

Poor nutrition in the last 4-6 weeks of pregnancy can lead to the following problems:

Ewes

Twin lamb disease

Hypocalcaemia

Mastitis

Lambs

Hypothermia of lamb

Watery mouth/rattle belly

Joint ill (navel ill)

Pneumonia

Scour

Ewe Nutrition for Lambing

The ewe must have enough to eat and the means to be able to eat and drink enough so consider:

Grazing	Water availability
Housing	Ewe health
Trough Space	Lamb numbers

Lame Ewes

Many farmers are concerned about turning over pregnant ewes; however, the recent advances in lameness suggest that any lame sheep should be simply injected with antibiotics. This will be of minimal interference and has no ill-effect on the growing lambs.

Physical constraints:

A ewe can only consume 2-2.5% of her body weight in dry matter (DM), therefore all the requirements for this period of intense growth must be contained in this volume. For an 80kg ewe this equates to 1.6 to 2.0kg DM. This is complicated by a 10% reduction in dry matter intake (DMI) during the final two weeks of pregnancy.

Condition scoring

The ideal Body Condition Score (BCS) at lambing is 3.0-3.5 for lowland breeds and 2.5-3.0 for hill breeds. If ewes are in poorer condition then supplementary feeding needs to start earlier. If in good condition, then some energy deficits can be overcome by relying on the ewe's own reserves.

Scanning

Scanning is a very cost effective procedure that can make a huge difference to ewe feeding for the following reasons:

- Barren ewes are identified early, so do not receive supplementary feeding
- Single bearing ewes can be identified and fed accordingly, they may get sufficient energy from forage alone, reducing supplementary feed costs
- Twin and above ewes are identified so that they can be fed and monitored separately

As well as being beneficial for nutrition, identifying foetal numbers can help as part of your worming plan, if wormers are to be used at lambing.



The make-up of the diet becomes the most important factor...



Even conditions that occur later in the lamb's life, such as joint ill or some of the clostridial diseases can be attributable to poor colostrum, as a result of poor nutrition.

What to do next

Contact your local XLVets practice and ask to speak to someone about Grassroots Ewe Nutrition for Lambing.

To find your local XLVets practice and learn more about feeding ewes to ensure success at lambing time visit the XLVets website www.xlvets.co.uk.



XLVets
Excellence in Practice

Grass roots | Ewe Nutrition

www.grassroots.xlvets.co.uk

Nutritional planning:

Assuming all other factors listed before are correct, the make-up of the diet becomes the most important factor. The majority of farms will use a combination of grazing, forage (hay or silage) and commercial concentrates.

By knowing the forage analysis, the analysis of the concentrate and the calculated DMI of the ewe, the energy content of the ration can be determined. By comparing this to the known requirements, the energy excess or deficiency can be seen and any corrections made. Whilst the calculations are not difficult, your XLVets practice has a nutritional spreadsheet that can perform these.

This method can also be applied to homemade diets, and to a TMR.

Fine tuning and metabolic profiles

The only way to accurately assess the diet is to test the ewes to find out how they are responding through blood samples. This is best done approximately six weeks before lambing, ideally with a minimum of ten ewes.

Results from the analysis above will show if the energy or protein content of the diet needs adjusting.



Twin lamb disease

Twin lamb disease should be considered as a warning that the flock is under nutritional stress. Survival rates of ewes with twin lamb disease is generally poor and there is an argument that the cost of treatment is better put into the remaining healthy ewes.

TREATMENT OPTIONS:

Glucose supplements

Oral glucose will not work as it is metabolised by rumen flora, so glucose precursors such as glycol need to be used. Work from one XLVet practice suggests that dosing four times a day is more beneficial than the traditional twice daily regime.

Steroids

Much has been made recently of the use of low dose dexamethasone. However, further discussion with your XLVets practice would be recommended for this option.

Non-steroidal drugs (NSAID's)

There is evidence to show that the complex biochemistry associated with twin lamb causes release of inflammatory factor that have an effect on appetite. Suppressing these can encourage the ewe to eat.

Inducing Birth

As the major reason for the occurrence of twin lamb disease is the presence of the lambs, inducing the ewes is often the best means of a cure. However, this should be discussed in detail with your veterinary surgeon.

