

# SHEEP NEWS – JUNE 2019



Welcome to this month's sheep newsletter. I hope that lambing was a success – for once we had relatively good weather. Getting weaning right is a crucial part of both this year's and next year's production. If ewes are weaned late in poor condition this can put them on the back foot for the following season. Similarly, lamb performance can be made worse by leaving them with the ewes as they start to compete for grass.

We've been getting lots of faecal samples for faecal egg counts (FECs) in over the last few weeks – keep them coming! FECs are a great way of assessing worm burden in your lambs, especially when you think you might not have a problem – we have had some surprising results so far! Nicky

## When to wean?

Although figures across the industry indicate that lambs are typically weaned between 12-14 weeks old, it can vary widely between flocks and according to the year.

The decision to wean should be based on three things:

- Ewe body condition score (BCS)
- Lamb growth rates
- Feed availability

Therefore, because these factors alter every year, a weaning date should not be set in stone. It is also important to remember that each group of ewes and lambs will be different even across a lambing season, in terms of lamb ages; ewe condition; and lamb growth rates. So, weaning across a flock may take place according to the groups of sheep within the flock rather than as one mass event.

## 8 weeks is critical:

### Ewe condition:

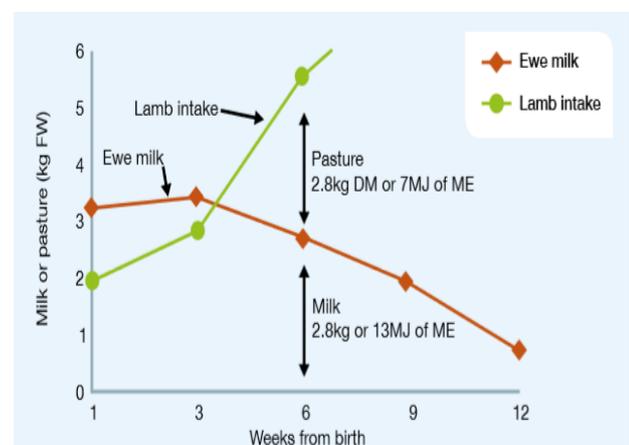
Lowland ewes should be **at least BCS 2.5 at weaning**. If more than 10% of ewes are BCS <2.5 when lambs are 8 weeks old, weaning may be brought forward to allow the ewes more time to regain condition in time for tupping. Ewes at correct BCS at tupping tend to have more lambs the following year.

### Lamb growth rates:

Lambs are most efficient in converting feed to growth in the pre-weaning period. By 8 weeks of age most of their intake comes from the pasture (or creep if available) rather than the ewe's milk.

**How much have your lambs grown?** Weighing lambs at birth/turn out will provide an average birthweight and weighing again at 8 weeks will show how well lambs are performing.

Eight-week weight is a good indicator for how lambs have performed and how well they are likely to perform the rest of the season.



**Target lamb growth rates: birth to 8 weeks old (56 days) = > 250g per day, ideally 300g per day**

### **Feed availability:**

After 8 weeks old, ewes and lambs start competing for the same high-quality grass. **If there is plenty of grass available, the lambs are growing well and ewes are in good condition, weaning can be delayed** without reducing lamb growth and impacting ewe performance. However, if (like last year) forage may be limited, wean lambs earlier. **Lamb growth rates of less than 200g per day should trigger weaning** – move lambs onto better quality forage.

**Remember to Record! Record the number of ewes and lambs that are weaned.**

### **Get your Flock Checked!**

***Any ewes scanned in lamb and not lambled?***

This year's Flock Check is now available – it's a free blood test to look for Toxoplasma and Enzootic Abortion (Chlamydia). If you don't already vaccinate for these diseases, we can look for them in your ewes. Please get in touch with the practice for more information.

### **After Weaning – The Transition Period:**

#### **The lambs:**

Avoid vaccinating or worming lambs at weaning – these should be done before weaning, if necessary, as their immune system will be compromised by the stress of weaning.

Turn lambs out onto pasture that they know once weaned. They should be placed away from the ewes – out of sound or sight. Once the lambs are settled, they may be moved onto a new pasture.

It takes 3 weeks for the rumen to adapt to new feed, and so make sure that any different feed is slowly introduced to reduce a check in growth at weaning.

#### **The ewes:**

Dry off ewes at weaning by providing low quality feed or grazing for 2 weeks afterwards.

Once dried off, condition score the whole flock, separating out according to condition score (i.e. fine/fat/thin).

Pay special attention to young and older ewes as they are more likely to need more time to gain any weight necessary before tugging.

It may be necessary to FEC thin ewes at weaning to ensure that high worm burdens are not holding back BCS.

### **Summerleaze Vets Flock Health Club**

As many of you will know, Summerleaze Vets Flock Health Club was launched last year. We have been working closely with many of our members, and we are keen to get more sheep farmers involved. The club is targeted towards commercial flocks of varying sizes, with the aim of assessing flock performance and productivity.

It's £15 per month (ex. VAT) to join which includes:

- 1 flock visit to produce a Flock Health Plan plus one other visit (total time for visit – 60 minutes)
- 3 client meetings
- 5 faecal egg counts
- 1 post-mortem (or 2 small lambs), excluding lab fees and disposal
- 1 place on our Lambing Workshop
- 10% off Ram Fertility Testing



*If you have any questions or would like to join, please get in touch at the practice.*

Contact us on 01297 304007

Email: [summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk](mailto:summerleaze@summerleaze-vets.co.uk)