

Lamb Technical Solution

Ewes and lambs should be assessed at 8 weeks post lambing.

Ewes

- Body Condition Score (BCS) should be monitored, 90% of ewes should be at the target BCS of 2-3 (depending on situation and breed).
- If ewes are below, lambs should be weaned earlier rather than later to allow time for ewes to regain condition ready for tupping.
- It can take 6-8 weeks on grazing for ewes to regain 1 BCS.

Lambs

- Up to 8 weeks of age, DLWG should be greater than 250g. A 4kg lamb gaining 250g/day would achieve a live weight of 18kg by 8 weeks, or 21Kg at 300g DLWG.
- If growth rates are lower, consider the reasons why, such as parasites and ewe condition.
- At this age the energy intake is greater from grass than it is from milk. Therefore, it is critical sufficient amounts of high quality grass is available.

Up to weaning

- Competition for grass is high. If lamb growth rates drop under 200g/day, consider weaning and moving lambs onto better quality pasture.
- If being creep fed, weaning decision should be based on length of time to finishing and condition of the ewes.
- Target for high creep systems- sell 60% of lambs before weaning.

Transition period

- Lambs perform better weaned when they have already experienced different feeds such as clover and cereals with their mothers.
- Keep in mind that it can take 3 weeks for the rumen to adapt to new feed.

Weaning and Creep

- The purpose of creep feeding is to increase the suckling lamb's nutrient intake. This can help achieve target weights and condition, reduce risks of parasites and can allow an increase in stocking densities.
- When introducing creep, do so carefully to avoid gorging and acidosis.
- Poaching and disease should be considered when locating creep feeders.
- Wean lambs at around 12-16 weeks.
- Weigh regularly to record growth rates and to predict finishing dates, this can also indicate if there are any issues in nutrition and health.

Target for grass-based systems → over 70% of lambs to be sold (finished or stores) by tupping.

Feeding Guidelines

Growing lambs eat between 2-4% of their bodyweight as dry matter, for example a 30kg lamb will eat between 0.6 - 1.2kg DM per day.

Feed requirements

The table below gives a ME and MP guideline for growing lambs, please note requirements can alter with breed and target growth rates.

Table 2: Protein and energy requirements for castrated lambs (potential intake at 4% of BW*)

Lamb weight (kg)	Growth rate (g/day)	Potential DM intake (kg DM/day)	ME requirements (MJ/day)	MP requirements (g/day)
20	150	0.8	6.8	80
	250		10.0	110
30	150	1.2	9.0	85
	250		13.0	114
40	150	1.6	11.1	91
	250		16.0	119

(Source: AHDB, 2015)

*4% is the upper DMI limit for lambs, if the DMI is lower ME and MP requirements may need to be increased to reach target growth rates.

Key points

- If feeding grains, feed as whole or loosely rolled.
- Introduce different feeds over a period to reduce rumen health issues.

Finishing lambs

- Only sell lambs when they are ready for market.
- Over 80% of meat buyers require a R3L animal. Weight is important when sending animals to slaughter, however, do not ignore the need for confirmation and handling.

Marketing decision

- Identify markets first and then produce animals to fit their requirements. Nearly 50% of the lambs produced in the UK are sold through the livestock market, and the other 50% is sold deadweight.

Key points when selling

- **Clean animals:** Dirty animals are not accepted, it can compromise regulations and contaminate meat.
- **Handle with care:** Sheep bruise easily which can lead to reduce saleability and therefore have a negative knock on effect to the producer. Use clean and sharp needles when administering vet meds and injections.
- **Group lambs:** Grouping lambs which are similar in terms of colour, fat and confirmation coverage can bring a premium. A trial conducted by AHDB has shown that sorting lambs with equal merit can attract a premium of over £3 per lamb.
- **Understand how abattoirs work:** Ensure farmers understand the differences in payment systems when comparing deadweight prices. Penalties occur at all abattoirs, understanding the limits can help target livestock to meet the requirements.

