

From the  
Premier Breeder  
of British Registered  
Soay Sheep



SOUTHERN OREGON SOAY SHEEP FARMS

# Viewpoint

THIS MONTH'S FEATURE

## Winter Care

by Kathie Miller

**When you wake up in the country in the winter to no electricity, you know you are in trouble.**

A wood stove can keep you warm and candles will light your way, but with no power you have no well (bore hole) and no running water. A friend's recent experience illustrates the dangers of such extreme conditions.

It was -27F/-32C and her farm was buried in two feet of snow. Her breeding groups, two young rams and two adult ewes, were in separate shelters far out in her snow-filled pastures. She hauled water out to them, but it froze shortly after she got there. The sheep were staying dry, except for one little ram that had run out into the deep snow and could not get back to the shelter. Fortunately, she was there to free him quickly. It could have been disastrous.

She broke-up the breeding pairs earlier than planned and brought all the sheep into the insulated barn. They were better protected there

and getting feed and water to them was easier.

If you find yourself in need of more winter shelter, a temporary barrier of stacked straw bales can serve as a fourth wall on a three-sided shed and give animals instant protection from the wind and blowing snow. In here, in a deep bed of straw, they will be comfortably out of the weather.

Older animals, or those with health issues who are



Landa Weatherbeeta Coat

low on weight, can have problems with the cold, especially with short fleece. Housing them in the barn often isn't enough. For these Old Age Pensioners, I increase their food intake by



Out to feed in the snow

supplementing their regular grass hay with soaked sugar beet pulp, concentrates—rolled barley or COB (corn-oat-barley)—or a mix of the two. Rolled or crushed grains are more digestible and don't just go straight through them as whole grains do, but because of this they are easier to over-feed. Barley is energy-rich and a good warming food, but it must be used *very* sparingly and added gradually, especially for males.

Too much grain can cause an imbalance of calcium and phosphorus which will cause urinary calculi: stones or crystals that form in the bladder and kidneys and can block the urethral tract. This can be life-threatening for male sheep, especially wethers, and most especially those who were castrated young. Lack of

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## The Perfect Christmas Present

by Kathie Miller

**I am so excited about my Christmas present I had to share it with you.**

My "son" (He isn't really my son. I "adopted" him when he was 33 and he already had three kids and two ex-wives—but he is my family.) once again came up with a clever idea for me.

On Christmas morning, I opened a large box which contained what looked like three large, black plastic wheels. They were hollow

on one side and had spokes on the other. I couldn't imagine what I was supposed to do with three wheels. "You don't already have any of these?" he asked, rather surprised. "No. What on Earth are they for?"

"They make a reusable screw-top lid for all of those plastic five-gallon buckets you have lying around here! You snap the plastic rim over the rim of the bucket and then unscrew the "spokes" to lift out the lid.

They also have a seal that makes them water tight."

"SALT!!!!" I yelled. "Salt? What do you mean 'salt'?" he asked with a puzzled look on his face. "They will be perfect for my sheep salt," I explained. "It absorbs the moisture in the air and clumps because I can't seal the lid. Now, I won't have that problem!"

By next Christmas I suspect my barns will be full of buckets with these lids. What a clever "son".

## RESOURCES

### Winter Supplies

**Landa Weatherbeeta** dog coats are available on many Internet sites. Ebay seems to be the cheapest.

A safer alternative for a Heat Lamp from Premier1  
[www.premier1supplies.com](http://www.premier1supplies.com)

The **Gamma Seal Lid** permanently transforms a 12" diameter bucket into an air tight, leak proof, resealable storage container. It is a two-piece system (a universal adapter ring and a threaded replacement lid) that fits any 3.5- to 7-gallon plastic bucket. Costs vary from site to site, but are about \$7.95. They do not seem to be available in the UK.

Two sources are:  
[baytecontainers.com](http://baytecontainers.com)  
 and  
[usaemergencysupply.com](http://usaemergencysupply.com)

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[www.soayfarms.com](http://www.soayfarms.com)

All advice in this newsletter has been used successfully on our farm. It is important to remember that every animal and situation is different. Before you try any of our suggestions, we urge you to consult your veterinarian.

## Winter *continued from page 1*

water or water with high mineral content can also contribute to this. (Alfalfa can too.) Clinical signs vary, but restlessness and anxiety are often the first indications of a problem. Affected animals may experience abdominal pain, urine dribbling, distention and finally rupture of the urethra. As pain increases, the animals will isolate themselves. Call your vet as soon as you detect this for advice and/or treatment. It is often necessary to humanely destroy such animals to avoid further suffering.

Acidosis is another life-threatening condition that can be caused by over-consuming grain. The bacteria in the rumen make acid from the carbohydrates in the grain, and if too much acid is formed it is absorbed into the bloodstream and the entire body becomes acidic. It most commonly happens

when animals gain access to stored grain and overindulge. Be sure that you keep all grain and supplements secured. Acidosis symptoms come on rapidly: an animal that was fine when you last fed it is suddenly depressed, staggering, vomiting, and its breath smells of acetone. Symptoms may also resemble pneumonia. Drench with a slurry of cold water and two tablespoons (30ml) bicarbonate of soda (baking soda), and then give two tablespoons of mineral oil. Call your veterinarian immediately.

Grain will also cause aggression in rams and for that reason beet pulp is usually a better option. And do not feed concentrates on the ground. Ten foot rain gutters



Premier 1 Heat lamp



Heat lamps

with a scrap of wood screwed to the bottom as a stabilizer make great feed troughs.

In special cases, when extra feed is not enough and an animal is still cold, I use a dog coat. A 22"/55cm Landa Weatherbeeta Winter Dog Coat fits an average Soay well. It is very strong, fully waterproof, is made of breathable polyester rip-stop and padded with polyfill. It stays in place with Velcro® straps, one across the chest and one under the belly. It is even machine washable. I found my first one at the local feed store, but they are also available online in both the US and the UK for about \$28/£17.5. It takes the sheep a little getting used to—initially they think they can't lie down—but once adjusted they don't seem to notice it is there and it does help to keep them warm. In an extreme situation, a heat lamp may also be needed. ☺

## JANUARY CALENDAR

- Merge rams back into the bachelor flock. Watch for excessive fighting.
- Remove visual screens from fences.
- Merge ewes back into a single flock.
- Vaccinate rams, and trim horns and feet.
- Take fecal sample to vet; worm as needed.

## TIP OF THE MONTH

**The Gamma Seal Lid for 5-gallon buckets**

