AGRICULTURE

Sheep Bulletin

Edition 5

Inside this issue

Feeding Ewes in the final months of pregnancy

By Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

Demand on the ewe is significantly increased during late pregnancy. This is when up to 75% of foetal growth occurs and the requirement for energy and protein is significantly increased. Under or over nutrition at this point in the pregnancy, can have a detrimental effect on the lambing success, and survival rate of lamb and puts pressure on profitability and margin.

Action Points

- Take a forage sample and get it analysed.
- Choose an appropriate feed supplement based on forage analysis and farming system.
- Formulate rations, planning diet changes/amounts fed.
- Ensure all housing, penning and equipment is ready.
- Group ewes according to scanning results, lamb numbers and body condition score.
- Monitor intakes of forage and change accordingly.
- Plan a turnout routine and grazing, see page 18 and 19.

Groups

Ideally, ewes should be grouped and fed according to the number of lambs being carried, body condition score and parturition number. This should take place 6 weeks pre-lambing or at housing.

Thin singles can be grouped with twins. Thin twin bearing ewes can be grouped with triplet bearing ewes, this extra feeding of thinner ewes will meet the extra nutrient demand and ensure a higher plane of nutrition.

Housing Requirements

To ensure ewes have sufficient lying areas and are able to display natural signs of behaviour please see below standards for lying areas.

TYPE OF SHEEP	AREA OF STRAW(M2/EWE)
Large ewe in-lamb	1.2 to 1.4
Large ewe in early lactation	1.4 to 1.8
Large ewe – with lambs at foot up to 6 weeks old.	2.0 to 2.2

Target Body Condition Score at lambing

EWE TYPE	LOWLAND EWES	HILL EWES	EWE LAMBS
Target BSC at Lambing	3.0-3.5	2.5	3.0

Lambing ewes in the correct body condition score can have great influence on:

- Lamb birth weights, vigour and survival rate.
- Ewes mothering ability.
- Udder development.
- Colostrum and milk quality and quantity.
- Losses due to metabolic disease, prolapse or dystocia.

Ewe Requirements

The ewes' demand for energy and protein increases with liveweight and number of lambs carried. As lambing approaches, there is a 15% increase in ME and MP requirement from week 3 to 1 week before lambing.

EWE LIVEWEIGHT (KG)	NUMBER OF LAMBS	THREE WEEKS	ONE WEEK
50	1	9.8	11.2
	2	11.9	14.2
80	1	13.9	15.9
	2	17.0	20.0
	3	18.5	22.5

Metabolisable Protein requirements (g/day)

EWE TYPE	NUMBER OF LAMBS	THREE WEEKS	ONE WEEK
50	1	81	88
	2	92	103
80	1	107	116
	2	122	137
	3	129	148

Practical feeding

Forage should be available at all times when ewes are housed for lambing to maintain a stable rumen environment. Forage should be offered daily and regularly pushed up or turned to encourage ewes to get up and come to feed which will increase dry matter intake. Ewes should be fed at the same time every day as ewes anticipate feeding times and adjust their forage intake. Erratic feed times, particularly when feeding concentrate, can lead to unfavourable changes in rumen microflora and function, by interfering with saliva production.

Whatever your feeding system you must ensure that ewes have sufficient space and a chance to get their fair share of concentrate feed. Greedy ewes can eat too much while shy feeders may get too little. Both situations can lead to more prolapse and pregnancy toxaemia as well as variation in body condition score.

All feed offered to ewes should be of the highest quality, fresh, free from mould, yeasts and contamination. Trough feeders should be moved and cleaned regularly to avoid build-up of stable unpalatably feed.

To ensure maximum dry matter intakes are achieved we must ensure there is adequate feed trough space.

EWE TYPE	CONCENTRATES MM/EWE	RESTRICTED FORAGE MM/EWE	AB-LIB FORAGE MM/EWE
Large ewes	500	250	150

Factors to consider

- Feed no more than 0.5kg/head at any one time.
- Always provide clean fresh water.
- No sudden changes in feed type or quality.
- Less stress more rumination.

Scan the QR Code to view video of NWF Technical Development Manager, Paul Mardell discussing Ewe Nutrition.

Just like houses, start with the foundations!

With anything, planning ahead is always well worth it, especially when dealing with sheep! When it comes to housing and shed environment putting plans into place can help mitigate against health issues and it's spread to other ewes and lambs.

