



Happy New Year! Now is a good time to plan for lambing, if you haven't already started. Every lambing brings different challenges and therefore our plan and actions need to be modified each year while learning from previous years.

Do you have recurring problems each year at lambing time?

Watery mouth, high lamb losses in the shed or after turnout? If so, then there is scope for assessing your system and reducing your losses by a 'tweaking' or a changing your practice.

Where do I start?

Start with the ewe. We know that the **EWE** is everything! Her profitability and the health of her lambs will be reduced if she is not healthy and in optimum body condition at lambing.

- **What are you going to feed at lambing time?** Select the most appropriate concentrate feed. Remember it is not the amount of protein that is important but the 'type' of protein.

Spend your money on high levels (12-15%) of a **digestible undegradable protein (DUP)** i.e. protein that drives the quality and amount of colostrum, by being digested in the small intestine in the ewe and not by the rumen microbes.

Plan now to obtain the details and inclusion rates on the different components. These are not always displayed on the bag. Feed is one of your highest costs at lambing time, so make sure you get what you have paid for.

- **Body condition score** – aim for 3-3.5 for lowland ewes and 2.5 for hill breed ewes. This should not be significantly changed in the 6-8 weeks before lambing.

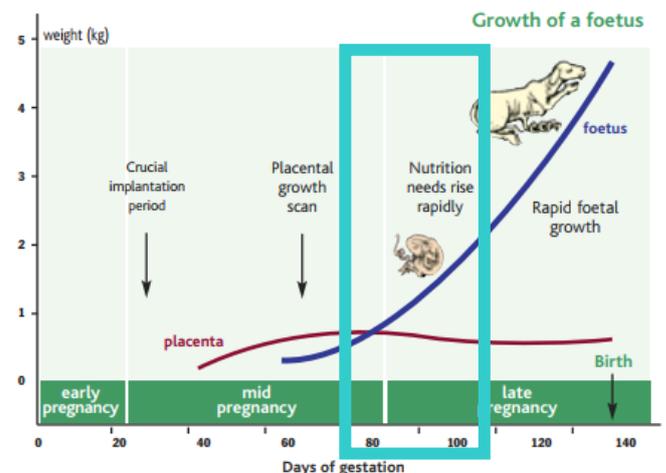
During this time, 75% of foetal growth occurs, therefore most of the extra energy and protein will be diverted to the lambs. Separating off the leaner ewes and feeding together with the triplets will significantly reduce the risk of twin lambs disease and supply much needed energy closer to lambing. This will help with milk production and the demands of lambing and late pregnancy. Feeding in lamb groups is very beneficial for most systems, we can also assess and adjust requirements using metabolic bloods.

Metabolic Bloods

Metabolic bloods are taken 4-6 weeks before lambing alongside body condition score checks to allow for time to make changes.

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 Johnes disease

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

- **Lame ewes** – Sort out any lame ewes now. If housing the sheep, separate off any lame ones and leave out until treated and sound, do not house them until healed.



Even if you have vaccinated using Footvax, housing lame ewes will increase the challenge of infection in the shed and make spreading infection far more likely.

We know that lame ewes produce poorer quality colostrum, less milk and have reduced 8 week weights in their lambs compared to sound ewes.

If they are lame they will eat/graze less, be at higher risk of getting mastitis and have lower body condition scores. The knock on effect is that their lambs are more likely to get watery mouth, joint ill and coccidiosis and other neonatal diseases.

It is therefore cheaper to sort out the problem before lambing. Speak to us at the practice if you are unsure of the diagnosis or would like help devising a lameness plan.

Record keeping

Leading on from the above, are you recording lambing issues? If you recorded last year then you will be able to review and identify any successes or weaknesses.

With red tractor requirements now meaning your health plan must be reviewed by a vet there is even more of an incentive to record data in a useable format. Not only is it cost effective but also you will gain from being able to analyse data that could stop you from making the same mistakes.

Ask us for help in designing a simple system or see next month's newsletter.

Upcoming meetings:

It's that time of year again. With the start of the lambing season around the corner we have the following upcoming meetings:

Advanced Lambing skills course – February

Suitable for experienced and commercial shepherds

Lambing skills for Small flocks – March

Suitable for small holders, students and novice lambing shepherds

Dates and timings to be confirmed

Invite to follow

Venue for Both: WVG

Cost - £20 + VAT

Free to scheme members

Don't forget to order any medicines needed prior to lambing!

Vaccines need to be completed well before:

Heptavac p plus

Scabivax (if required)

Items that you may find useful to have in a **Lambing medicine box** are:

Injectable antibiotic

NSAID e.g. metacam

Calcium

Magnesium

Propylene glycol e.g. ceto phyton

Glucose

Thermometer

New syringes and needles

Please speak to a vet for further advice/a farm specific protocol