

DN NEWSLETTER

issue 40

As summer passes behind us and we head towards Autumn we need to start thinking about the next sheep cycle. Do you know what condition your breeding sheep are in? Have you planned their management, grazing and handling over the next few months?

Pre-Tupping Considerations

The sooner we prepare the more successful tupping time will be. How did last year go? Were the scanning and lambing results where you wanted them to be or do changes need to be considered to improve performance to fit your farming system?

Fertility in ewes and rams is affected by many factors, including health, nutrition, body condition, genetics, age, season, stress and the environment.



Ewe Care

Keeping more productive ewes is vital to productivity and ewe health is half of the flock's fertility.

If toxoplasma or enzootic abortion are a risk on your farm, ensure ewes are vaccinated 4-6 weeks pre-tupping. Check requirement and details with your vet.

Parasite control should be considered. If fluke is an issue, then drenching should be considered. Worm treatment should be only carried out if there are young or thin ewes, if Haemonchus is a known issue, or if faecal egg counts indicate a requirement. Again, discuss and check with your vet.

It can be useful to blood sample ewes well before tupping to check for trace element status. Ideally sample 6-8 ewes from each cohort of the flock.

Ram Care

Now is the time to carry out the Ram MOT, at least 10 weeks pre tupping:

- **Toes** – check locomotion, legs and feet
- **Teeth** – check for under and overshot jaws, gaps and molar abscesses
- **Testicles** – Measure and check firmness (like a flexed biceps) with no lumps or bumps
- **Tone** – check for body condition score between 3.5-4.0 (spine well covered).
- **Treat** – check vaccinations are up-to-date (clostridia, Pasteurella), parasites, lameness, shearing?
- Consult your vet for a thorough examination

Ensure tups have access to shade to avoid heat stress which can affect sperm viability. If testicles have excess wool then remove this during shearing. A ram's testicles should be at 4-5°C below rectal temperature for optimum spermatogenesis.

Consider feeding high-quality protein supplement for at least 8 weeks pre-tupping to improve testicle tone and boost semen production if BCS is low. This is when sperm maturation takes place. Feed a maximum 0.5kg/ram/day. (Progressive GT nuts).

As a rule of thumb, mature rams should have a scrotal circumference of more than 36 cm and ram lambs more than 34cm. Breeding ability of rams reaches peak between 2 and 5 years of age and will decline after this. Both young and old rams are inappropriate for intensive breeding systems. A fertile mature ram should be able to successfully inseminate 85% of a batch of 60 ewes in their first cycle. Ram lambs 85% of 40 ewes.

Vaccination against clostridial diseases, Pasteurella and Louping ill should be carried out at least 10 weeks prior to tupping.



Ewe Care continued...

Body Condition Score (BCS) – Lean ewes, cull those that were BCS 2 or less at weaning and have not gained 0.5 BCS in 4 weeks. Overfat ewes, BCS 4-5 at weaning may not have reared lambs last year, check records if available and cull if not. Group ewes according to condition to enable appropriate feeding.

Udders – mastitis, cull ewes with hard and lumpy udders or current infections as they will not yield enough milk and will be a disease reservoir. Low or slack udders, or large teats – may cause problems for lambs suckling and increase the risk of mastitis.

Reproductive Problems – cull those which aborted, or had ringwomb or prolapse.

Teeth – teeth issues impact on condition and reduce the capability of ewes to rear lambs.

Feet – lameness should be investigated and treated, failure to respond to treatment should be culled, cases of footrot should be culled if treated more than twice in a year, cases of CODD should be kept away from other ewes until infection has healed and the ewe is no longer infectious.

Lambing Score / Ease – cull if difficult lambing and do not keep their female lambs for replacements. Mothering ability – again cull if issues and do not keep female lambs as replacements.

Body Condition Score (BCS)

Segregate ewes into 3 groups, fat (BCS >3.5), fit (BCS 3-3.5) and thin (BCS 2.5 or less). Identify pasture that will ensure ewes reach optimum score (3-3.5) by tugging.

To gain 1 BCS ewes will need access to unrestricted high-quality grazing for 6-8 weeks.


Ovulation rate is influenced by age, breed, stage of breeding season and nutrition/body condition. High protein supply increases ovulation rate. Prolonged under-nutrition can have long-term effects. Younger ewes have lower ovulation rates.

Flushing = increasing nutrition with forage or concentrates before breeding, increases ovulation rate in ewes and sperm production in rams. Most effective when BCS near target and if <2 or >4. Need improved nutrition for at least one cycle (at least 3 weeks prior to tugging) to influence ovaries to release more eggs.

Proximity to rams stimulates ewes to cycle and ovulate earlier, up to 3-4 weeks. Pheromones from the ram stimulate ovulation in the ewe. Can achieve by housing and grazing rams near to the ewes. A teaser ram can be run with the ewes 17 days before planned tugging. One teaser per 100 ewes. Remove after 15-16 days and replace with entire males. This helps synchronise the ewes to make lambing period more compact. Do not flush on red clover and keep off red clover for 45 days either side of flushing.

The average lowland ewe:ram ratio is 40:1 but in some systems can be as high as 80:1 to 100:1. With the 'right' fit ram many more ewes can be served.

Target body condition score at mating for ewes:

	Hill Ewes	Upland Ewes	Lowland Ewes
Weaning	2	2	2.5
Tugging	2.5	3	3.5
Mid-pregnancy	2	2.5	3
Lambing	2	2.5	3

The DN Store at Dugdale Nutrition stocks a wide variety of products suitable for tugging time. Available for nationwide home delivery. Call 01200 420234 for more information or to place your order.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact your local DN Sales Specialist or email our Veterinary Technical Manager, Debby Brown:

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