We recommend a minimum pen size of 2m x 1m, with a pen for every eight ewes, with hay rack, feed bucket and water bucket for each pen area. Try not to share buckets across pens to minimise the spread of any potential diseases. Studies have shown that hypothermia, infectious disease, such as diarrhoea and watery mouth and hard lambings are the main causes for neonatal deaths. Body temperature is a major contributor towards this, with small lambs losing heat much quicker due to their surface area to weight ratio.

Ensuring your lambing shed offers the best environment for newborn lambs is critical:

- Keep pens well-bedded (aim for a nesting score of 5!), changing between ewes.
- Ensure there are no draughts or leaks, especially at ewe and lamb levels.
- Keep pens dry and clean and disinfect regularly.
- Clean feeding equipment, disinfect teats, tubes, buckets – it's the perfect place for bacteria to live!
- Have an isolation pen set up and ready – isolating sick ewes or lambs from healthy ones minimises the spread.
- Don't forget comfort! It needs to be soft and cushioned for ewes and lambs to lie on.

To ensure ewes have sufficient lying areas and are able to display natural signs of behaviour, we recommend the below standards.

TYPE OF SHEEP	AREA OF STRAW(M2/EWE)
Large ewe in-lamb	1.2 to 1.4
Large ewe in early lactation	1.4 to 1.8
Large ewe – with lambs at foot up to 6 weeks old.	2.0 to 2.2

For further information and advice on improving your lambing environment, please speak to your local NWF sales specialist.

Preparation Produces Performance.

By Cormac White, Farm Vet & Nuffield Scholar

As lambing is fast approaching it is important to get systems and protocols in place to ensure a labour-efficient, cost-efficient and productive lambing. The patterns similar to all successful businesses in all industries from Toyota to Tesco is ensuring that effective planning has been undertaken to minimise problems and maximise efficiency.

Lambing typically accounts for 25% of the labour hours undertaken on a sheep farm for a whole year so ensuring that these labour hours are as efficient and profitable is key. Walking the shed to identify areas where issues have occurred in previous years allows for mitigating procedures to be undertaken. Making sure things are handy and accessible will reduce workload. For example, piping water troughs to reduce lugging buckets of water around can save hours but there is a litany of labour-saving tips that can be acquired from neighbouring farmers. Why not attend a pre-lambing discussion group meeting at a neighbouring farm to get plenty of tips?

Given the recent spate of issues surrounding vaccine availability, it is worthwhile to plan for the clostridial and pasteurella vaccine doses you will likely require. Scanning data will help you identify the total number of lamb doses of clostridial and pasteurella vaccines you are likely to need, so get these ordered whilst they are available rather than being under pressure last minute.

Feeding ewes pre-lambing typically accounts for the largest feed cost on most sheep operations. Analysing your forage will help you to manage concentrate feeding levels appropriately and thus manage concentrate feed costs. Monitoring the efficacy of pre-lambing feeding can be done by organising pre-lambing blood tests with your veterinary surgeon. This is also a great opportunity to walk through lambing protocols such as colostrum feeding, disinfection protocols for lambing pens and treatment protocols for common ailments with your veterinary surgeon. You could even consider undertaking this veterinary visit through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway with your veterinary practice.

Hygiene is key to success at lambing so ensure sheds have been steam cleaned, allowed to dry and disinfected with an appropriate disinfectant in plenty of time in advance of lambing. Allowing a shed to dry will take significant time in the winter so plan well in advance. Clean, dry, disinfect and dry all lambing equipment, lamb feeding equipment and hurdles. Discuss with your Vet based on your farm history what the most appropriate disinfectant to use, is as certain products such as Hydrogen peroxide are efficacious against cryptosporidium whilst others are not. Remember that a lambing shed is essentially a maternity ward so there is no such thing as too clean! This will help reduce incidences of watery mouth, joint ill and navel ill.

Having had such a wet year liver fluke burdens are an issue this year so undertaking monitoring through fluke coproantigen testing and fluke egg counts is prudent in ewes. Fluke coproantigen testing requires a dung sample from approximately six individual animals in a group. These tests can pick up a fluke infection two to four weeks after ingestion of the larvae, much earlier than waiting until eggs can be found in the faeces. Monitoring for fluke burdens is essential to ensure the usage of the right treatment at the right time. Resistance to triclabendazole products is prevalent and considering this is the only product that treats all stages of fluke so prudent use is warranted.

