



Sheep Newsletter February 2015

Many of you will be starting lambing this month or even be well into lambing. Hopefully it's going ok so far.

If you've scanned you will know how many lambs to expect this season with the aim being to rear as many as possible. We are often called to investigate problems when the number of lambs reared or sold is poor.

The first questions to ask are '**where did the majority of the losses occur?**' Very often you have a gut feeling that you lost 'more than usual before turnout' or 'most after weaning' but without actual numbers and hard evidence we could end up investigating down the wrong path at extra expense.

Records therefore are essential –and they can be collected easily – honest! A wipe board at the end of the pens or in the shed with a tally chart of the following will give lots of useful info:

1. Numbers born alive.
2. Numbers born dead.
3. Numbers died.
4. Reasons – abortion, watery mouth, scour, laid on, born with placenta over mouth (caped).

This could be a daily, weekly, monthly tally and the info transferred into the diary (vet students love this kind of job!).

This small amount of data will give us a huge insight into how the ewes have performed in this first 48 hour period and the potential issues that are occurring. It will also help

identify a problem that can be stopped **BEFORE** you reach the end of lambing.

Lamb deaths –lets go for another 2% reduction this year!

The target for lamb losses from scanning to sale is 10 - 15%. Many flocks are achieving this and many flocks lose a lot more. This is profit and worth working on.

The main reasons for losing lambs in the first 0-48 hour period often relates to the amount of colostrum that they do or don't consume.

COLOSTRUM: 50ml/kg in first 6 hours **THEN** 200ml/kg in remaining 18 hours.

So a 4kg twin lamb needs 200ml in first 6 hours then 800 ml in remaining 18 hours to complete the 24 hour period after birth.

The following lambs are unlikely to get enough colostrum:

- Big singles that needed lambing.
- Lambs that were 'hung' and have a swollen tongue.
- Lambs that have been mis-mothered when you find them.
- Triplet lambs.
- Lambs from a ewe that is sick/twin lambs/hypocalcaemia/difficult lambing.
- Lambs from a ewe with big teats/no milk/one quartered.
- Lambs with a 'rye neck'.

So concentrate your efforts on these and encourage your students to work with this. Milking colostrum off the ewe is by far the cheapest and most effective colostrum to give.

If the ewe has no colostrum or she dies, an artificial colostrum **alternative** is required. If she has colostrum but you feel she doesn't have enough i.e. in the case of strong triples, then a colostrum **supplement** can be given.

Artificial colostrum – we regularly get asked about the best products to use. When looking at the details on the packet, very often they are vague and offer little information. Think about the following when buying artificial colostrum;

- You get what you pay for. The best and **most effective** products are the **most expensive**.
- A colostrum **ALTERNATIVE** has a higher protein level (–aim 76% protein) than a colostrum **supplement**.
- Products containing whey protein and bovine colostrum derivatives are superior to egg protein additives.

Bovine colostrum can be used as an alternative. Don't use the colostrum from just one cow. Use a pooled mixture from 2-3 cows to dilute any possible effects of rare antibodies that can react with the lambs and prove fatal. Feed 20%-40% more colostrum than ewes colostrum, i.e. 60-80ml/kg in first 6 hours and 240-300ml/kg in next 18 hours.

FREE ways of reducing lamb losses!

- Power wash/disinfect the hurdles used to make pens for lambing – lambs will ingest E.Coli/cocci on dirty hurdles.
- **WASH YOURS HANDS** before touching the ewe's udder/teats/in lambs mouth.
- Have a **separate stomach tube** for sick lambs (watery mouth) and healthy lambs just requiring a colostrum top up.
- Observe the **lambs sucking** –for a 5 min period of time frequently.

These will help to **MINIMISE LAMB LOSSES**. Lamb losses occur most commonly due to:

- Lack of quality COLOSTRUM.
- Low birth weight.
- Inadequate brown fat reserves to use in the first 6 hours of birth.

Infections that cause lamb losses are usually always present in the environment i.e. E.Coli, Streptococcus Dysgalacticae, lamb dysentery etc. With quality colostrum and the correct amount, the lamb will be less likely to succumb to these diseases.

Sheep skills workshop

Many thanks to all who attended the meeting at the practice. It was a fantastic turnout and once again prompted many discussions. Hopefully the specific treatment protocols and associated costs for common conditions around lambing proved useful.

Coccidiosis was also discussed in detail with the best options for treatment and prevention discussed. A summary of this section can be found on our website shortly at www.woodvet.co.uk

Due to increased demand....

Basic lambing skills practical workshop

Wed 18th Feb 1.30pm-4pm at Wood Vet Group.

- Practical approach to the difficult lambing.
- Lamb and ewe first aid at lambing time.
- Common conditions, prevention and treatment at lambing.

This has been a popular course in previous years and suits all shepherds requiring a refresher, plus student and first time lambers. Cost £20 inc vat. Please phone Wendy or Sue on 01452 543 999 or email largeanimal@woodvet.co.uk to book a place.