so that vital lambs of 3.5 to 5.0 kg weight were born.

Keywords: sheep, Lithuanian Blackface, lambing season, age of ewes, fertility, weight.