For larger operations now is the time to undertake staff training and make everyone on farm aware of all procedures and protocols. Communication challenges at lambing time can be mitigated by ensuring that everyone is working to the same goals in the same manner.

In Summary:

- Review areas of concern from the last lambing.
- Walk shed to identify potential labour-savings and attend a discussion group meeting.
- Order all ewe and lamb vaccine in advance.
- Analyse your forage and plan your pre-lambing ration.
- Book in your pre-lambing vet visit.
- Clean sheds and equipment with appropriate disinfectants.
- Monitor the fluke status of your flock.
- Undertake staff training.

FarmVets SouthWest run Sheep Discussion Groups for sheep farmers keen to drive their business forward.

FarmVets SOUTHWEST

NWF Sheep Feed Range

NWF Ewe Feeds

The NWF range of ewe compounds are formulated to optimise ewe production, milk yield and sheep health.

Raw materials are carefully selected to include a range of starch sources to allow a balanced and safe digestion along with digestible fibre to promote rumen health. A range of protein sources have been used including soya, distillers along with Ultra Pro-R and Ultra Soy from the NWF protected feed range.

This high-quality by-pass protein ensures optimal MPB levels to promote lamb birth weights, milk production and milk quality, which promotes high DLWG, healthy and fast-growing lambs. The comprehensive range of ewe compounds has a feed to suit all systems and forage types which provides the confidence that NWF have a compound for flock requirements.

Champion Ewe Nuts (WM, WI)
A high energy density feed specifically formulated to meet ewe requirements and promote colostrum quality.

Classic Ewe Nuts (WM, WI)
Balanced energy and protein sources ensure a steady, even flow of nutrients to the ewe throughout a 24 hour feeding cycle.

Ewetrition 19 Rolls (WM, WI)
A high energy, high MPB feed formulated to meet ewe requirements.

Premium Ewe Nuts (WM, WI)
A cost effective ewe diet that is ideal for all classes of ewe.

Prime Ewe Rolls (WM, WI)
A cost effective quality ewe diet, balanced in energy and protein.

2 Good Nuts & Rolls (LT)
Top quality 19% protein feed that promotes milk yield and colostrum quality.

Mill Production Location Codes

WM = Wardle Mill
WI = Wixland Mill
LT = Longtown Mill

Collinson Feed Bins

NWF Agriculture can arrange the purchase of Collinson Silos. The sales team can help advise on type, size and the finish of silo required for sheep feed storage. The County Range T1 Snacker and TriStor Snacker are both perfect silo options for sheep farms, both feature a three legged design and a telescopic, adjustable chute, designed exclusively for filling snackers, bags and barrows. Capacities available from 4 – 15 tonnes.

Collinson

NWF Lamb Feeds

The extensive range of NWF lamb compound feeds are formulated to the highest specification using quality raw materials, carefully selected depending on the compound and its intended use.

NWF high starch lamb diets are formulated from a range of starch sources to enable a controlled degradability which promotes a good, fast finish on store lambs. Within the range there are high quality, energy dense, lamb starter diets which include balanced starch, fibre and quality protein sources such as our protected Ultra Pro-R which promotes high levels of MPB for young growing lambs.

NWF can supply a range of protein levels depending on your farm system, lamb type and marketing goals which gives you the confidence that we can deliver a compound to suit your needs.

NWF lamb feeds include vitamins B1 and B12 which aid in the prevention of disease and promote good growth rates. Ammonium chloride is also included to help in the prevention of urinary calculi. A flavour is added to diets designed to increase palatability and boost intakes.

Fast Lamb Pellets (WM, WI, LT)
A high quality, energy dense starter diet.

Spring Lamb Pellets (WM)
17% protein barley based diet.

Super Lamb Nuts (WM, WI)
15% protein high starch based compound.

Prime Lamb Nuts (WM)
13% protein barley based finishing diet.

Vital Rearer All Rounder Nuts (WM)
18% protein diet that is suitable for a range of systems.

Lakeland Lamb Pellets (LT)
Carefully formulated 17% protein compound.

Delta Lamb Nuts (LT)
15% protein high starch based compound.

Superstock 16 and 18 Nuts (LT)
High inclusion levels of barley, suitable for a wide range of systems and applications.

