

SHEEP NEWS – FEBRUARY 2020

SUMMERLEAZE
FARM & EQUINE VETS



With lambs coming thick and fast (or imminently so), this newsletter will focus on feeding your ewes and lambing performance.

Accurate feeding in the pre-lambing period will pay dividends for the coming year, by ensuring that ewes are in the correct condition, producing fit healthy lambs and providing them with plenty of colostrum and milk.

We have been looking at lamb losses within the Flock Health Club, with some of the headline results shown here – make sure you record your losses this season to find out where your flock fits in.

We wish you all the best for the season ahead, please give us a call at the office for any advice.

Feeding the Ewe at Lambing Time

Within the practice we have seen an increased number of twin lamb disease and an increased number of big lambs this year. Both of these scenarios can be caused by inefficient feeding of ewes, and so getting feeding right in the lead up to, and at the point of lambing is crucial for lambing success. Some key points to consider are:

- **Analyse your forage**

Each year's forage is different, even from the same field and cut at a similar time of year. Forage should make up at least 60% of a ewe's pre-lambing diet, and so ensuring that we know the quality of it is important before we add in other ingredients such as ewe rolls or barley.

- **Plan a ration**

Plan your ration ideally from 6 weeks pre-lambing by assessing the needs of your ewes. The requirements of each ewe will depend on several factors including her body condition score, litter size and number of weeks to lambing. Plan your ration for each group of ewes based on these requirements. We have been assessing a lot of forage and formulating rations this year, and so please get in touch if you have any questions about this.

- **Assess intakes**

Although the ration on paper may be formulated to meet a ewe's energy and protein requirements, what they are actually eating must also be measured. If ewes are under/over-eating forage, for example, then the ration should be adjusted to ensure that they are still getting what they require.

Several factors will influence feed intake, including ewe health and condition; feed palatability; timing and feeding routine and feed space. Ewes must have enough room to access the ration put in front of them. Ewes require at least 15cm per ewe for ad lib silage, and 50 cm per ewe for concentrates.

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FlockCheck 2020 is now running

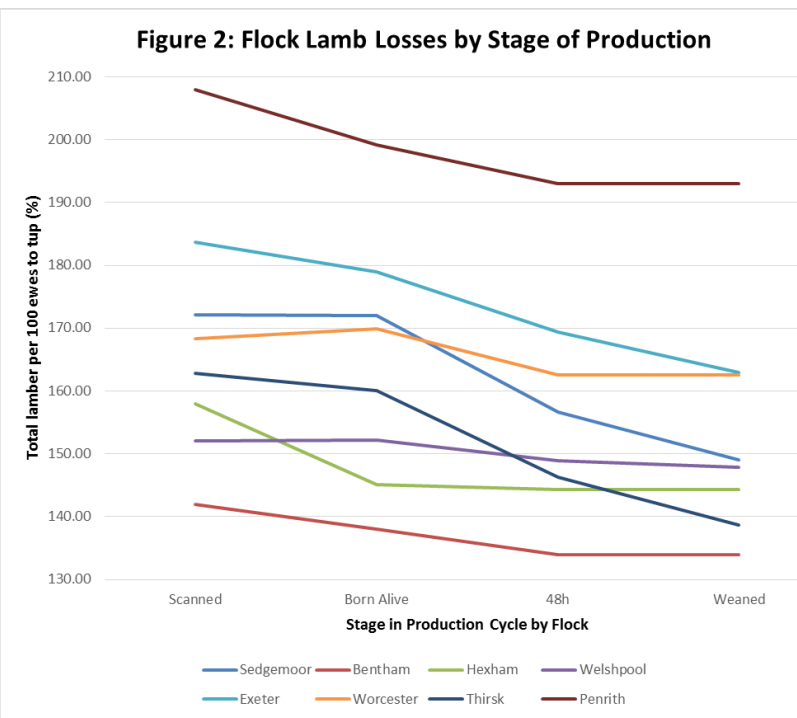
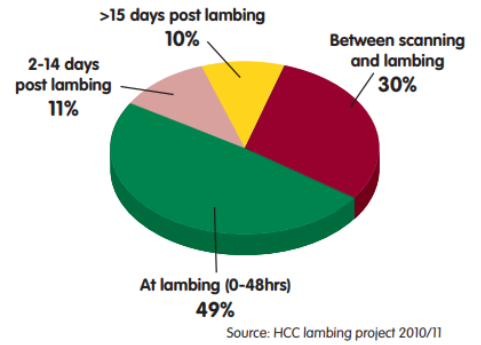
The scheme looks for infectious causes of abortion (Enzootic abortion and Toxoplasma) in ewes which scanned in lamb and aborted/did not lamb. The cost of blood sampling is free; vet time will be charged. 6-8 ewes can be bought down to the practice for sampling. Please call to discuss.

Flock Performance

Within the last year, the Flock Health Club (FHC) has been looking at lamb losses. We have been assessing areas which our flocks are performing well, and those in which potential improvements can be made.

Within the national flock, nearly 50% of lamb losses occur within the first 48 hours of life (Figure 1). Within our FHC results, the proportion of losses within the same period appears to be much higher, accounting for 60-100% of all losses (Figure 2), and so pinpointing why losses occur in the lambing shed/field is vital. EACH lamb lost at lambing time under a lowland system has been estimated to cost £20-25, and so minimising losses is crucial for maximising profits and ensuring flock sustainability.

Figure 1: When losses occur (% of total losses)



A simple tally system differentiating between wet (those born dead/ not licked by the ewe) and dry (those licked by the ewe and most likely suckled) lambs gives a rough measure of why lambs are being lost. Some of our flocks have invested in a 'LambCam' – small Bluetooth cameras installed in the lambing shed and linked to a mobile, ideal for monitoring without disturbing lambing ewes.

We also found wide variation between FHC lamb losses, ranging from 3.4% to 14.8%, averaging in 9.8% (well below the UK target of 14%). Reasons for losses were of course flock dependent, but identifying these losses allows farmers to target weaker areas in the production cycle for next year.

A key driver for flock success is rearing percentage. The total proportion of FHC lambs reared (Figure 3) averaged 157% (range 134% - 193%) which is below the UK lowland target of 168%. Although some flocks are doing well, and overall losses appear to be generally low, they still need to strive for higher rearing rates. E.g. investigating reasons for relatively low scanning rates (target 195% in a lowland system) may help to identify reasons for fewer lambs scanned to start with. The key to maximising performance is to first assess how your flock is doing to allow improvements to be made in the future.

Figure 3: Proportion of Lambs Reared by Flock (Rearing %)

