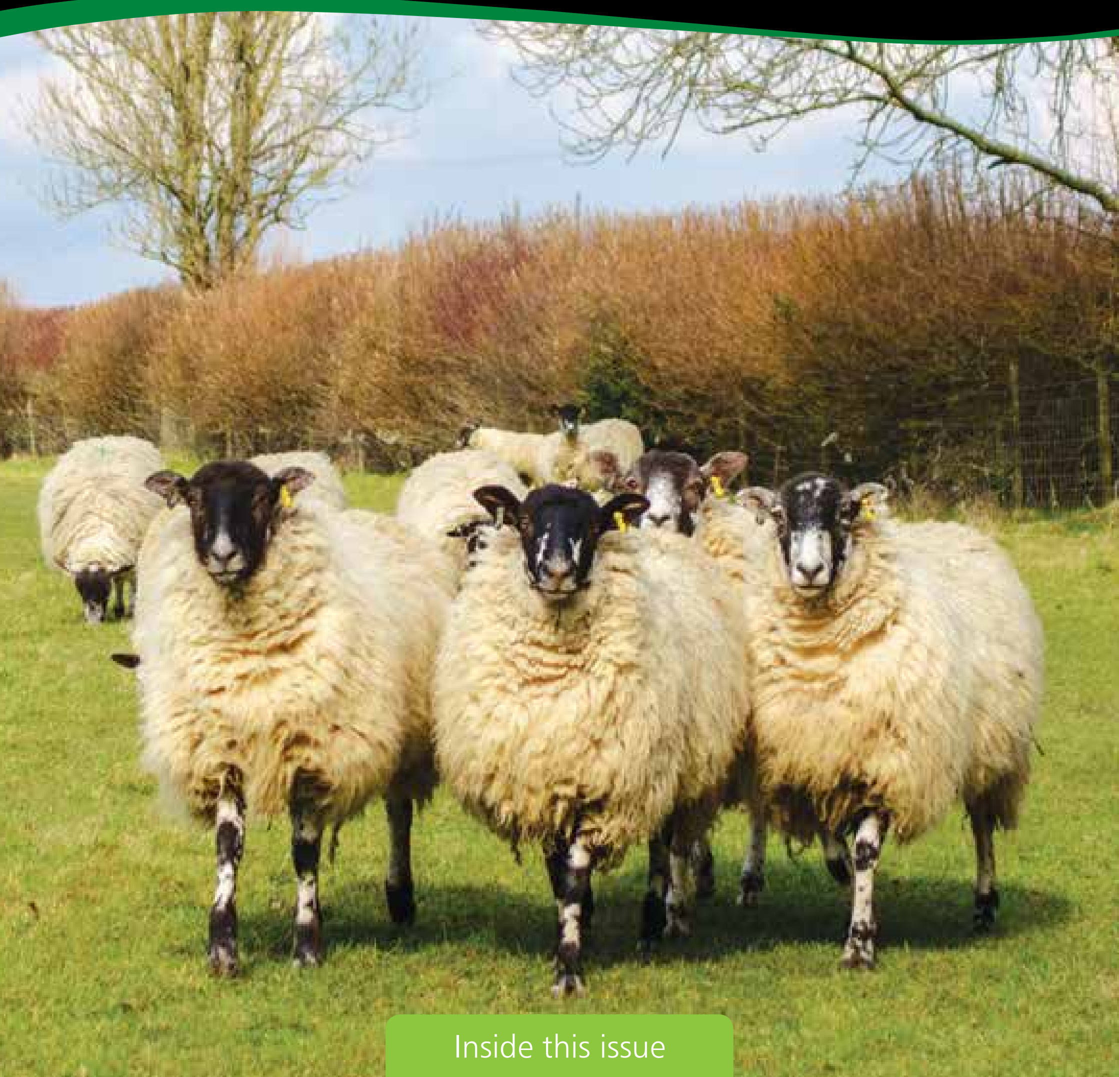
Sheep Bulletin

Edition 7



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What to Expect in 2026

By Alastair Brown, Policy and Strategy Officer, Livestock Auctioneers Association Limited

The New Year is looking positive with fewer lambs coming forward and strong demand holding firm, 2026 looks set to deliver healthy returns for sheep farmers across England and Wales.

Finished lamb prices remain buoyant, with recent figures showing liveweight averages at English and Welsh auctions are up to 16% dearer in the latter months compared to 2024, while prices are currently averaging around 320p/kg liveweight, and many lots exceeding 400p/kg. Cull ewe values have also climbed, currently averaging £129/head, up between 10-30% on last year, supported by the reduced throughput.

