

Two lambs were born Sunday one day after Winter Farm Day.

This ewe rejected one of her lambs.

That happens frequently enough that every shepherd has experience with the problem. I am not aware of any scientific reason why a ewe would reject a lamb. There are as many anecdotal reasons as there are shepherds.

A rejected lamb is called a “bummer”, although most folks just refer to them as orphaned. Of course, they are not literally orphans. Just rejected.

Some shepherds think that ewes reject a lamb because it is weak, or because it is a twin or triplet. The ewe does not think it can feed that many.

I doubt that. Sheep have good instincts but they are not known for abstract thoughts.

Some think that the first ewes to birth in a flock are more likely to reject. Later ewes might learn from their predecessors in birthing. Maybe.

Some think that ewes are more likely to reject a second lamb that results from a hard birth. Maybe.

Some think that ewes will reject a lamb of a different color. Maybe.

Or a lamb that is handled by a human and then carries a human scent. I doubt that.

In any case, this ewe accepted the first-born, dark, spotted lamb.

It seemed to accept the larger, white, second lamb but then turned against it. Fortunately, the white lamb was able to nurse and get some colostrum before rejection.

Colostrum is important, actually crucial for the survival of mammals.

Colostrum is not milk. Colostrum is a breast fluid produced by humans, cows, and other mammals before breast milk is released.

It's very nutritious and contains high levels of natural antibodies. Colostrum promotes growth and health. It promotes immunity, helps fight infections, and improves gut health throughout life.

Once the mother makes a rejection decision it is extremely hard to reverse.

The ewe will head-butt the lamb repeatedly when it tries to approach.

It is a difficult thing to watch.

Again, there is zero science on getting a ewe to accept a once rejected lamb.

Nevertheless, most every shepherd has a favored remedy. None work a high percentage of the time.

Some rub afterbirth or the ewe's urine on the rejectee to make its smell right.

Some restrain the ewe repeatedly to allow the bummer to nurse. The ewe may accept the lamb after some days and many trials.

Some rub vanilla extract or other strong scents on the lamb's nose and the ewe's head.

There is one solution that consistently works well for the lamb and the ewe.

That is to remove the lamb and bottle feed it.

The only drawback is that newborns need to nurse every two hours. In a couple days that can be cut back to four feedings a day and in a week or two reduced to two or three times daily.

We have done this many times, but neither Gail nor I wanted to take this job on.

We came up with a delightful solution.

Gail called Jennifer Jopp and offered the still healthy lamb to the Jopp family. Emma and Aaron are two teenage farmers who help me at our farm.

The bummer lamb is very well cared for and doing grand. You can see it by going to Jennifer's Facebook page. Sorry, I do not really do Facebook and cannot supply the link. Just Google Jennifer Jopp and you should be able to get there.

Tom



This is the accepted lamb. Robustly healthy, a bit smaller than its twin but well accepted. Some shepherds would theorize that the ewe accepted this black lamb because it matched her coloring. Maybe, but I doubt it.



At first the ewe seemed to accept this white lamb. It groomed the lamb and let it nurse the all important colostrum.



Then the ewe changed her mind. Who knows why?

