

In light of the recent tropical heat we've been enjoying from Siberia and Storm Emma, and with lambing either under way or looming, I thought it would be helpful to talk survival tactics for the lambs, ewes and maybe for some of you at this tricky time of year!

Ewe Nutrition

Your ewes' nutrition leading up to and during the lambing season is key; if you get it right then lower rates of lamb death, metabolic disease and dystocia/lambing complications are just a few of the many benefits you will see.

During late pregnancy feed requirements can double, whilst the ability to eat/appetite greatly falls (dry matter intake can drop by 10% over the final two weeks of pregnancy). So here are a few tips on how to help them through:

Grouping

Group according to how many they've got on board or, if you don't know, go by body condition score.

Try and pen first timers in their own separate group.

Stocking density should allow 1.1-1.3m² space per ewe with up to 50 ewes per pen.

Rationing

During late pregnancy a ewe can consume 2-2.5% of her bodyweight in dry matter (DM) and all of her rising energy requirements must be catered for in this.

Analysis of forage and concentrates can be very useful when formulating a diet for the ewes. I could bore you all with facts and figures on dry matter intake and feed space requirements etc. but I thought looking at where we're at in the calendar I would just mention a few things to watch for that might indicate there is a problem with your nutrition and if you think there's something not quite right don't hesitate to contact us for some help.

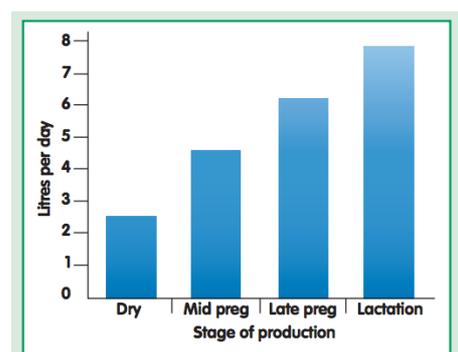
- **Ewe body condition score** - Keeping a record of a groups BCS can be so useful when assessing/keeping tabs on your nutrition plan.

- **Pregnancy toxemia or twin lamb disease** - We can carry out BHB checks on any individuals/groups you're concerned about.
- **Hypocalcaemia** - Similar story to milk fever in cattle, however clinical signs are usually seen pre-lambing (initial weakness with progression to recumbency; can have dilated pupils and bloat/constipation). Blood samples can be taken to monitor/diagnose this.
- **Dystocia and Lamb survivability**
- **Mastitis** - This can indicate poor nutrition in the ewes during lactation.

Please note: if you want to know more on those subjects please contact the farm department. If no-one can talk due to Siberian heat stroke or you'd rather research it yourself, there are some very useful guides on the **EBLEX** website titled, 'Improving ewe nutrition for Better Returns'.

Water

Not something that gets talked about too often, but water demands can really rocket up as the ewes go through lambing and into lactation (see chart below) so it is important to ensure all drinkers/troughs/buckets are checked for ice and kept full.



NB: These will vary according to the dry matter of the diet.

Lambing Toolkit

As this time of year can be so challenging; having equipment prepared and ready to use can be a massive help. We'd recommend having these items ready to go in your kit:

- Lambing ropes/snares
- Lube
- Strong iodine solution - try and get this on as soon as possible.
- Sterile needles and syringes
- Thermometer
- Stomach tubes/syringes
- 40% glucose (dextrose) solution for injection
- Colostrum supply
- Electrolyte sachets
- Sterilizing solution for bottles and stomach tubes.
- Anti-inflammatories and antibiotics
- Disinfectants
- Warming box

Hygiene - cleaning and disinfection

Having plans in place for cleaning/disinfecting and storing kit after use can help reduce the chance of complications further down the line. This also counts for how you maintain the ewes' pens, lambing areas and lambed groups.

Lambs

Trying to keep lambs healthy and most importantly alive can be the most frustrating and difficult aspect of sheep farming! Again, AHDB have a very useful guide online titled 'Reducing lamb losses for better returns' which you might find useful.

The most common causes of (neonatal) lamb death can be roughly divided:

- Dystocia - 40%
- Starvation/Hypothermia - 30%
- Infectious disease - 20%
- Accidents/predation/Multifactorial - 5%
- Congenital defects - 5%

Dystocia

Can be just simple bad luck, but as talked about, can also relate to nutrition and management issues. Try to keep a record of instances and contact us if rates are high

Starvation and Hypothermia

Starvation and hypothermia walk hand in hand as lambs are born with very little energy reserves which almost completely burn out in their first 6 hours of life. There are a number of measures you can take to ensure that the lambs survive after this window.

- **Colostrum** - 50ml/kg in the first 2 hours of life and 200ml/kg in the first 24 hours of life.
- **Exposure** - Providing adequate shelter and warmth is paramount as exhausted energy reserves lead to plummeting blood glucose levels and subsequent hypothermia. Taking a lamb's temperature can be useful:
 - >40°C (104°F) - fever or overheating
 - 39°C-40°C (102-104°F) - normal
 - 37-39°C (99-102°F) - moderate hypothermia
 - <37°C (99°F) - severe hypothermia
- **Warming** - If a lamb is too cold/hypothermic it is important to get them dry and warm as soon as possible. Heat lamps are commonly used however you must be careful as overheating can occur. Ideally lambs should be placed into warming boxes that use fans to warm the air. Try and take rectal temperatures every 30 minutes and when the lamb reaches 37°C: remove and feed using a stomach tube.
- **Stomach Tubing and Glucose Injections** - These procedures carry a high level of risk so it is important the individual carrying it out has received training and feels confident in their ability. To inject glucose:
 1. hold lamb by forelegs with body hanging down against your legs
 2. injection site is 1" below and 1/2" to the side of the navel - spray site with antiseptic
 3. insert needle pointing towards the tail-head and inject 50 ml of the solution slowly over 10 – 15 seconds (no resistance should be felt.)

All the best for the coming months!!

Ben