Producers can anticipate another positive year for lamb prices, although seasonal volatility will remain a factor. Weather conditions, flock health, and global trade trends will all influence the outcome, but the overall outlook is confident. Disease management will remain a priority, with bluetongue restrictions easing but vigilance and vaccination still advised as temperatures rise.

With government support for farming continuing to decline, many producers are reluctant to expand flock numbers. Environmental schemes offering alternative income streams are reshaping land use. This contraction in supply is expected to underpin firm prices throughout 2026, creating opportunities for those still actively producing.

Exports continue to play a vital role in price stability. Shipments to the EU are forecast to rise slightly, while imports are expected to fall, combined with lower supply, this points to sustained price strength.

The UK breeding ewe flock has been shrinking steadily, falling to its lowest level in decades. Current projections suggest further contraction in 2026, with the lamb crop expected to drop by around 2%. This reduction in supply will be a key factor underpinning market strength throughout the year.

In short, for farmers, 2026 offers both challenges and opportunities while uncertainty persists, competitive live auction markets continue to support strong prices. The live ring remains the most effective environment for achieving a true market value, with competitive bidding consistently driving stronger prices than direct supply chains. Those who engage with competitive markets and adapt to evolving conditions are best placed to thrive.

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Bluetongue 2026 Update

By Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

Bluetongue virus is mostly spread by certain species of biting midges (Culicoides species), many of which are found throughout Great Britain.

Midges are infected with the virus when they bite an infected animal and the virus spreads when the infected midge then bites an uninfected susceptible animal. Once a midge has picked up the Bluetongue virus, it will be a carrier for the rest of its life.

The time of year (midges are mainly active between April and November), meteorological conditions (temperature, wind speed and direction and rain), topography and the proximity and density of neighbouring farms with susceptible animals are significant factors.

Bluetongue virus can also be spread through biological products such as blood, germinal products (semen or embryos), or the movement of infected animals. Infected pregnant animals can, under certain circumstances, transmit the virus to their unborn offspring. Once born, the infected offspring could act as a source of Bluetongue virus.

The severity of the infection depends upon the serotype of the virus and may also be affected by strain. New serotypes continue to be identified but only serotypes 1-24 are notifiable.

How to spot Bluetongue in Sheep

Sheep are more likely to show obvious clinical signs of Bluetongue than cattle if they become infected. Signs of bluetongue in sheep include:

- Ulcers or sores in the mouth and nose.
- Discharge from the eyes or nose and drooling from the mouth.
- Swelling of the lips, tongue, head, neck and the coronary band (where the skin of the leg meets the horn of the foot).

Other clinical signs include:

- Red skin because of blood collecting beneath the surface
- Fever
- Lameness
- Breathing problems
- Abortion
- Death

Farmers and vets should follow good practice when treating and vaccinating animals at risk of being infected with Bluetongue.

You can help to prevent the spread of Bluetongue by:

- Vaccinating your animals with a suitable authorised vaccine
- Responsibly source livestock
- Remaining vigilant

For further updates and information on Bluetongue visit: **www.ahdb.org.uk/bluetongue**

Bespoke Blends Prove Perfect for Derbyshire Flock

By Eliza Burton, NWF Sales Specialist

Postern farm is located in the heart of Derbyshire on 140 acres of ideally conditioned land for rearing ewes, lambs and store cattle. Laura and Rob White run the farm full-time, with help from their three farming-mad children around lambing time. Rob's parents previously ran a dairy farm down the road, where he worked until 2016, before moving to Postern farm full-time.

Since starting out slowly with 20 sheep in 2015, their flock has grown steadily, with Laura and Rob now having over 200 Swaledales, 200 Texel-cross mules and 20 Blue-faced Leicesters.

Ewes are split by breed for a slightly staggered lambing, with the Texels tupped during October and the Swaledales in November to help Laura and Rob reduce the intensity and spread lambing over two months. Lambing is run across a combination of a conventional lambing shed and a permanent polytunnel system. *"The polytunnel gives excellent airflow and warmth, which is a real advantage at higher altitudes,"* says Laura. This setup has helped maintain a smooth lambing process whilst ensuring the health and comfort of their flock. Laura and Rob focus on keeping pens well-spaced and they use lime in all pens and walkways to help keep diseases at bay.