Sources:

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Health

Urinary calculi

- Urinary calculi only occur in males when salts that are normally excreted in urine precipitate and form stones.
- Formation of stones is a result of high phosphorus and magnesium salts in the urine from high levels in concentrated diets, in addition with not enough water or a calcium in-balance.
- The stones then lodge in the kidney, ureters, bladder, or urethra. If stones get stuck here, the flow of urine may be blocked. Prolonged blockage may result in the rupture of the bladder releasing urine into the surrounding tissues.
- Preventing the condition by good management is essential because treatment is often ineffective, and prognosis is poor.
- In NWF lamb feeds, there is 0.5% of ammonium chloride. Ensure there is access to clean fresh water 24/7.

CCN (Cerebrocortical necrosis)

- Common in lambs which are 4-8 months old.
- Affect is usually seen 2 weeks after movement on to new pasture or other dietary change.
- In the early stages, lambs are blind, isolated; wandering aimlessly. The condition will deteriorate within 12-24 hours. Sheep will die within 3-5 days if left untreated.
- Treatment is 3 consecutive days of intravenous thiamine (vitamin B1).
- In the NWF lamb premix, there is an inclusion of B1.

Bloat

- When ruminants rapidly eat forage such as clover or alfalfa, the breakdown of these form a foam which increases the viscosity of the rumen fluid - this prevents the small bubbles of gas getting released.
- Just weaned animals should not be put straight onto high clover content pasture, allow animals to adapt to new pasture / feeding gradually.

Acidosis

- Acidosis is often caused by sudden changes in the diet, such as the introduction of concentrates. The rumen pH becomes more acidic than it should be due to the increasing fraction of propionate and lactate.
- To reduce risk of this, ensure lambs are introduced to feeds gradually allowing the rumen to adapt.
- Ensure structural fibre is available.

Coccidiosis in Lambs - Prevention is key

Coccidiosis is a problem in intensively reared lambs and lambs at pasture. When there is an increase in temperature; usually in the spring, it can trigger a mass hatch and increase the risk of coccidiosis. Prevention is far better than cure due to the permanent damage it can cause.

Causes

- The infection is caused by coccidia, which parasitizes the gut lining. The ewe can pass the parasites onto the lambs. Later born lambs are usually more at risk.
- On extensive systems, lambs can develop natural immunity, as they can be exposed to low numbers of coccidial oocysts.
- Lambs at 4- 6 weeks old are most at risk but can range from 3 to 12 weeks old.

Factors which can increase the risk

- High stocking rates
- Heavy contamination around feeding areas and water troughs
- Ewes which are short of milk may encourage lambs to nibble at contaminated straw.
- Mixed age groups.

Symptoms

- Rapid weight loss.
- Diarrhoea containing mucus and flecks of blood.
- Staining to tail.
- Straining and abdominal pain.
- Dehydration.

Prevention

- Avoid faecal contamination of bedding and feed troughs and move feed troughs regularly (daily).
- Group lambs according to age to prevent younger lambs picking up the disease from older lambs. Also, avoid putting young lambs on pasture which have previously had older lambs to minimise risk of contamination.
- Medication of ewe feed, this won't eliminate oocyst production but in conjunction with lamb creep medication is a beneficial prevention.
- Use faecal testing to help diagnose if the disease is present.

Treatment

- Treatment can be administered through a drench or medicated feed (**treated with Deccox**).
- Treatment depends on the individual situation, but farmers should consult their vets to determine a treatment for their system.
- Treatment should be given as soon as signs appear.
- Establishing a health plan to include coccidiosis is key for a long-term solution to reduce losses.

****Can be confused with Nematodirus****

Source:

Price, R. 2018. *How to Treat and Prevent Coccidiosis in Lambs*. [Online]. Available from: <http://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock/q-a-how-to-treat-and-prevent-coccidiosis-in-lambs.htm> [Accessed March 2018].

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