Importance of Forage Sampling

In the dairy industry, it is common practice to take regular forage samples throughout the year and analyse them for their nutritional parameters. In the sheep industry this is less common, but is still an essential tool in the feed management of sheep at this crucial time in the breeding cycle. NWF Agriculture offers a free forage analysis service as part of a nutritional package to help increase feed efficiency, reduce costs and increase sheep profitability.

It is important to take a forage sample that represents the whole clamp or bales being fed and to sample different cuts or fields separately.

Top tips for sampling

- Wait at least 6 weeks before sampling.
- Take several sample points across the face working in a W shape or from at least 3 bales.
- Send to the NWF laboratory early in the week, avoid posting on a Friday.
- Pack in a polythene freezer-type bag and squeeze the air out before sealing it tight.
- Ensure all bags are labelled with as much detail as possible on the paperwork.

Once the results are returned contact your local NWF Sales Specialist who will interpret the results for you and provide advice.

Why take a forage sample?

- To assess the quality of the forage available to feed.
- Essential to prepare an accurate feeding programme.
- Ensure correct compound feed is selected.
- Work out daily feed requirements and total volume requirements.
- Control costs and improve budgeting.

Planning feed requirements for a successful lambing starts now. The NWF Agriculture rationing program provides vital feed planning to help manage the feeding of ewes throughout their breeding cycle.

NWF Agriculture can accurately ration ewes according to individual farm flock data. Using key parameters such as forage analysis, scanning results, ewe breed and weight, calculating feed rates required to balance available forage and meet ewes' nutritional requirements.

Mineral Supplementation for Sheep

Minerals and vitamins are essential components of all sheep diets. Minerals have many functions within ewes and lambs but imbalances, too high or too low, can cause problems. The NWF UltraMin mineral range is a convenient way of providing bio-available minerals, vitamins, and trace elements to livestock.

POWDERED MINERALS - SUPPLIED IN TOTE OR 25KG

UltraMin Sheep General Purpose	UltraMin Intensive Lamb
• High levels of Vitamin B12 to reduce the risk of pine (cobalt availability). • High levels of Vitamin E are included to boost immunity. • General Purpose Sheep – 15-30g (F/A available).	• Ideal for home mixing based on adlib feeding. • Formulated to reduce the risk of urinary calculi using Ammonium Chloride. • High levels of Vitamin E to ensure this product will work well with moist cereal-based diets, helping reduce the risk of muscle weakness in intensively fed lambs.

MINERAL BUCKETS - SUPPLIED AS 20KG OR 80KG

NWF Protein Energy	NWF Ewe Breeder	NWF High Mag
A specifically formulated & developed high quality protein and energy feed tub suitable for grazing sheep. • Excellent source of energy from sugars, starch and protected fat. • High quality rumen bypass protein. • Protected Zinc to support a healthy immune system and encourage foot health. • Good levels of vitamins, minerals and trace elements to counter forage shortfalls. • Helps boost fertility and growth rates by supplementing forage based diets.	A high quality protein and energy lick developed for ewes all year round. • Enhances rumen activity for better forage utilisation and increased intakes. • Vitamins, minerals and trace elements to support the pregnant ewe and growing lamb. • Salmon fish oil (Omega 3) supports egg development and lamb vigour. • High levels of Zinc to support the immune system and foot health. • B12 to further enhance rumen function.	A specifically formulated mineral and vitamin lick designed to reduce the risk of grass staggers in your livestock. • Three sources of highly accessible Magnesium. • Combination of quickly available and slow release sources offer 24 hour protection against staggers. • Vitamin D3 to aid absorption of Calcium to help prevent milk fever. • Balanced range of trace elements and vitamins to address spring & autumn grass deficiencies.

Top Tips for Rearing Orphan Lambs

Depending on the farm system and circumstances there is nearly always a situation where a lamb may need to be taken off a ewe and reared artificially.

There are some fundamental steps and protocols that should be followed to ensure a healthy lamb is reared successfully using a concentrate milk replacer such as NWF MilkiVit Energized lamb milk replacer.

COLOSTRUM

Colostrum is the key to the successful rearing of any lamb and remember the 4Q's - Quality, Quantity, Quickly and Quietly.

Lambs must receive 50ml of colostrum per kg of body weight, so a 4kg lamb requires 200ml as soon as possible after birth, ideally within 4–6 hours. Within a 24-hour period, lambs must receive the equivalent of 200ml/kg body weight in colostrum.