"We've been working closely with Eliza for the last six years, tweaking the diet and processes as we go along. The ewes are fed NWF Champion Ewe nuts on the lead up to lambing, before switching to a bespoke lamb blend for weaning. Initially, we began trailing with slight variations in our bespoke Postern blend, before finding one that suits the flock perfectly. We feed the blend

ad lib, alongside haylage and silage bales. The nutritional support we've received from Eliza has been fantastic; the flock is performing well, health is exactly where we want it, and daily liveweight gain (DLWG) is great. We've topped and won the best mule ewe lambs at Leek market three years in a row. The mule lambs have a great frame, don't have that 'pumped' over-fit look. We've greatly reduced days to slaughter, helping with livestock rotation and bottom-line finances," adds Laura and Rob.

Working with Laura and Rob, Eliza recommended feeding a 16% bespoke blend, with high levels of starch, formulated to improve intakes and support frame growth whilst adding a good cover. Offering a bespoke option allows for tweaks in formulationsto match both the flock and the forages fed; be it fresh grass, silage, maize or wholecrop.

Formulating a nuttier blend helped with reducing sorting and driving intakes. The blend includes the full NWF mineral pack for health and growth, plus ammonium chloride to prevent urinary stones, making it suitable for both ewes and tup lambs.

With strong beef prices over recent years, the introduction of 35 store cattle was brought in to provide an additional source of income and help with shed utilisation across the year. Working with Eliza, and with only having one feed silo, the store cattle are fed the same bespoke blend as the flock to make life easier, however they are provided with a separate source of copper to support herd health.

Looking ahead, Laura and Rob aim to increase the number of ewes and cattle and add a second permanent polytunnel to expand lambing capacities. With excellent success showing locally, Laura is also keen to continue showing her flock and retaining her title at Hope show.

For further information on improving flock performance, please contact your local NWF sales specialist. NWF Agriculture would like to thank Laura and Rob for sharing their story and for their continued business.

Maximising Performance with NWF Protected Feeds

By Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

A ruminant meets its metabolisable protein (MP) requirements through a combination of rumen degradable protein (ERDP) and bypass protein, also known as digestible undegradable protein (DUP).

Effective rumen degradable protein feed the microbes in the rumen. At the same time, DUP is absorbed in the small intestine, supplying the sheep directly with the protein required for lean tissue growth, including growing foetus, followed by milk production.

Supplying the correct balance of protein type ensures optimal performance of the animal. As ewes approach lambing, their rumen capacity is restricted by the growing lambs, and rumen outflow is increased. At the same time, their requirement for MP increases as the lambs grow and the ewe prepares for milk production to commence.

Metabolisable Protein requirements (g/day)

Ewe liveweight (kg)	Number of lambs	Three weeks	One week
50	1	81	88
	2	92	103
80	1	107	116
	2	122	137
	3	129	148

Advantages of high DUP sheep feeds include:

- Better conditioned ewes
- Improved colostrum quality and quantity
- Increased milk production
- Stronger more viable lambs
- Heavier birth weights
- Higher lamb DLWG

Feeding Ultra Pro-R and Ultra Soy as a Straight

With more sheep farmers actively focusing on producing high-quality silage for ewes and increasing pressure for greater sustainability, there is a growing opportunity to include protected soya and rapeseed as a straight feed.

Anecdotal feedback, along with research conducted by John Vipond from SAC and others, has shown that in the last month before lambing, ewes fed on an ad-lib high quality silage with either 100g of soya (per lamb) or 50g of protected soya (Ultra-Soy) fed alongside a mineral can reduce labour and feed costs. This attributed to smaller amounts of supplementary feeding and the utilisation of good quality silage to meet the ewes' energy requirements. A target of one bale per four 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.

Speak to your local NWF Sales Specialist about the use of protected feeds in ewe diets.

Making the most of your forage

By Paul Mardell, NWF Technical Development Manager

An accurate prediction of feed intake, both forage and total intake, is fundamental to any feeding recommendations. Ewes are generally fed ad lib, which can make an estimate of feed intake difficult, and the actual intake will depend on a number of animal factors including body weight, stage of production, feed quality and digestibility.

Calculations and predictions of feed intake in late pregnancy and lactation are widely used in rationing programmes, but they also require practical application and monitoring. The total DMI intakes based on % of ewe bodyweight are estimates that can be used as a guide.

Stage of production	DMI (% of bodyweight)	Example 70Kg ewe (kg DMI)
Dry ewe	1.5	1.1
Late pregnancy	2 to 2.5	1.6
Lactation	3 to 3.5	2.6

Scotland's Rural College has produced a guide of predicted daily forage dry matter intake as a percentage of ewe liveweight. As you can see the better quality forage has a higher dry matter intake, so not only would intake increase but also more energy from every kilo of forage fed.

