



It may not be the New Year we were quite hoping for however the current situation does remind us of some of the basic requirements that affect health and productivity of our livestock. Biosecurity is a huge part of what we as farmers and vets deal with on a daily basis, sometimes without evening realising. The Wikipedia definition is as follows: “Biosecurity refers to measures aimed at preventing the introduction and/or spread of harmful organisms (e.g. viruses, bacteria, etc.) to animals and plants in order to minimize the risk of transmission of infectious disease.” Often we will discuss this a lot at the time of health planning or if you are buying any stock in but it is just as pertinent at lambing time when you will have vulnerable new born lambs that do not have a well-developed immune system yet.

#### Lambing shed hygiene

Whether you have started lambing already or are starting to think about what you will need to have in place before you start, it is important to not overlook the hygiene within the lambing shed, as when you are in full swing of lambing it is easy to become complacent.

The below steps will help to prevent the spread of infection and disease, which will help to ensure you have fit healthy Lambs.

- Ensure there is adequate fresh clean bedding to absorb moisture and provide warmth and that individual pens are easy to clean out between ewes and lambs.
- Making sure that buckets and feeding equipment can easily be disinfected to prevent any disease spread within young lambs.
- Dipping the whole lamb’s navel as soon as possible after birth with a 10% iodine solution to prevent infection.
- Ensure that any equipment which may be used during lambing is thoroughly cleaned and dried after each use.
- Good hand hygiene is also important, as we are all too aware of at the moment. By wearing gloves when having to assist with lambing this will help to prevent infection within the ewe.
- As with any task, the easier it is to do the more likely it is to be done. So by making sure that pens are easily accessible to muck out and having equipment and cleaning supplies readily available means the job is more likely to get done effectively.

#### **Metabolic profiling and BCS**

Along with hygiene/biosecurity, nutrition is important to prevent illness and give ewes and lambs the best chance to be healthy at lambing. Assessing the body condition score of ewes pre-lambing will help to guide whether you are feeding them correctly. Body condition is scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very thin and 5 being very fat. At lambing time you should be aiming for:

Hill – 2

Upland – 2.5

Lowland – 3

With no significant change wanted in the 6-8 weeks pre lambing. Having said this you can still make a difference by separating off thin ewes or those expecting multiple lambs and feeding them more to provide increased energy and protein intakes. This is because in the last few weeks of pregnancy the lambs will do the majority of their growing and therefore use the ewes' resources, leaving a thin ewe at high risk of succumbing to twin lamb disease. The combination of scanning and body condition scoring allow for grouping of ewes effectively.

Alongside body condition scoring metabolic bloods can be used to assess feeding regimes. These are targeted to the highest demand period of the 3 weeks pre-lambing. We want to sample around this time so that we don't miss an energy problems prior to the biggest demand but we also still need time to adjust feeding rations. We aim to sample 5 animals minimum from each group – single, twins, triplets. It is still useful if you don't scan so don't worry if you don't know!

When sampling we are looking at:

#### **BHB levels**

- Blood ketone levels indicate if ewes are receiving enough energy and therefore their Twin Lamb disease risk.
- Ewes in negative energy balance try to use body fat as an energy resource leading to the production of BHB by the liver
- These are toxic to the animal hence the official name for twin lamb disease being pregnancy toxemia
- Treatment of twin lamb disease is often unsuccessful, one study showed only a 33% survival rate, therefore being able to prevent it will be much more rewarding
- Negative energy balance is also linked to poor colostrum

#### **Urea levels**

- Represents the level of recent protein intake
- Adequate protein is essential for production of colostrum and milk which in turn effects the lamb growth rate
- Protein is also an essential building block in the immune system so low protein is linked to reduced immune function

#### **Albumin levels**

- Is a protein produced by the liver
- Low levels indicate chronic disease such as liver fluke, blood loss from something such as Haemonchus, Johnes disease or chronic undernutrition

**Please call the practice if you would like to book in a blood sampling session.**

#### **ONLINE MEETING**

With Covid looking likely to hang around for some time we thought we would like to offer you an online meeting in the place of our usual ones.

Full details are yet to be confirmed but watch your emails for an invite.

Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February

Lunch and learn

(Unfortunately, you have to provide your own this time!)