



Happy New Year to you all! This month we focus on feeding the ewe and pre-lambing preparations as well as housing diseases that need to be on your radar.

Winter Feeding

Last month we stressed the importance of ewe nutrition and body condition scores; we are now entering the most important phase of pregnancy where these factors are essential.

Her body condition and what she eats **now** will determine the following:

- **Lamb birth weight**
- **Colostrum availability and quality**
- **Milk volume and quality**
- **Fertility going forward e.g. back in lamb with twins**
- **Immune status e.g. parasite resistance**

Now is a good opportunity to assess your forage quality if you have not already done so. It is better to find out now if your forage is of poorer quality, rather than trying to fix nutrition issues later. This will also allow you to plan feed costs and select the most appropriate concentrate feed.



Key points to consider:

- Take representative forage samples → **10-20 small samples** from different places (e.g. bales) and should be thoroughly mixed before being sent away for analysis. Don't leave holes in silage wrap after sampling
- Consider rechecking forage analysis if the appearance of the forage changes; in an ideal scenario analysis should be taken when starting a new forage type and periodically through the feeding period.

Understanding your analysis:

- **'D-value'** – measures digestibility. The higher the number, the better the digestibility of the forage and therefore less concentrates are needed.
TARGET: HAY 60% SILAGE 68%
- **DM figure** – measures dry matter. Ruminants need high dry matter intakes – the wetter a forage is, the less the ewe will actually be able to eat, and will therefore need more concentrate.
**TARGET: HAY 80% + BALE SILAGE >30%
SILAGE >25%**
- **ME figure** – measures energy. ME or metabolisable energy is the available energy per kilo of dry matter (MJ/kg DM). This is important as the energy levels required will depend on stock body condition e.g. high energy for thinner ewes. If energy levels are poor, ewes will need supplementing to achieve required energy targets.
TARGET: HAY & SILAGE 10 - 11MJ/kgDM
- **CP figure** – measures crude protein, which combines rumen degradable and undegradable (bypass) protein quantities.



Protein drives milk and colostrum production and quality. However, **during the last 3-4 weeks of pregnancy and early lactation the type of protein is important.** Good access to protein that is digested in the small intestine and not the rumen is crucial at this stage; ewes need at least 20% bypass protein (e.g. hipro soya or rapeseed) in their diet for the energy demands of milk production. Ensure you select premium ewe feeds containing 12-15% undegradable protein; typically these should contain soya in the top 3 listed ingredients. You may need to request these details from the manufacturer.

**TARGET: HAY 12%, SILAGE 14%
SOYA (in concentrate) 14%+**

- **Ammonia** – this measures the degree of secondary fermentation. A high level of ammonia indicates ongoing protein break down and loss due to secondary fermentation, meaning protein quality is likely to be poor. If levels are higher than 10%, this can indicate poor initial fermentation.
TARGET: Less than 3%

- **Ash content** – If feed contains high ash content, this is indicative of soil contamination and will increase the risk of secondary fermentation. High ash feeds have a high Listeriosis risk!
TARGET: Less than 9%

- **Silage acidity** – this is a measure of the pH of the product. Very acidic levels will affect the palatability of the feed, meaning ewes will be reluctant to eat it.
TARGET: Above pH 4.0

Metabolic Bloods

Metabolic bloods are taken 4-6 weeks before lambing alongside body condition score checks.

It is recommended we sample ewes from different feeding groups/different scanning groups to assess how each group is performing. The bloods allow us to check for more than just energy levels:

- **BHB levels** – blood ketone levels indicate if ewes are receiving enough energy and therefore their Twin Lamb disease risk
 - **Urea levels** – represents the level of digested protein and indicates if ewes are receiving enough dietary protein to sustain good colostrum and milk production
 - **Protein levels** – blood protein levels indicate chronic disease processes such as Fluke or Johne's disease
- By sampling 4-6 weeks from lambing, there is time to address issues with feeding regimes and improve rations where needed. From the results, ewes can be split into feeding groups to ensure protein and energy requirements are met whilst not over feeding ewes e.g. thin ewes to be fed with triplet carrying ewes.

If you would like to discuss metabolic blood sampling for your flock, please call us at the practice

Winter Diseases

It's that time of year where infectious conditions must be on your radar to avoid rapid spread; especially with animals being housed. This month we have had a few reports about external parasites such as sheep scab:

Sheep scab

Sheep will be itchy and will be seen scratching or nibbling at themselves. Often the fleece will look unkempt and fleece loss can be dramatic.

Scab is caused by the mite *Psoroptes ovis* and is spread via direct contact with infected sheep. The mite can easily be introduced into a flock on purchased animals, sheep returning from grazing, or contact from infected trailers or shearing equipment. Scab infections can become debilitating very quickly with sheep losing condition and getting secondary skin infections. The mites form painful characteristic yellow crusts on skin (see image) in the later stages.

Scab infections can be easily confused for lice infections; if you are unsure it is crucial to get a correct diagnosis! This will involve a vet visit; this can't be diagnosed over the phone.

This close to lambing it is important that sheep receive treatment promptly to avoid condition loss. Treatment choice is not straightforward and ewes must be handled carefully to minimise stress.

If you have any concerns about external parasites in your flock, please speak to us for advice before treatment.



DATE FOR THE DIARY

**Advanced Lambing Skills Course
The Key to Profitable Lambing
Wednesday 17th January**

At Quedgeley

1.30 – 4.30pm with tea, coffee and cake

£20 per person plus vat - Free to Flock Health scheme members

A NEW FACE...

Flick Hockaday

We are delighted to announce that Flick joined Wendy, Sue and Julie in the farm office at the end of December and will be in the office from 10-6pm Monday to Friday

She is from a farming background and has already been a great addition to the team
Please give her a warm welcome