	DMI (MJ/kg DM)	12 to 3 weeks pre-lambing	3-0 weeks pre-lambing
		% of bodyweight from forage	
Straw	6.5	1.0	0.8
Average hay	8.5	1.5	1.1
Good hay	9.5	1.8	1.4
Poor silage	**9.5**	**1.4**	**1.2**
Good silage	10.5	1.6	1.4
Very good silage	**11.5**	**1.8**	**1.7**

Maximising forage intakes

- Highest quality
- Clean
- Palatable
- Free from moulds and yeast
- Well fermented
- Frequency and timing of feeding - this should be constant
- Presentation of feed to encourage intakes – for example chopped silage rather than long big baled material.
- Access to feed – trough space or distance to supplements outdoors.

Any deficit in energy intake and DMI (not supplied by forage) must be provided by concentrate feeds to meet the nutrient demands of the ewe, which depend on stage of production.

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, fedd rates can be calculated to balance available forage to meet ewes' nutritional requirements.

Early Life Nutrition in Lambs

By Dr Laura Tennant, Technical Advisor at Trouw Nutrition

Early life nutrition sets the foundation for a lamb's entire lifetime performance. In those first days and weeks, growth is rapid, immunity is still in development, and the metabolic systems are finding their rhythm. Providing the right nutrients in the right form gives lambs the best chance of thriving - and energised lamb milk plays an important role in achieving that.

Industry standards suggest that annual lamb losses on lowland farms in the UK is estimated to be 15%. Losses in hill flocks are thought to be lower, however, the reduction in potential lamb output will detrimentally impact business profitability in any system.

Much of this loss is preventable and primarily occurs due to a lack of sufficient quantities of adequate quality colostrum in the first 24 hours post lambing. The first few hours after birth are critical for the survival of the newborn lamb.

Ensuring an adequate supply of good quality colostrum is key in supporting lamb health, performance, and survivability.

Colostrum is a nutrient-dense feed that contains a higher fat, protein, and mineral content than ewe's milk. Not only does colostrum provide essential nutrients to the newborn lamb, but it also stimulates digestive activity and contains immunoglobulins that function as antibodies to support the immune system.

Why Early Nutrition Matters

Lambs are born with a very weak immunity, so it is vital that the first feeding of colostrum is fed within those first two hours of life. Not only is the timing important, but the quality must be high. Using a refractometer, a small drop of the ewe's milk can be used to measure the Brix %, preferably at 26-27%, reflecting the ewe's milk's naturally high fat content. Good early feeding practice will support antibody development and reduce susceptibility to early-life disease challenges.

Colostrum also delivers enzymes, hormones, and growth factors, giving a head start to the metabolic programming. Early-life nutrition influences rumen development, feed efficiency, and overall growth rates long after those first days of life. With expected increases in lamb production after the increase in the 2025 season, reaching that full potential will maximise the profit.

Energised Lamb Milk

Energised lamb milk replacer has been formulated to more closely match the nutrient density and osmolality of ewe's milk. Osmolality refers to the concentration of solute particles in a solution - high levels can damage the gut integrity. ELM protects the gut while supplying the energy lambs need.

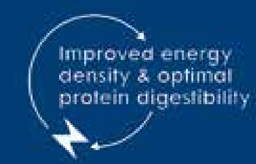
The high energy density provides critical support for maintaining body temperature, developing immunity, and driving daily growth. Fat sources are highly digestible, using homogenised and dried coconut and palm oil to improves fat digestion and absorption of the diet, as well as easily digestible sources of dairy protein from whey derivatives or skimmed milk. Essential vitamins and minerals are also supplied, with low levels of inorganic sources used, helping lambs' transition smoothly to their own active immunity, usually around day 6-10.

On-Farm Results

With the 2025/26 lambing season likely to bring weather-related challenges, feeding the high-energy-dense ELM can help lambs reach their full potential. Feedback from farmers has shown evidence of excellent palatability and an increase in growth rates to **0.34kg/day** compared to the previous year on another milk powder at **0.23kg/day.** This then equates to an extra **3kg of growth** for lambs fed on ELM for a month.

www.trouwnutrition.co.uk/en-gb

Four Reasons To Choose Milkivit Energized Lamb Milk



Faster growth
High energy density and optimal protein digestability achieve excellent lamb performance.

Reduced risk of scour and bloat
Lower osmolality and efficient gut development reduces the risk of scour and bloat.

Lower cost per feed
Low mixing rate (175g/L) makes 14% more milk per bag versus the same quantity of a 200g/L mix-rate powder.

