



# DN NEWSLETTER

## issue 26

**Lambing time is the most crucial time for a sheep flock to ensure profitability. Without a successful lambing time and new lambs being born alive and thriving there is no future income potential to the flock. The biggest losses in a sheep flock have been shown to occur at lambing time and many have been shown to relate to nutrition.**

### Objectives of Ewe Nutrition

- Optimise conception rate and embryo survival
- Increase lamb numbers and improve survival rate
- Produce stronger, more viable lambs
- Ensure good quality and quantity of colostrum and milk
- Optimise lamb growth rate and the weight of lamb weaned per ewe
- Finish lambs when they are growing most efficiently
- Ensure ewes are healthy and minimise losses
- Reduce flock replacement costs
- Improve flock profitability

Ensuring the ewe is fed adequately around lambing time is crucial for production of colostrum. This in turn is KEY to getting the lamb thriving from birth and performing well through to weaning.

The body condition of ewes is a very important factor in colostrum and milk production and in reduction of health issues around lambing time. Ideally ewes want to be Body Condition Score 2.5-3.5 at lambing but it is important they do not gain or lose an excessive amount of condition through pregnancy.

We have to remember that a ewe is a ruminant and she is designed to provide herself with the majority of her needs via the rumen bugs digesting grass and forage. As we get closer to lambing we may need to SUPPLEMENT the ewe to meet her increased needs for milk and colostrum production. We need to avoid substituting forage and so over feeding MUST be avoided.

However, it is important that we meet the needs of the ewe and so analysing the forage she is being fed is useful to establish the base of the diet. In the UK we mainly feed grass based diets and so it is very rare that

the protein requirement of the ewe is not met but ensuring we get the right level of Energy is essential.

If you scan your ewes the feed can be targeted specifically, if not then we would recommend feeding for the average ewe with twins.

As we get closer to lambing, and the ewe's needs increase, she is clever and her rumen throughput increases. This means she can continue to keep her intakes up but as the feed is moving through quicker we need to make it more digestible. If you know your forage quality you can target the higher quality sources for closer to lambing.

For thin ewes and younger ewes we may wish to supplement for longer BUT we should feed small amounts for a longer period to encourage more forage intakes and keep their rumen healthy. If we feed too much too soon and for too long we will increase the risk of acidosis which increases the risk of twin lamb closer to lambing. This excess feeding upsets the rumen bugs and slows down their ability to digest forage and also costs too much.

### The rules of thumb for energy supplementation are:

Maintenance	$(LW / 10) + 3$	10 MJ/day
Gestation (last week)	About 4 MJ/lamb carried = +8 for twins	18 MJ/day
Lactation	Need 7 MJ/l of milk. For twins - 3l milk in week of lactation = extra 21 MJ	31 MJ/day





With protein the importance is the quality of the protein. The rumen bugs require rumen degradable protein for them to grow and multiply and break down the feed and they receive most of this from grass and grass based forages. The bacteria that pass out of the rumen once they have past their best become the protein source for the ewe.

If feeding cereal based forages or straw then more protein supplementation will be required. On roots different mineral and protein supplementation will need to be considered depending on the farm set up.

As she gets closer to lambing time she needs supplementation to meet her needs and this comes in the form of quality protein sources such as soya.

Lamb birthweight, udder development and milk production depend on meeting ewes needs in late pregnancy. Added benefits of getting the protein right at this stage are reduced worm egg output and less post-lambing breakdown in immunity to parasites.

Reducing metabolic issues around lambing is dependent on minimising stress on the ewes. Make changes slowly, including environmental and dietary. Do not over-stock. Do not handle excessively as get closer to lambing. Consider weather conditions.

Trough space is important, ensure 15cm per ewe for ad-lib forage or TMR. If feeding concentrates once or twice a day ensure 45cm per ewe, or even better, scatter the concentrate as long as the floor is clean and dry. Scattering the concentrate has two benefits in that the ewes take the feed in slowly and they are not pushing to a feed barrier.

Clean, fresh water is essential for a healthy ewe and her rumen. Her requirements for water increase from 2.5 litres post weaning to 6 litres in late pregnancy and 8 litres once lactating. Sheep prefer running water so water sources that change the water regularly are better than big troughs containing stagnant water. Out at grass much of the water comes from the grass unless the weather is particularly dry.

Supplementation close to lambing time will be targeted at the milk and colostrum production and lambing success. Big lambs are more likely to occur if ewes have been over fed in mid-pregnancy when placental growth is occurring.

Remember the most important feeding recommendation for ewes is SUPPLEMENT not SUBSTITUTE. Feed the best quality supplementation you can BUT feed less of it.

#### KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN PREGNANCY

- |                     |                             |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Condition Score  | 4. Forage / Grass Quality   |
| 2. Scanning Results | 5. Concentrate Feed Quality |
| 3. Health           | 6. Feeding Levels           |

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