24-hour intake

- 3kg lamb = 600ml
- 4kg lamb = 800ml
- 5kg lamb = 1000ml

REARING SYSTEMS

There are several methods of rearing orphan or spare lambs, some more labour intensive than others, and some require expensive equipment. The method employed will normally depend on the number of lambs that require rearing. Training lambs to suckle can be a frustrating task and needs patience but after a few days they soon get the hang of it.

Bottle Feeding - The most simple and effective system if you have a low number of lambs to feed and rear. Recommend 8-9kg milk replacer per lamb. It is labour intensive and there can be an increased risk of digestive upsets.

Cold Ad-lib Feeding – Milk consumed is "little and often' and with low set-up cost to see faster growth rates. The suggested feed rate of 11-12kg milk replacer per lamb, teat height 30-38cm from the floor and maximum 25 per pen.

Automatic Machine Feeding – The highest set-up cost but labour intensive with the fastest growth and DLWG. Milk is consumed "little and often" with a regulated milk temperature and rate of 12-13kg milk replacer used per lamb.

For all rearing it is important to clean teats, lines and mixing bowls daily. Ensure non-return values are working correctly and calibrate machines at least once a week or when a new batch of milk powder is started.

TOP TIPS

- Ensure adequate colostrum intake.
- Remove lambs at 24 hours 48 hours max.
- Introduction to a small nursery pen until trained.
- A clean, dry straw bedded lying area should be provided and this should be well-ventilated but free from draughts, and provide heat lamps.
- Fresh clean water should always be available.
- Provide a top-quality creep feed such as NWF Fast Lamb pellets from day one. It should be offered fresh at least once each day, with refusals being fed to older animals.
- Introduce gently to the teat, training normally takes 1-2 days depending on the system.
- Once trained move to a larger pen.
- Keep back a couple of trained lambs in the nursery pen to help teach new arrives.
- Maximum 10 lambs per teat and maximum pen size 50.
- Do not feed ad-lib roughage (e.g. hay) during milk feeding as this can depress concentrate intake and delay weaning.

WEANING

Before lambs are weaned ideally, they need to be:

- A minimum of 2.5 times their birthweight.
- A minimum of 35 days of age.
- Eating a minimum of 250g of solid feed per day.

Abrupt weaning is the best weaning system, but it is important to ensure lambs are consuming enough solid feed to avoid a post-weaning check. It also reduces the risk of digestive upsets that can occur during a gradual weaning process.

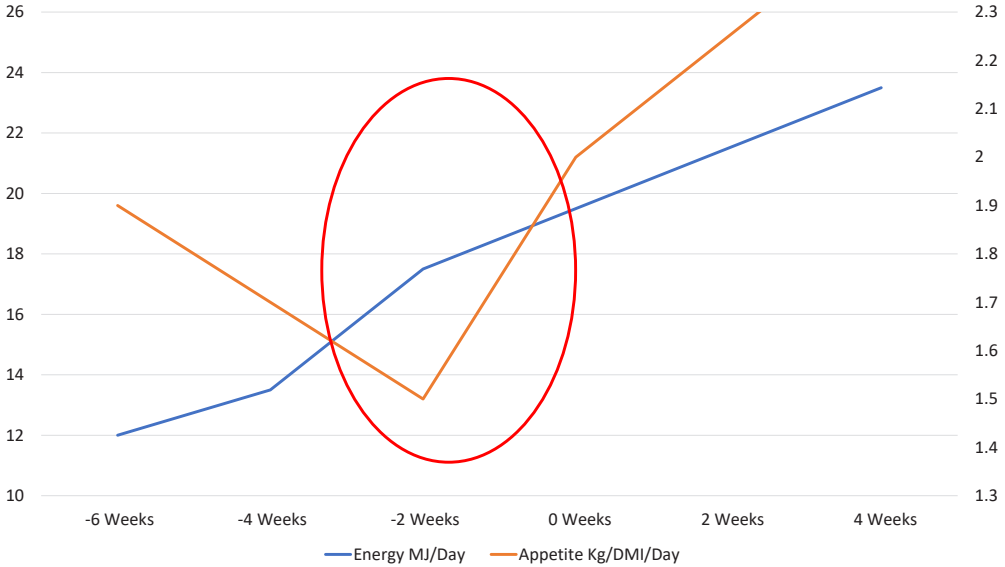
Post-Lambing Advice

By Eliza Burton, NWF Sales Specialist

It is very important to ensure that lambs achieve maximum growth rates whilst also supporting the ewe to ensure she is productive again next year.