Easy feed
East mixing makes the product easy to handle, and high palatability means lambs are eager to feed.

NWF Ewe Feed Range

NWF Lamb Feed Range

The NWF range of ewe feeds are formulated to optimise production, milk yield and 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 are used including **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.

Our comprehensive range has been designed to suit all systems and forage types.

Mill Production Location Codes

LT = Longtown Mill
WM = Wardle Mill
WI = Wixland Mill
BT = Moist Feed Plant

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

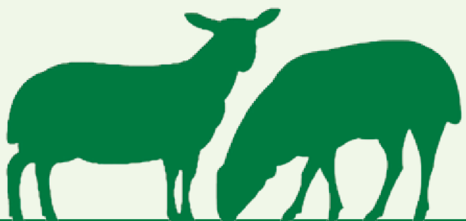
Classic Ewe Nut or Roll (WM, WI)
A tried and tested high energy ewe feed. Balanced energy and protein sources ensure a steady, even flow of nutrients to the ewe throughout a 24-hour feeding cycle.

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 feed that is ideal for all classes of ewe.

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

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



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

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

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

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

Vital Rearer All Rounder Nuts (WM)
16% protein feed 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.

The extensive range of NWF lamb feeds are formulated to the highest specification using the highest-quality raw materials.

NWF high starch lamb diets are formulated from a range of high-quality raw materials to allow for a controlled degradability, promoting a good, fast finish on store lambs. Within the range are high quality, energy dense, lamb starter diets which include balanced starch, fibre and **Ultra Pro-R**, a high quality protein source that which promotes high levels of MPB for growing lambs.

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 to increase palatability and boost intakes.

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

Reseed for Resilience in Spring 2026

By Matt Clarke, Barenbrug Account Manager

If your reseeding strategy has seen a bit of a wobble in recent years – veering from too much rain to get through the gate, to not enough soil moisture to let seed get out of the ground – then at least you can take heart that you're not alone, now it's time to plan a fresh start.

Of course, it's a fool's game to guess whether spring 2026 will present favourable weather for reseeding. But more than a few of you will likely have more than a few fields that are not only looking past their best, but probably also performing well below their potential.

Cold, wet, saturated ground will have hampered many swards. Compaction prevents roots from accessing deeper nutrients, and poaching opens bare ground for invasive (and non-productive) weeds. Those same pastures will then have been hammered by high temperatures and long dry periods, burning off and further depressing their yield potential.

On top of that, many of the fields thus affected will likely have been those already earmarked for reseeding, among the 15% that's generally recognised as the ideal annual reseeding or overseeding 'quota' to aim for.

Why reseed anyway?

Well, there's a wealth of evidence to show how reseeded land simply performs better. With the right choice of mixture and varieties, this is your ideal opportunity to 'modernise' your pasture.

Consider this: Barenbrug's 30-year grass breeding programme for the UK has provided, on average, a 0.5% per annum increase in grass yield. If it's been five or seven years since some fields were reseeded, then potentially you've got a 3-5% yield increase straight off the bat just from using some of the newest varieties. That's before you compare the difference between the performance of a tired pasture and one that's at its peak.

These newer varieties are better at using nitrogen, better at extracting it from the soil. The very quality of these newer grasses is better, too – meaning a more favourable bite for fattening lambs and improved forage overall.

What's more, when you make that investment in reseeding a pasture, you can increase the resilience of your farm and your business. Don't focus only on perennial ryegrasses and instead look to the advances that have been made in breeding of other species, such as tall fescues.

Yes, you may look on fescue as an 'old' grass technology. But that's a myth: new fescues are (almost literally) a breed apart from what you may remember of them. Fussy about pH? Not anymore. Drought resilient? Yes. And alongside those features (as if they weren't sufficiently attractive) then the quality's risen in leaps and bounds too.

What system fits?

Hand-in-hand with any decision to reseed should be an evaluation of your current system or production goals. What (if anything) do you need to change? Are you focused on increasing forage quality, smoothing out peaks and troughs of grass production, or finding a route to optimise a limited labour resource?

Another demonstrable point, given both the changing weather patterns we've seen in recent years and the likely longevity of your reseeded pasture, is how to build in resilience. A sward sown in 2026 could well see you through into the mid-2030s – but how might weather patterns further change over that period?

Think about mixtures that offer some degree of drought resilience, or forage reassurance in unseasonal conditions: hybrid ryegrasses, for example, offer rapid early-season growth, even at lower temperatures, to offer an early-season bite as well as high yield potential. Meanwhile, your classic diploid ryegrasses will continue to perform slightly better in dry weather.

