



Are you ready for lambing?

Winter / Spring 2017

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Some of you will have done your first lambing well before you had your first mince pie of the festive season; for many others, there's still time to prepare before the last slice of Christmas cake disappears. Sheep farmers out there will be thinking about what to do to ensure that you can enjoy a prosperous New Year with a healthy crop of newborn lambs.

Feeding for Profit

Three-quarters of foetal lamb growth happens in the last 6 weeks of pregnancy and the final 2 weeks are key for udder development. Ewes have to be in the right body condition throughout this time; getting it wrong will cause low birth weight lambs and poor quality colostrum (thin and pale instead of thick and yellow), both of which lead to poor survival rates. Many pre-lambing diseases such as vaginal prolapse and twin-lamb disease are related to poor nutrition. Ewes in good body condition over the final 6 weeks have the lowest lamb losses so feed them right until lambing.

Ewes should be grouped and fed based on the numbers of lambs found on scanning and the ewe's body condition score (BCS); put thin sheep in with those due to have twins, as they will need roughly the same amount of food. Overfed singles can get too fat and have over-large lambs; they often only need supplement concentrates in the last two weeks. Ewes carrying triplets have a very high demand for protein and energy; feed them separately if possible to give them plenty of trough space. Handle your sheep...the goal is to produce body condition scores of around 3 in lowland flocks (or a BCS of 2 for leaner lambing hill ewes). Improving the body condition of a thin ewe takes time so try to do this at least 2 months before lambing; later than that is for fine tuning.



The need for supplementary concentrates will also depend on the quality of the forage available (forage analysis can help here). Most flocks will start receiving extra rations 6 to 8 weeks pre-lambing with good quality concentrate introduced slowly and always less than 0.5 kg per head to avoid acidosis (you can feed twice daily where necessary). The crude protein of concentrates should be approx. 18% (up to 21% if the forage is poor). Get the minerals right; calcium concentrations should be below 1% and magnesium levels should also be low. Finally, treat any lameness early, as a lame sheep won't eat enough dry matter.

Blood sampling and worm egg counts...is this for ewe?

Body condition scores change relatively slowly. Blood sampling a group of 10 ewes one month (or at least 3 weeks) before lambing, to test levels of beta hydroxybutyrate (BHB) – a by-product of fat mobilization – and levels of urea and albumin in the blood (low levels suggest a low protein diet or liver fluke/worms, respectively), provide a cheap and quick way of checking feed. Check ewes have not just been fed concentrates before blood sampling as this can lead to inaccurate results. Worming should be targeted at ewes in poor condition/those carrying twins or triplets. If fluke is a problem on your farm, treat all ewes.

Dedicated Sheep Veterinary Team

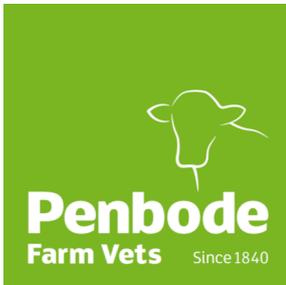
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Vaccination...have they had their jabs?

Clostridial diseases (such as pulpy kidney), and Pasteurella are the most common causes of death in growing lambs. Lamb losses to these diseases can be greatly reduced by vaccinating the ewes in advance so that antibody levels have time to rise in the colostrum. The best time to boost the ewe is usually between 4 and 6 weeks before lambing. If replacement ewes have been bought in, it may be best to give them a full primary course (2 jabs, 4 weeks apart; so start 8 weeks pre-lambing) to make sure they have immunity to pass on to their lambs through colostrum.

When things go wrong...abortions

Isolate and mark aborting sheep and clean and disinfect the area. Don't mother lambs on to these individuals. If more than 2% of your flock are aborting, contact your vet to investigate. Put freshly aborted lambs (with their placenta) into separate bags and identify the aborting ewes for blood sampling.

House rules...



Lambing indoors needs some thought about housing. A typical 70kg ewe needs 1m² of floor space and 45cm of trough space for restricted concentrate feeding - overcrowding can lead to problems resulting from stress, poor hygiene and disease transmission. The sheds should have draught free ventilation and there should be plenty of clean, dry bedding. If ewes are being brought indoors, this should be done at least 2 weeks before lambing at a time when their fleece is dry to avoid introducing lots of moisture.

Lambing Kit

Finally, a quick check over the lambing kit a week before your first lamb arrives to make sure everything is there. Below is a check list of the products and materials likely to be needed around lambing time:

1. Lubricant
2. Gloves
3. Lambing rope/snare
4. Stomach tube/lamb feeder
5. Colostrum (ideally frozen ewe, otherwise goat or cow or powdered)
6. Marker spray
7. Antibiotics/anti-inflammatory for a difficult lambing
8. Respiratory stimulant
9. Syringes/needles
10. Calcium 20% injection for hypothermia
11. Propylene glycol/twin lamb drench
12. Strong Iodine navel dip
13. Glucose 40% injection for intraperitoneal injection of hypothermic lambs
14. Thermometer
15. Prolapse retainer
16. Oral antibiotics for watery mouth

Once, you've dipped the navel, colostrum is the key to keeping the newborn alive. Lambs need at least **50mls per kg** of bodyweight in the first **4-6hrs** of life.

Colostrum does not have to come from the dam to give energy and antibodies to the lamb. If a ewe does not have a lot of milk, take some from another ewe that has lambed recently (6 to 8 hours). Frozen or fresh ewe or cow colostrum can be used if necessary. Remember not to defrost in a microwave as this will destroy necessary nutrients. Feed the lambs using a stomach tube made from a catheter tube and a 50cc syringe. These devices are lamb savers and two or three of them are key in a shepherd's medicine cabinet.

All Penbode branches have a lambing bay...if you have any concerns, bring your lambing to us!

