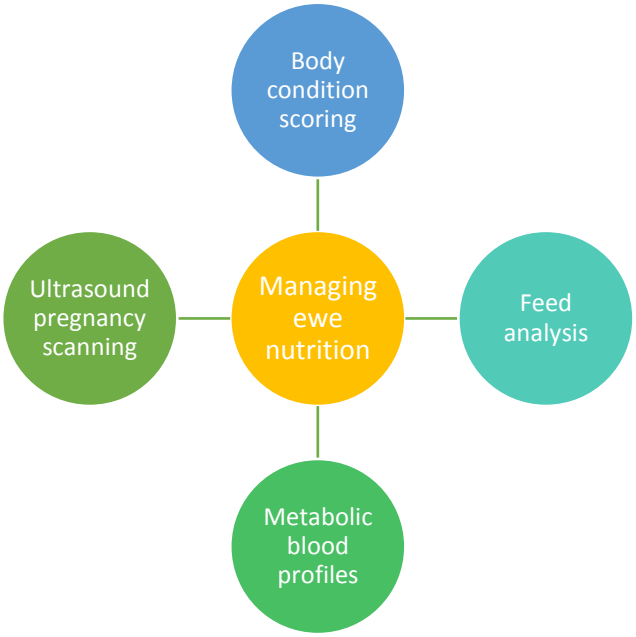
THE WOOD VETERINARY GROUP

Happy New Year! If you haven't already started lambing, then planning for it should be in full swing! Each lambing brings its own different challenges, but hopefully by planning well in advance we can attempt to minimise problems as much as possible - apart from the unpredictable weather of course!! Many issues experienced frequently come down to one common factor – nutrition, so that's what we'll be discussing in this month's newsletter!

Managing ewe nutrition in late gestation

Getting the nutrition element right when it comes to managing pregnant ewes is one of the most fundamental aspects to having a successful lambing period. This aspect, when done well, often reduces many of the problems we see during a lambing season. Body condition scoring is one of the best and easiest tools to monitor ewe condition so do take every opportunity to put your hand on the ewes' back and body condition score them.
In over fat ewes, not only can the delivery of lambs be difficult due to excess fat in the pelvis, but it has also been shown that the drop in blood progesterone levels, necessary to initiate labour, is not as pronounced in over conditioned ewes, meaning that they may show a delayed onset/prolonged lambing. In ewes that are too thin, we know that they are at a much higher risk of twin lamb disease and producing little and/or poorer quality colostrum.



Maximising feed intakes

We need to be looking to maximise feed intakes in our pregnant ewes during mid-late pregnancy; 75% of foetal growth occurs in the last 6-8 weeks of gestation and during this time the growing foetus(es) will be pressing on the rumen and reducing the amount that the ewe can eat. Therefore, high quality and palatable feeds must be used during this period. Where possible, try and have silage/haylage analysed before feeding it. It is often a false economy to be feeding poor quality forages to ewes and will likely be detrimental to the ewe and her unborn lamb(s). The microbes in the rumen work efficiently to digest forages and so we must feed the rumen to feed the sheep and not just feed the sheep! If feeding concentrates, aim to purchase a high protein cake (18-21%) and where possible try and choose one with a high rumen degradable protein content – this will feed the rumen microbes and thus feed the ewe! If feeding fodder beet, remember it needs to be as clean as possible, try not to purchase very soiled beet as this can predispose to listeriosis.

Managing pregnant ewe lambs

During mid-pregnancy, ewe lambs require 20% more feed than your average ewe because she is still growing herself. She needs to be 80% of her mature adult weight by the time she lambs for the first time. A growth rate of 150g/day is optimal for ewe lambs during mid-pregnancy. AHDB have reported a study

which compared ewe lambs that had high growth rates (300g/d) with those that low growth rates (80g/d) during mid pregnancy. Interestingly, the ewe lambs that had the very high growth rates produced a smaller placenta, had lambs with lower birth weights and had a 5 fold increase in lamb deaths, compared to those with low growth rates. Therefore, nutrition in ewe lambs and their weights during pregnancy must be carefully monitored to achieve the optimal outcome. In the last 6 weeks of pregnancy, ewe lambs should not be gaining any weight. It is very important that these target weights are met to give the replacement ewe the best start possible as sub-optimal growth rates can have a significant impact on her lifetime productivity.

Metabolic pre-lambing bloods:

These need to be done 4-6 weeks before lambing and must be done in conjunction with body condition scoring. Changes can then be made in time before lambing if the blood results and BCS figures indicate to do so. We advise to blood sample several ewes from each management group to determine how well each group is doing with regards to nutrition. Single bearing ewes and sick ewes are not representative and so should not be sampled. An equal number of twin and triplet bearing ewes is ideal.

Understanding why we use certain parameters in pre-lambing metabolic bloods:

- BOHB levels – indicate whether ewes are receiving adequate energy from their current diet and reflects their risk of twin lamb disease
- Blood urea nitrogen levels – parameter used as an indicator of protein digestion. Adequate urea levels will mean that ewes will produce plentiful, good quality colostrum and will promote good milk production throughout their lactation

New Graduate Update!

Our early lambing flock, due at the end of this month, will be housed 10-14 days prior to lambing where they will be fed high quality forage and concentrates at sheep feed barriers. It is essential that ewes have enough space to feed when they are housed for lambing.

- In-lamb ewes require 10cm of space each along a barrier when fed with ad-lib forage or TMR
- Pregnant ewes receiving concentrate feed must have 45cm of space each at a trough or feed barrier. This is to allow all ewes to feed at the same time

If facilities allow, having a shed divided down into smaller pens and grouping ewes in bunches of 15-20 makes the management of pregnant ewes far easier, especially if you're attempting to catch a flighty ewe-lamb that is struggling to lamb and you're on your own!

HEPATAVAC P - First time ewe lambs will need **2 injections 4-6 weeks apart**. The second injection and all boosters must be completed a minimum of **4 weeks pre lambing** to ensure adequate antibody levels in colostrum.

SCABIVAX - Only for use if you have had a **known** Orf issue on your farm previously. Vaccination of ewes **7-8 weeks pre-lambing**, to allow for scabs to drop off! These ewes must be kept **well away** from intended lambing areas!

Please call the practice to discuss any queries regarding vaccinations!

Good Colostrum Management – achieving the best start for lambs!

- ✓ **50ml/kg** as soon after birth (**within 4-6 hours**)
- ✓ In **the first 24 hours of life**, the lamb must receive **200ml/kg of colostrum** (i.e. a 5kg single must have 1 litre in the first 24 hours)
- ✓ Remember – artificial colostrum is a supplement to ewe's colostrum and NOT an alternative, it should be used as an addition to poor quality ewe colostrum.