Diversity

Talking swards, of course – make sure there's something for every outcome. Not only within each field – the mix of grass species, complemented by grazing herbs such as chicory with its deep roots to break through soil pans and draw up nutrients from lower soil profiles – but across the farm, too.

This is particularly important if you find yourself in a position to reseed several fields together. Seek resilience again by choosing different mixtures. Some fields may be well-suited, thanks to their soil, topography and drainage characteristics, to host ryegrass-strong mixtures (rather than a herbal ley, for example).

Take this route, and you might have to accept that while these fields will be handsomely productive under typical rainfall, they'll perhaps need to be temporarily out of use in dry spells through future Julys and Augusts. But if you've got that diversity developing across the farm, then you'll have an alternative bite to which to turn.

For further information on maximising grassland performance or grassland management, please speak to your local NWF sales specialist or read the NWF Grass & Forage Brochure online.

www.barenbrug.co.uk/agriculture

BARENBRUG

How Grassland Management and Creep Feeding Boosted Lamb Growth

By Amelia Lewandowska, NWF Sales Specialist

For over 40 years, Grove Farm in Somerset has been home to the Gammon family's beef and sheep enterprise. Run by Alan, his wife Tracey and his daughter Jess, Grove Farm is home to 130 head of store cattle and 250 Texel Mules, along with Jess's 60 Dutch Spotted ewes.

Alan chose to base the sheep side of the operation on Texels because of the breed's versatility, with excellent growth rates, body conformation, high killing-out percentages and carcass quality.

The farm covers 285 acres, which is primarily grassland, with 35 acres set aside for straw production. Building on their simple grassland management practice, ewes and lambs are turned out to grazing pasture before Alan tops the grass once the flock is moved into the next rotation of fields.

"We've found managing our grass in this way helps promote a more uniform pasture growth, with all areas of the field starting at the same height. It also helps with weed control by limiting seeding. Grass is then baled ready for Autumn and Winter feeding," says Alan.

On top of driving grassland performance through grazing routines, Alan also reseeds approximately 40 acres each Spring to ensure leys are as productive as possible, along with using the SFI grants available to help with reseeding and operational costs, both helping with finances and environmental benefits/farm offsets.

The introduction of creep feeding was a significant turning point during one of the driest seasons the family had faced. With grass growth stunted by prolonged dry weather, Alan and Jess installed a simple yet effective creep system, allowing lambs to access high-quality starter pellets while still grazing alongside their mothers. This approach ensured lambs received the extra energy and protein required to maintain growth rates despite limited forage availability.

"With a very dry and hot Spring and Summer, we were not getting the grass growth needed for both productive grazing and for anything to be baled for later in the year. After a conversation with Amelia, we decided to try creep feeding for the first time, and we never looked back. Lambs were growing fantastically, both in body composition and in DLWG. We were selling Spring fat lambs at 52kg, with sale prices of upwards of £200 at Sedgemoor market. Amelia helped us take a step back and look at the bigger picture, historically we've been a low intensive operation, however stepping back and looking at input vs output costs, supplemental creep feeding has proved nothing but beneficial" adds Alan.

Not only has the increased performance helped drive the farms productivity, shifting the focus to a 'days on farm' approach rather than age-based sale has also helped drive farm finances. On top of that, it helps with livestock rotation, plus there has been a reduction in health issues with lambs spending less time on the farm and therefore less opportunity for health issues to present themselves.

Looking ahead, as Jess continues to be more involved in the running of the farm, the family would like to continue to expand on flock and store cattle numbers.

NWF Agriculture would like to thank Alan, Tracey and Jess for their insight into their farm operations and their continued business.

How To Get the Most Out of Your Vet During the Winter and Spring Months

By Charlie Parker, Veterinary Surgeon, Oakhill Farm Vets

Over the past few years in Lancashire, we have increasingly investigated more metabolic issues on our sheep farms. These include growing lambs, especially during autumn and winter, and ewes around lambing time. We have been encouraging sheep farmers to screen the poorest lambs late in the grazing season and ewes pre-lambing to manage these preventable problems early, rather than having to intervene once clinical signs appear.

The main barrier is the additional cost of testing, but the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funding has helped overcome this, in addition to the increased productivity of a flock not limited by nutritional imbalances. If you haven't already signed up for the pathway, there is more than £1000 per group within the same flock available for a wide range of veterinary services, so I recommend you contact your vet about it!

