

This unsettled weather is hard on both people and livestock. Now, when we should have good, solid winter weather, we have had a thaw. We expect the traditional "January thaw," but we don't look for another lengthy period of above freezing weather the next month. But, with the uncertainties that come with a changing climate, we never know what the coming days will bring.

Still, certain jobs are there to be done in their season. And now, with muddy fields that provided neither clean snow on which to feed the sheep or solid ground over which to drive the small tractor without making deep ruts, Runo readied the hay barn for the shearing/lambing season.

He spent one long day hauling the 4X4 round bales out of the barn. He filled three hay wagons and piled the rest outside on old cedar posts that he laid on the ground. The hay has been inside since last summer, and these few weeks out in the weather won't bring about much damage.

The next day, Runo spent another long day, with me helping in the afternoon, bringing in feeders and hog panels, driving steel posts, and doing everything that is necessary to convert the open plan of the hay barn to a lambing facility.

On that second day, a slushy snow/sleet/ice mix with some thunder and lightning gave way to a rainy late afternoon with another electrical storm. Just before that afternoon rain arrived, we were finally ready to bring in the sheep.

We did our best to fill the pens with ewes in equal numbers, but there was some adjusting necessary. Even today, when we counted again, though the pens of ten or eleven predominated, we found one pen of twelve ewes, and that is one too many. So, this morning, we moved one ewe from the pen of twelve to another group that comprised only ten sheep. Now, unless we have miscounted, no pen is overpopulated or underpopulated.

There is always another adjustment to make, too. We have wire guards around the water tubs in each pen, partly to keep the water clean, as a ewe cannot step up into the tub, but also to minimize the chance of losing a newborn lamb in the water.

But, we have three horned Icelandic ewes that cannot get their heads through the openings to the water tubs, so one pen, in the north end of the barn, has no guard around the drinking area. The horned sheep need to be there.

That is all done, and today, more seasonable winter weather

has returned. It has snowed off and on since last evening, and it was just five degrees Fahrenheit (-15C) this morning.

This week, if all goes well, we will shear the sheep. Then, a month of a little easier life—a little grain and better hay—will prepare the ewes for lambing. As always, that will be a month of less sleep than usual, more hours in the barn, and the pleasure of seeing new lambs struggle to their feet and embark on a life on this farm.