After lambing, milk yield increases rapidly peaking at 3-4 weeks into lactation, at this time the ewe's energy requirements double to meet this demand. If not met for a prolonged period, it can lead to ketosis, hypocalcemia, lower milk yields and therefore lower DLWG and lamb mortality.

Energy and Appetite Pre and Post Lambing



When it comes to turnout it is important to monitor grass growth in advance. Until grass swards reach approximately 4cm, most of the nutrients in ewe and lamb diets must come from supplementary concentrates. It is recommended to consider the following forage feed rates:

Weeks After Lambing	0	2	4
Grass (Under 4cm)	1kg	0.8kg	0.6kg
Hay	1kg	0.9kg	0.7kg
Avg Silage (10-11 ME 12-13% CP)	0.9kg	0.8kg	0.6kg
Good Silage (11 ME + 13+% CP)	0.8kg	0.7kg	0.6kg

I recommend feeding NWF Champion Ewe or Ewetrition 19 Rolls, which offer a cost-effective, high-quality compound to suit the requirements of most flocks. For higher producing ewes rearing more than one lamb, it is advisable to include a source of digestible undegraded protein, such as NWF Ultra Soy and Ultra Pro-R into the ration.

Upon analysis of forage diets this year, NWF are seeing results that are generally lower in protein and energy. To combat this, the addition of NWF Ewe Breeder and Protein Energy mineral buckets is recommended to ensure flocks are getting the necessary nutrients. Buckets are available as 20kg or 80kg. I have been using them at home since tupping just to ensure ewe health, immune system and foot health is kept at its peak. These are a high-quality minerals buckets providing the ewe and lambs with high energy and quality ingredients. These ingredients include salmon fish oil for lamb vigour, high levels of zinc to support the immune system and foot health, B12 for rumen function and MOS for helping to activate the ewe's immune system.

It is very important sufficient clean water is always available, a ewe can drink up to 9 litres of water per day.

If you have not yet analysed forage contact your local NWF Sales Specialist. The NWF forage analysis service is free for NWF account holders with results processed within 24hrs of receipt at the accredited laboratory at our head office. We analyse grass, maize and whole crop silage, fresh grass and haylage.

Finally, we need to look at weaning. It is recommended to feed a 17-19% starchy starter pellet. Ideally, we would like to see them consume the following amounts of concentrate - 100g/h/d at weeks 2-3, 200g/h/d at week 3-5 and then 300g/h/d up to 8 weeks old. Then consider swapping onto a lamb finisher nut to help 'flesh out' the lamb.

At 8 weeks, lambs should be 20kgs					
Lamb Weight	**Growth Rate (g/day)**	**Potential DM Intake (kg/DM/day**	**ME Requirements (MJ/day)**	**MP Requirements (g/day)**	**Lamb Nuts**
20	150	0.8	6.8	80	300g+
	250		10.0	110	300g+
30	150	1.2	9.0	85	400g+
	250		13.0	114	400g+
40	150	1.6	11.1	91	600g+
	250		16.0	119	600g+

*The majority of the diet should be forage (60-70% of DMI)

(Source: Adapted from AHDB, 2015 and Feeding the Ewe 2017)

Optimise ewe performance and improve farm sustainability

By Rupert Stafford, NWF Head of Straights & Commodity Trading

With more farmers seeing variable forage samples, there is a growing opportunity to include protected soya in sheep diets. Research and practical application of making the most from forage and providing protected protein sources can have positive impacts on flock health and survivability.

Anecdotal feedback and work done by John Vipond, and others, have shown that over the last month before lambing, ewes fed on an adlib mineralised silage with either 100g of soya (per lamb) or 50g of **Ultra-Soy** can reduce labour and feed costs. This was noted due to smaller amounts of supplementary feeding and making use of good quality silage to provide ewes with their required energy. A target of 1 bale per 4 ewes of ME 11+ or more is needed. Blood testing on a sample of ewes can be done if there is any doubt in silage quality.

Feeding the right nutrition not only makes a big difference to ewes but will make a significant impact on lamb survivability through ewe colostrum quality. Correct nutrition also reduces the risk of watery mouth and twin lamb disease.