What can I spend this funding on, I hear you ask? I have included a few starting points that we encourage our sheep farmers to investigate, things that are generally not sampled until major issues occur, but we are trying to identify any potential problems before they have significant financial and welfare implications. Where possible, we try to apply the 'prevention is better than intervention' approach by identifying vaccinatable diseases, nutritional deficiencies, and implementing management strategies before the problem has occurred.

A large amount of our time is spent reacting to or giving advice on preventable problems, so working out the cost-benefit of ways to prevent these is important. I would suggest that Clostridial and Pasteurella and abortive vaccines are generally very cost-effective, as these are usually detrimental to the output of the flock by having a high mortality risk. The cost of boosting lambs with a Clostridial and Pasteurella vaccine will very quickly be justified if it saves even one life. This same conversation should be had about every management change that is considered, but the indirect costs of many diseases or deficiencies are underestimated, and if they are not looked for, they will hinder the farm's output. As sheep farming profitability is often in small margins, these can add up to be costly factors in the health and productivity of your flock.

Growing Lambs

We ask the farmer to select a group of the poorest lambs, screen for endoparasites and test lambs from each group for energy, protein, copper, selenium, cobalt and iodine (other tests can be added if you are suspicious of other deficiencies). Cobalt and iodine have been the most common trace element deficiencies in our flocks, with many of the cobalt-deficient lambs having received mineral supplementation already in the form of drenches, boluses or injections. As cobalt is not stored, drenches are often insufficient to correct deficiencies and boluses or injections are a better option. Testing also allows more targeted supplementation, as many products are combinations of minerals and knowing which are deficient prevents over-supplementation of those that are at adequate levels.

Ewes

Winter is a time of transition for breeding ewes, with grass quality decreasing and pregnancy to deal with, it is an important time to monitor nutrition. In addition to body condition scoring when handling at tupping, scanning, and the run-up to lambing, screening ewes 3-4 weeks before lambing is a cost-effective way of minimising the risk of metabolic issues at lambing time. Sampling 10 or more from different groups of ewes (singles, multiples, gimmers, different breeds) will give an accurate insight into the nutrition status and allow adjustment of the ration, if required, to have its effect in time for lambing. Copper deficiency in late pregnancy causes swayback in lambs, and susceptibility to deficiency (Welsh Mountain, Cheviot) or toxicity (Texel, Suffolk) varies by breed. It is often 'locked up' by high molybdenum and sulphur, so testing forage and sampling the sheep will give us the best insight into whether supplementation is required.

We have found barren ewe screens to be another very useful group to test for trace elements (copper, selenium, cobalt, iodine), abortive (enzootic abortion, toxoplasmosis) and iceberg diseases (border disease, Johne's, among others). This is another great use of Animal Health and Welfare Pathway funding to look for issues in the rest of the flock by sampling this highest-risk group.

Lambing KPIs

As we look ahead to lambing time, I emphasise the importance of record-keeping around lambing to our farmers. Recording key performance indicators (KPIs) such as scanning percentage, number of ewes to the tup, abortions, lamb mortality and respective ages, number of lambs weaned, can act as an early warning system to potential problems and compare yourself with other years or other farms. This benchmarking is something we have introduced with our Oakhill Sheep Discussion Group farms to create talking points of common problems and how to address them. The funding can help pay for your annual health plan, which is a nice time to discuss these KPIs with your vet to identify strengths and weaknesses compared to previous years or other local farms and create a plan for next year.

OAKHILL FARM VETS

www.oakhill-vets.com/farm

Housing and Welfare; Feeding Ewes in Winter

By Katie Smith, NWF Ruminant Nutritionist

A proactive approach to high-quality nutrition is key to ewe performance and profitability throughout their production cycle.

75-80% of foetal growth occurs during the last six weeks of pregnancy, which increases the ewes' requirements for both energy and protein. However, the challenge in meeting this energy demand is that the growing foetus takes up more space inside the ewe, meaning dry matter intakes (DMI) will reduce by up to 30%, emphasising the importance of high-quality nutrition at this crucial time.

Whilst energy is important, we must not forget the need for quality proteins, as the demand for metabolisable protein (MP) increases during the last few weeks of gestation, particularly in ewes expecting multiple lambs, as forage alone will not provide enough MP to support both the ewes and lambs post birth.

