

DN NEWSLETTER

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Depending on your lambing time and system, you may already be selling lambs fat, or maybe considering options for the next few months to ensure you hit the markets when they suit your lamb type. Feeding lambs can be a challenge and may depend on the year but whatever you decide, any feeding must be efficient.

Lamb performance, certainly up to weaning, is determined by the first few hours after birth. Ensuring good colostrum intake is key and is proven to affect health and growth through to weaning. If a lamb does not suckle quickly, at least within the first 6 hours of birth, then they should be fed replacement colostrum (either from ewe or purchased) at a rate of 50ml/kg liveweight. In the first six weeks of a lamb's life milk is their source of nutrition. Whether this be direct from the ewe, or from replacer in the case of pet lambs, this needs to be of adequate quality and quantity. If milk supply is inadequate, then lamb growth will be restricted. Feeding the ewe in the early weeks after lambing may be useful and required if grazing or forage is limiting but as time passes this becomes inefficient and it may be better to creep feed the lambs.

After 6 weeks of age lambs can rely on pasture, with or without lamb creep. At 6 weeks the lamb will have an energy requirement of 10MJ. They will receive approximately 6.5MJ energy from milk at this stage and 3.5MJ needs to be provided from the pasture, or creep feed if pasture is limiting.

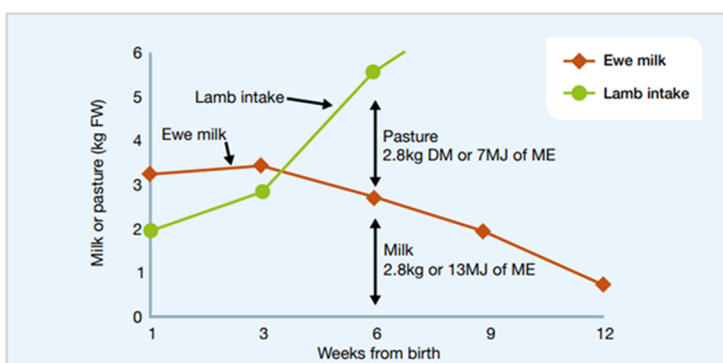


Figure 9. The milk to grass transition for lambs reared as twins (Beef & Lamb NZ)

The average weaning age is 90 days with a target weight of 30kg for lambs out of lowland ewes. This would be the optimum for a grass-based system. Weighing lambs at 8 weeks is useful to predict performance to weaning. If lambs have not achieved 85% (17kg of a 20kg target) they will continue to struggle up to and beyond

weaning. Positive results can be seen by weaning these lambs early and feeding them high-quality creep feed.

By 12 weeks of age the energy requirement from pasture has increased to 100%. Lambs should be weaned once the lambs and ewes are competing for the available grass. Lambs should be given the priority grazing. Once the ewes have been body condition scored around weaning, and the grass requirements have been calculated, decisions can be made as to whether ewes need better grazing. It is important to understand the grass that is available and what is required. If grazing is tight creep feed for lambs may be more appropriate.

To make the best use of grazed grass it is important to manage it carefully to optimise quality and quantity. It is important to avoid lambs eating into the reserves for flushing and overwintering ewes. The leaf is the most nutritious part of the plant (>11.5 kg MJ Metabolisable Energy/kg Dry Matter).

For weaned finishing lambs the ideal is to have a pre-graze sward height of 10-12 cm and post-graze height 5-7 cm if using rotational grazing. If set-stocked the sward should be 6-8 cm height. Clover in the sward will increase the rate of gain by 25% but it requires good management to achieve good levels from mid-summer onwards.

Parasite burden can be reduced at grazing by utilising other classes of stock or using fields for conservation. Ideally do not graze finishing lambs on fields that have had ewes and lambs on in the same season. Faecal Egg Counts should be used to monitor any worm challenge. Batching lambs according to their weight can enable feed to be targeted more efficiently. A good target for grass-based systems is to ensure >70% lambs are sold (finished or as stores) by tuppung.



Keeping male lambs entire can help with higher growth rates due to better feed conversion. They should be separated from ewe lambs by 5 months of age and their finishing should be planned to avoid any store periods. The meat quality can be affected if they are not finished by 8 months of age.

Shearing store lambs means they eat more and finish quicker. The lambs need less lying area but their requirement for feeding space is NOT reduced. Shearing housed lambs reduces the risk of heat stress on high cereal diets. The lambs need to be housed for over a month to see the benefit and it is important to check there is no penalty at the abattoir for shorn lambs.

When selecting for slaughter it is important to handle and weigh the lambs regularly. Ideally, at least every 2 weeks as this ensures any health or nutritional problems are identified early and can be rectified without too much loss. Margins are always tight, so monitoring is important. Ensure any data is analysed and you know your market. Always check any carcass reports you receive.

Feeding replacement ewe lambs can be a challenge and it is important to get it right to ensure target bodyweight at weaning, mating and lambing as well as target body condition score at lambing. Ideally, ewe lambs will only rear one lamb and lamb loss will be less than 15% from scanning to weaning. The aim is for long-term (lifetime) productivity.

It is important to target a liveweight gain of 200-250 grams per day from weaning to mating and continual growth of 130 grams per day from mating to 6 weeks pre-lambing. During lactation, ewe lambs should be fed 20% above mature ewe requirements. The biggest threats come from inadequate grass supply and feeding.

Silage for lambs needs to have a D-value of >65 or an ME value of >10MJ/kg DM. Silage with a shorter chop length will increase intakes and help with better growth rates, meaning less days to slaughter. A TMR mix gives a consistent diet but requires forage analysis to ensure it is correctly balanced. Concentrates are often financially rewarding for early-lambing flocks hitting the spring markets but should only be used to hit performance targets or if grazing is needed for other stock. If good quality grass is plentiful then do not feed concentrates. A feed conversion efficiency of 5:1 (kg gain:kg concentrate) is required to cover cost.

If you want any advice or support on managing your grazing system, forage production, or choice of concentrate (and whether it is required) please contact us at Dugdalenutrition.

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Ewe Type	Ewe Lambs (mature weight 70kg)	Lowland Shearlings (mature weight 70kg)	Hill Shearlings (mature weight 50kg)
Minimum weight at mating (kg)	42 (60% mature weight)	56 (80% mature weight)	40 (80% mature weight)
Target weight at lambing (kg)	56 (80% mature weight)	63 (90% mature weight)	45 (90% mature weight)
Target BCS at lambing	3.0	3.0-3.5	2.5

