2009 North American Bluefaced Leicester Breeders Survey Results

Summary:

The 2009 North American Bluefaced Leicester Breeders Survey was distributed to with the Bluefaced Leicester Union of North America's Flock Book in April, 2009. The survey went out to 62 breeders and 23 responded by mail or email. This represents a 37% response rate.

The producers' answers were tabulated and the results are shown in red in the following tables. Respondents' comments are recorded on page 4 of this document.

Flock Information:

The average total flock size of the responding farms was 45 sheep, and the average number of purebred BFLs per farm was 22. Twenty-two of the 23 responding farms bred BFL ewes in the fall of 2008.

Only 26% of the responding farms said they flush their BFL ewes prior to turning the rams in.

An average of seven adult ewes per farm were exposed to rams.

Thirty-nine percent (39%) of the responding farms exposed BFL ewe lambs to rams.

Fifty-two percent (52%) also used BFL rams for breeding mature ewes of other breeds; and 22% used BFL rams on ewe lambs of other breeds.

Ewe Deaths:

The cause of death was not asked but a few respondents noted that some losses were due to dog attacks and predators.

Of the 163 adult BFL ewes exposed, two died before lambing and one died at lambing.

Five of the 31 BFL ewe lambs exposed to a ram died before lambing and one died at lambing.

One of the 23 artificially inseminated BFL ewes died before lambing.

Two of the 78 mature ewes of other breeds died at lambing.

Conception Rates:

The BFL rams showed excellent covering ability with a 97% conception rate (156 ewes lambed out of 161 ewes exposed) for mature BFL ewes and 100% conception rates for mature other breed ewes. Artificially inseminated mature BFL ewes also showed a 100% conception rate.

Lambing Percentages:

The lambing percentage of pasture-bred mature BFL ewes was 176%. However, six (26%) of the responding flocks had lambing percentages of 200% or higher. Artificially inseminated BFL ewes had a 195% lambing percentage.

Birth Weights:

Birth weights for purebred BFL lambs ranged from 5 to 14 lbs. Birth weights for crossbred lambs ranged from a low of just 2 pounds to a high of 13 lbs. Many farms reported that lambs were vigorous at birth.

Lamb Survival:

When it comes to hardiness of the purebred lambs, the results showed that mature BFL ewes had a 92% rate of surviving lambs at 7 days. Yearling BFL ewes had a lamb survival rate of 81% at 7 days, and artificially inseminated BFL ewes had an 84% lamb survival rate at 7 days. This contrasts to the hybrid vigor shown in the crossbred offspring of BFL rams, whose figures came in at 95% to 100% lamb survival ratings at seven days. It should be noted that these rates include lamb deaths to predator losses.

Questions or comments:

Please direct any questions or comments about this survey to Becky Utecht, (email becky@riveroakssheep.com or phone 320-679-4117).

Thanks everyone who took the time to complete the survey and return it to me. Thank you to my fellow committee members, Jody McLean and Linda Wendelboe for their help in developing the survey questions. And a big thank you goes out to to Kelly Ward and BLU for distributing the survey to members along with the 2008 Flock Book.

2009 North American BFL Breeders Survey RESULTS- Part 1

Producers entered demographic data and the number of **purebred Bluefaced Lesicester** sheep in their flocks that fit into each breeding category.

Breeder Name/Address: 23 BLU member farms responded out of 62 sent out with the flock book

(37% response rate)

Current Total Flock size: Avg. 45 (All breeds of sheep) (1030 total) Current # BFLs (all ages): Avg. 22 (504 total) BFL Rams (>1 yr): Avg. 2.5 (58 total)

BFL ewes (>1 yr): Avg. 12.5 (289 total)

	Adult BFL Ewes (>1 yr at time of exposure to ram)	BFL Ewe lambs (under 1 yr old at exposure to ram)	BFL Ewes Artificially Inseminated
1.) # BFL Ewes exposed to ram (or Al'd)	Total - 163 ewes exposed on 22 farms	Total - 31 Ewe lambs exposed on 9 farms	Total -23 ewes Al'd on 2 farms
	Avg. 7 per farm	Avg. 3.5 ewes per farm	Avg. 11 ewes per farm
2.) Did you flush prior to exposure or AI? (Circle one)	6 - Yes 17 - No 26% 74%	2 - Yes 7- No 22% 78%	0 - Yes 2 - No 100%
2 a.) If yes, with what?	Corn, pellets, grain, lush pasture, nearby rams	Grain	
3.) # BFL Ewe deaths prior to lambing (do not report their fetal counts below)	2 (dog attack)	5	1 (dog attack)
4.) # BFL Ewe deaths at lambing (report their lamb counts below)	1 (dystocia - lambs not in- cluded in counts below)	1	0
5.) # BFL ewes who lambed (include ewes with stillborns and abor- tions but not ewes who died at lambing)	155 total ewes lambed 97% conception rate	11 total ewes lambed 46% conception rate	22 ewes lambed 100% conception rate
6.) Total # Lambs born (include stillborns and abortions)	273 total	16 total	43
	176% lamb rate	133% lamb rate	195% lamb rate
7.) # live lambs at 7 (seven) days	250 total	13	36
	92% live lambs > 7 days	81% live lambs > 7 days	84% live lambs > 7 days
8.) # Lambs stillborn or aborted	12 5% loss rate	2 13% loss rate	3 7% loss rate
9.) # Lamb deaths during days 1 to 6	11 4% death rate days 1 - 6	1 6% death rate days 1 - 6	4 9% death rate days 1 - 6

Birth weights, suggestions, comments, etc.: <u>See page 4</u>

2009 North American BFL Breeders Survey RESULTS - part 2

Producers entered the number of <u>non-purebred BFL ewes</u> in their flocks that produced lambs sired by a **purebred Bluefaced Lesicester ram** in the appropriate category.