Table 1 shows the effects of overfeeding and underfeeding ewes in the late stages of pregnancy:

Under-Nutrition	Over-Nutrition
Low lamb birthweight and survival rate	Over-sized lambs and dystocia
Reduced udder weight and mammary development	Prolapse
Weakened ewe/lamb bond	Pregnancy toxemia
Impact on the long-term performance of the ewe	Lambing difficulties causing delayed onset of lactation
Delayed onset of lactation and lower colostrum and milk yield	Potential for a high BCS to impact on future performance
Reduced lamb growth rate	Reduced lamb vigour

Ideally, a quality ration should be available ad lib, frequently pushing feed up to barriers or topping up creep feeders in conjunction with adequate feed space, which is vital to ensure high DMI (Dry Matter Intake). Additionally, it is crucial to ensure that clean, fresh drinking water is available for the ewes to access 24/7.

Forage forms the bulk of many ewe rations; regular forage analysis is fundamental in ensuring the diet is always optimal, enabling the ewe to achieve peak performance. For more information on our forage testing services, contact your NWF sales specialist.

How to mitigate disease risk:

For housed sheep, maintaining a clean environment is imperative for good ewe health and a lower disease risk during lambing. Key tips to assist in this:

- Ensuring fresh clean bedding straw is always available, if you can perform the knee drop test successfully, then the bedding levels should be sufficient.
- Coccidiosis oocyst numbers multiply around high traffic feeding areas, regularly moving troughs, mineral buckets etc. will help to reduce this spread.
- Vaccinating ewes against worms regularly will help to reduce the egg count in crowded pens.
- Ensure plentiful clean/fresh drinking water is always available for the ewes to access.

Mineral Supplementation for Ewes and Lambs

By Louisa Lloyd, NWF Ruminant Nutritionist

The NWF Agriculture range of ewe compounds have been designed to give optimum levels of both cobalt, selenium and vitamin E when fed alongside forage as part of a balanced diet, however depending on a range of factors, your flock may still be deficient.

The NWF powdered mineral and mineral bucket range has been specifically formulated to improve ewe and lamb growth, health, fertility and milk yields. The range supplies a comprehensive array of vitamins, minerals and trace elements to maximise ewe and lamb performance.

In addition to feeding concentrates, the use of feed blocks can improve the performance of ewes in terms of maintaining liveweight, which would have knock-on positive effects on fertility, lambing percentage, lamb survival and liveweight gain of the lambs reared. Feed blocks are best used when the availability of either grazing or home-grown forage is limited, or to boost nutrition around flushing, tupping, and lambing.

Ensuring a sheep's mineral requirements are met correctly, while avoiding under or over supply, can be a very delicate balancing act. Deficiency occurs when the minerals in the feed do not meet the requirements of the ewe, while an oversupply of minerals in the feed can cause toxicity. Trace elements are needed in small quantities of less than 100mg/kg in sheep diets.

Trace elements are essential for growth, productivity and immunity. There are seven key trace elements that are required by sheep; iron, copper, cobalt, iodine, manganese, zinc and selenium. Macro-minerals are needed in relatively large quantities and are necessary for bone development and nervous system health, alongside supporting growth.

Macro-minerals include calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, sodium, chloride, potassium and sulphur.

www.nwfagriculture.co.uk

0800 756 2787

Understanding your forage

NWF sales specialists will work alongside you to unlock your flock's full potential. Ask about the NWF FREE forage analysis service. Our state-of-the-art laboratory processes over 8,000 fresh grass, silage and haylage samples each year.

FAA Forage Analysis Assurance Group
QUALITY FORAGE ANALYSIS

Collinson Silos – Safeguarding Your Feed, Supporting Your Flock

Collinson

Feed is one of the biggest input costs for sheep farmers, so protecting its quality and making feeding as efficient as possible is essential. A Collinson Silo provides a bio-secure, weatherproof and labour-saving way to store and handle sheep feed.

Four ways a Silo supports efficiency for Sheep Farmers

Protect feed quality
Sheep feed stored in bags is vulnerable to damp, mould and vermin. A Silo keeps feed dry, clean and secure, helping safeguard flock health and performance while reducing waste.

Improve labour efficiency
Filling snackers or buckets from bagged feed is time-consuming and physically demanding. Discharging directly from a Silo makes the job faster, cleaner and easier. The T1 Snacker Silo features an extendable, adjustable chute designed specifically to streamline snacker filling.

Reduce feed costs
Buying in bulk significantly reduces cost per tonne and avoids the wastage that often occurs with spoiled bags. A Silo ensures your feed investment is fully protected and the ROI is paid off in no time.

Smart Silos – Monitor feed 24/7
Upgrade your Silo to include FeedAlert and you can check feed levels anytime using the free app. Share your feed level data directly with NWF to ensure timely deliveries and avoid running out. Prices start from £450.

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