Looking ahead there is ongoing uncertainty across the sector, not to mention the volatility the industry is experiencing with raw material prices; all reasons enough to assess forage quality and balance cost effectively. Working with suppliers, vets and your NWF ruminant sales specialist can aid in creating and maintaining a resilient and productive enterprise.

Although this will not impact this season, now (post lambing) is the time to start thinking about the forthcoming silage season, discuss with NWF Agriculture what you can do to improve your forage for the 2024/2025 lambing season. We would suggest a review of your reseeding policy, fertiliser application rates and the use of a good silage additive to provide the best quality protein in forage for the coming season.

Perfecting Springtime Grazing

By Roger Bacon, Barenbrug Agricultural Key Accounts Manager

In sheep production, where margins are incredibly tight, high-quality grass can be the key to profitability – so keeping a constant supply in front of livestock makes sound financial sense.

Perfecting grazing pressure

Throughout the growing season it is important to carefully manage grazing pressure to ensure both good grass quality and high forage yield. Naturally, there will need to be some adjustments throughout the grass-growing season, depending on weather and other external factors but, get your grazing pressure and your residuals right, and fields will be fit to regrow leafy, high-quality, nutritious grass again and again.

Leafy grass can be well over 20% CP and have an ME of 11.5MJ/kg DM. The relationship between the D value of a grass to ME is 0.16. To have 11.5MJ/kg DM available, a grass plant must be 71.8% digestible. Managing grazing heights closely means that a sward is more likely to maintain its leafy growth and not become too mature and put out a seed head, which will reduce digestibility and affect the level of energy and protein available to the grazing sheep. Managing grass to the advised heights, particularly for ryegrass, will maintain the levels of live fresh leaf up to the three-leaf stage and minimise both seed heads and the gathering of older, dead unpalatable material at the base of the sward.

An added benefit of having animals graze ground is that they recycle nutrients back into the whole area through dung and urine. When they rely on larger volumes of silage or concentrate, more time is spent in smaller areas, putting more nutrients here but also putting more pressure on soil structures.

Correcting high grazing pressure

If grazing pressure becomes too high, it will result in short pasture stubble and sheep are forced to consume poorer quality forage. Periods of excessively high grazing pressure will result in decreased grass production, with slow regrowth and the plant becoming low in carbohydrate reserves. The persistency of the sward and its ability to grow away in spring will also be considerably reduced. The most effective solution is to remove some sheep or buffer feed with silage or concentrate. With low grazing pressure, animal gain per head per day will typically be higher but production levels per acre will be poor. Where there is a need to increase grazing pressure this can be achieved by intensifying the stocking rate or, a paddock/field can be taken out of the grazing rotation to be silaged. If neither is possible, topping with a rotary mower or topper to remove tall, rank vegetation and encourage new growth can also be helpful.

Good grassland management can have a positive impact on farm finances along with being environmentally beneficial.

- Growing grass and other grassland crops is one of the cheapest feed sources.
- Grazed livestock will typically produce a better output per hectare.
- Animals fed on grass tend to be healthier and require less veterinary attention.
- Enabling animals to graze for longer can reduce labour, machinery and housing costs.
- Grazing animals recycle nutrients back into the soil through dung and urine.
- Growing clover alongside grass fixes soil nitrogen, reducing the need to buy in fertiliser.
- On mixed farms, growing grass in between other crops can help improve soil structure.

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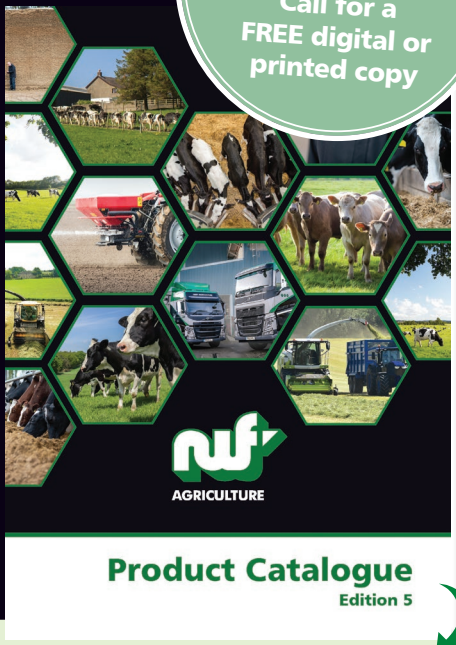

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