

Top 10 tips for an easier lambing season

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Lambing time is the busiest time of year on sheep farms. Research has shown that a quarter of the annual workload occurs at lambing time. Some simple management tasks can greatly improve lamb survival and reduce your workload.

1 Prevent ewes getting thin: Monitor ewe body condition and adjust feeding levels for sheep that are losing or gaining too much body condition.

2 Minimise stress and prolapse: Provide adequate feeding space so that all ewes can eat concentrates at the same time. For most farms, this will require 500-600mm per ewe to ensure that shy feeders get equal access to feed. When calculating trough space, ensure that you only calculate available space – deduct 600mm at corners where the sheep are feeding at right angles.

3 Reduce lambing difficulty: Adjust late pregnancy feeding according to litter size and lambing date. This will reduce the number of excessively small lambs (resulting in higher mortality) or excessively large lambs (greater lambing difficulty). Target birth weights are: singles (6kg), twins (5kg) and triplets (4kg).

4 Boost colostrum quantity and quality: Feed pregnant ewes 100g of soya per day per lamb carried for the last two weeks of gestation.

5 Reduce lameness: In non-slatted winter accommodation, use adequate bedding to keep the lying area clean and dry. Apply ground or hydrated lime where the sheep stand and feed twice weekly before applying fresh straw bedding.



6 Prepare for lambing: Have stocks of all the products you need at least a week before the ewes start lambing. Gloves, lubricant, iodine for navels, antibiotics (subject to vet advice), syringes, needles, glucose, colostrum, lamb milk, bottles, teats, stomach tubes, marking spray, Calcium injection, thermometer, jugs, whisks, water/feed containers, disinfectant for lambing pens etc.

Log onto <http://www.sheepnet.network/> for other useful tips and tricks.

7 Have adequate lambing pens: Have at least one lambing pen available for every 10 ewes due to lamb. This will allow ewes and newborn lambs to be held inside for longer periods, particularly during adverse weather.

8 Bedding and disinfecting pens: Use adequate bedding in lambing pens and clean and disinfect lambing

pens after each occupancy to reduce the disease challenge to newborn lambs. You will require approximately four 4x4 round bales of straw per 100 ewes for bedding.

9 Adequate colostrum: Ensure that all lambs receive adequate colostrum in the first six hours of life. Colostrum provides newborn lambs with nutrition, but also antibodies to fend off disease. Every lamb should receive 50ml/kg birth weight of ewe's colostrum. If using artificial colostrum or cows' colostrum, always include some colostrum from ewes.

For example, if a ewe with triplets only has 300ml of colostrum, then each of her three lambs should receive 100ml of ewe colostrum and the deficit should be made up of either colostrum substitute or cows' colostrum where there is no alternative source of ewe colostrum available.

10 Establish a strong mother/offspring bond: When lambing indoors, it is essential that the ewe and her lambs are given time alone to bond. Aim for a minimum residency period of 24 hours in the individual lambing pen for each ewe/lamb combination. Ideally, this should be followed by a few days in a group pen, or a small sheltered paddock with some other ewes and their lambs.

