

Lambing 2021

Marion Fox, B&T Drystock Advisor, Teagasc Galway/Clare

We all have seen a very different year with the Coronavirus but hopefully it will improve now that we have a vaccine. When we were in lockdown we had more time to focus on doing different jobs around the farm. For the majority of mid-season lambing flocks scanning has been completed at this stage. Scanning is a key management tool as it will guide the farmer to know how many lambs per ewe and that will determine feeding regime accordingly

Feeding:

Ewes should be at a body condition score of 3 at lambing. This gives the lamb and the ewe the best chance. Concentrates fed to ewes should be high quality. The main feed fed to ewes is silage along with concentrates. Protein intake is very important. For twin bearing ewes the requirement is 200 grams of protein per day in the later stage of pregnancy. Soya is an excellent source of protein and can be found in most concentrates or rations. The table below shows the amount of concentrates required before lambing for a twin bearing ewe. In general ewes with singles should be fed 30% less than twin bearing ewes building up to a maximum of 0.5kg/day in the week before lambing. Triplet bearing ewes should be fed 30% more than those carrying twins up to a maximum of 1kg/day prior to lambing.

Table 1. Concentrate requirements for twin bearing ewes pre lambing.									
Silage quality	Weeks before lambing							Total (kg)	Conc. cost @ €250/tonne
	(daily conc. requirement kg/ewe)								
	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		
Precision chopped silage									
72%DMD	.2	.2	.2	.3	.5	.75	15	€3.75	
65%DMD	.3	.3	.4	.5	.6	.8	20	€5.00	
Big bale/single chop									
72%DMD	.3	.3	.4	.5	.6	.8	20	€5.00	
65%DMD	.4	.4	.4	.6	.7	.8	.9	30	€7.50

Keady and Hanrahan 2009.

Preparing Equipment for Lambing:

Before lambing starts ensure you have all the equipment that you require. Have all your lambing pens disinfected, iodine for navels, castration rings, marking spray, disposable gloves, feeding tubes, teats and artificial colostrum. It is important to ensure that after each use the equipment is sterilised to prevent spread of disease.

Hygiene:

Hygiene is very important around lambing as it reduces the amount of disease exposure to both ewes, lambs and also the farmer. Pens should be cleaned out and disinfected after each time they are used. As the lambing season progresses and the workload increases we can sometime fall behind with cleaning out lambing pens but it is very important not to let our guard down as the build-up of infection increases and there is a greater risk of an outbreak of disease. There are a number of disinfectants on the market that can be used. The pens should have plenty of straw as it will give the lamb a better change when they are born in a warm clean environment. Hypothermia can develop quickly if there is not adequate dry bedding.

There are a lot of health issues that can develop around lambing time. I have described some of the main ones below:

Watery mouth: Watery mouth and / or E. coli scour are diseases associated with lambs receiving insufficient colostrum and poor hygiene. Fresh clean bedding is a must and cleanings should be removed as quickly as possible.

Naval infections: The freshly broken umbilical cord is wet with blood. Blood is an ideal medium for the multiplication and spread of bacteria. The bacteria gain access to the body via the broken cord leading to infections in many parts of the body. Nave-ill and joint-ill are just two such infections. The naval should be dipped in disinfectant. Tincture of iodine is one of the most reliable products. This both disinfects the naval and dries it out preventing further infection. Dips are generally more successful than sprays.

Coccidiosis: Coccidiosis tends to become a problem from about week three post lambing. If possible late born lambs should not be grazed on pastures that earlier born lambs previously grazed. This is particularly important if there is a long lambing spread.

Hygiene at Lambing: Colostrum: Lambs should receive 50ml of colostrum per kg body weight in the first hour (250ml for a 5kg lamb). After lambing, check that each ewe has a good supply. If not or if the lamb is unable to suck you should feed the lamb using a stomach tube, preferably with colostrum taken from freshly lambing ewes. A store of this in the freezer would be very useful.

For the best results at lambing, the key points to remember is to be prepared. Have ewes in good condition, feed accordingly as per scan results and have all equipment and pens ready in advance to help with workload.