	Adult Ewes (>1 yr at time of exposure to ram)	Ewe lambs (< 1 yr old at exposure to ram)	
1.) Total # Ewes exposed to BFL ram	78 ewes on 12 farms 52% of respondents used BFL rams as crossing sires	15 ewes on 5 farms 22% of respondents used BFL rams on ewe lambs of other breeds	Breed(s) of Ewes: BFL crosses; Shetland; Hamp/Suffolk cross, 1/2 blackface 1/2 BFL; BFLxBL; Cheviot; Icelan- dic; Cormo; Romney;
2.) Did you flush prior to exposure or Al? (Circle)2 a.) If yes, with what?	Yes - 3 No - 9 (25%) (75%) Corn, Ram across fence	Yes -2 No - 3 (40%) (60%) Grain	NCCx Rideau/Canadian; BFLx Rideau/Charolais; Jacob; JacobxColumbia
3.) # Ewe deaths prior to lambing (do not report their fetal counts below)	0	0	
4.) # Ewe deaths at lamb- ing (report their lamb counts below)	2 (1-coyote kill)	0	Breed(s) of Ewes: BFL/Shetland; Shetland
5.) # Ewes who lambed (include ewes with still- borns and abortions but not ewes who died at lambing)	76 100% conception rate 5a.) # single births: _14 5b.) # twin birth: _54 5c.) # triplet births: _12 5d.) Quads or more: _0	5a.) # single births: _8 5b.) # twin birth: _2 5c.) # triplet births: _0 5d.) Quads or more: _0	Breed(s) of Ewes: See above
6.) Total # BFL-sired Lambs born (include stillborns and abortions)	154 197% lambing rate	12 120% lambing rate	
7.) # live BFL-sired lambs at seven days	147 95% live lambs > 7 days	12 100% live lambs > 7 days	
8.) # BFL-sired Lambs stillborn or aborted	3 2% loss rate	0 0 % loss rate	
9.) # BFL-sired Lamb deaths days 1 to 6	4 3% death rate days 1-6	0 0 % death rate days 1-6	
10.) Birth weight ranges, If collected	6 - 13 lbs	Smallest weights reported were 2 and 4 pounds.	Breed(s) of Ewes: See above

Thank you so much to everyone who took the time to complete this survey!

Questions or comments about these results? Please email becky@riveroakssheep.com or call 320-679-4117.

2009 North American BFL Breeders Survey RESULTS - Comments

Flushing comments:

Lush pasture and 1# corn/head/day, 1 week prior and 10 days after ram in.

Grain; whole corn/pellets; whole shelled corn; rams across fence.

Birth weight comments/purebred BFLs:

8-13 lbs. Birth weight range; lambs ranged from 8 to 12 pounds at birth; birth weights: 5-12 lbs.; average birth weight ~10 lbs. - range from just under 9 to 12 lbs.; Birth weights ranged from 7.25 for smallest triplet to 14 for a pair of large twins; triplets - 2 ewe lambs - 1 ram lamb weighed 8 lbs., 9 lbs., and 10 lbs.; 11 pounds single; not able to accurately weigh lambs; 8.5 to 13 lbs.

Birth weight comments/Crossbreds:

No birth weights collected but all lambs medium to large with excellent vigor at birth;

7 - 9 lbs.; 9 - 13 lbs.; 6 - 12 lb lambs from adult ewes, 2 - 4 lb lambs from yearling ewe; 7 - 9.5 lb. lambs from adult ewes and 6 lb. lambs from yearling ewes; 7 - 13 pounds; 11 & 12 lb. twins - big and vigorous; 5 - 11 lbs.

BFL comments:

- Numbers in top box are as of 7/27/09; had a few others prior to this date in 2009.
- I have not been able to get nearly as good conception rates for BFL ewe lambs compared to my black-face ewe lambs. BFL ewe lambs are very slow to mature.
- Shouldn't Question #5 (specifying # of singles, twins, triplets, etc.) be included on this side?

 **Answer- Yes, my error! Sorry that it wasn't included for the purebred ewes.
- I try to keep birth weights below 10 pounds. Easier lambing for both lambs and ewes. My lambs are very lively and eager to nurse.
- One nervous first time mother lost her lamb after a series of injuries and poor feeding at around 4
 weeks. Another first time mother refused to feed for 2 weeks but lamb persisted until mom gave in. All
 lambs quite vigorous and aggressive.
- Lost ewe lambs to barber poles, ewes to dog attack. I'm moving several ewes from purebred to commercial production because of birth weights and udder quality. The pasture-exposed ewes were cleanups from AI, bred to Texel. Ewes were fed grass hay and pasture throughout breeding, gestation and lactation. Lambs have access to creep ration.
- One of our mature ewes didn't catch at first breeding.
- Out of 3 yearling ewes only one had babies triplets. One ewe didn't take and we lost the other to very small birth canal dystocia.
- Both lambs lost by yearlings were very large, single rams. It would have been better to breed them to a proven ram with known lower birth weights. The ram lamb I bred them to throws larger lambs. None of the adult ewes lost their lambs or needed assistance. Only one ewe was assisted a breech twin. Neonatal vigor was excellent across the flock. My lambing rate was disappointing. The only comfort is that most lambs born were ewe lambs.
- Two sets of triplet ewe lambs. Yea!
- Fantastic steady growth. I do plan to expose my non-BFL ewes to my BFL ram lamb this fall.

Non BFL ewe comments:

- Only three of the triplets were put on my bottle/bucket program. I modified my lactation program for ewe with trips to allow better survival and ewe rearing.
- Two pounder made it! BFL/Shetland cross -- 3/4 BFL, 1/4 Shetland