



Lambing: Lights-Camera-Action

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The lambing season is fast approaching for the midseason flock with most of the early lambing completed. Good preparation and planning will help in achieving a better outcome. About half of lamb mortality occurs in the first 48 hours post lambing. Every extra lamb that is kept alive should contribute to a better profit margin as feeding and management to date will be a drain on the system.

Health

Health, disease control and feeding are all interlinked and a simple Health Plan is a good base to work from. Parasite control should be based on such and on flock history in consultation with your vet. A fluke control/monitoring regime is required on every farm. The view is that healthy adult ewes should not usually require a worm dose. Vaccination requirements can vary from flock to flock but most will be considering boosters for clostridia.

A good guide of overall flock status is ewe body condition. The target body condition for ewes at lambing being 3 (lowland) and 2.5 (hill). Trying to significantly improve at this stage is difficult but if used along with your scanning results, it is a good base to draw up an appropriate feed programme. Ewes should be grouped based on scanning and expected lambing date estimated from raddle colours. This will lead to stronger lambs at birth and with correct feeding less mortality from oversize lambs. For example it may be possible to allow a thin ewe carrying twins to be fed with the triplet ewes or a fat twin to go with the singles.

Feed

Feeding regime is recognized as important by all, but the number of farmers getting forage analyzed doesn't support this idea very well. What's on your farm? Excellent quality silage may go near fulfilling the ewes feed requirements up to lambing but the reality is that most must be supplemented due to poorer quality forage and/or carrying multiples. With purchased compound rations you generally get what you pay for, so pre lambing don't be penny pinching.

An example of Meal Feeding - Summary

Meal feeding (kg per head per day) level for twin-bearing mature ewes in good body condition.

Roughage quality	Weeks pre-lambing					Total (kg)
	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-1	
Excellent			0.1	0.4	0.6	15
Good		0.1	0.4	0.6	0.7	20
Moderate		0.1	0.4	0.6	0.8	25
Poor	0.1	0.3	0.6	0.8	1.0	40

Single bearing - 70% that of twins. Triplets +30%

Accommodation

Will lambing be outdoors in nearby paddocks or inside in the sheep shed? There are differing views which is best. For outdoor lambing small fields with good shelter and good grass are best. This can be more difficult as season progresses in that paddocks will be grazed or “contaminated” from earlier lambings. Some sort of pens to hold or catch ewes/lambs will be required. Housing has greater costs and capital tied up but management is easier when everything goes right. As the lambing season progresses there will be more disease build up indoors. Insufficient trough space is often an issue and clean water access can be overlooked. Straw usage must be adequate in lambing pens and under ewes if not on slats. Shortage of individual pens can be a problem especially if weather at turnout is poor. The target is one lambing pen for every ten ewes. This allows a ewe and her lambs bond for 24-48 hours. Next move them to group pens with up to 8-10 ewes and their lambs. Avoid overstocking sheds/pens. Try to ensure issues like lameness are resolved pre housing. If a few sheep are lame going into a shed/paddock then the majority will be lame in a short period with the increased stocking density.



Facilities and equipment

To assist lambing you need a toolkit. Hygiene is very important and a small bucket/ tray that can be easily cleaned is useful to carry items with you about the shed. Wear disposable lambing gloves, have lubricant, lambing ropes, lambing aid and a fostering crate available if needed. Once the lamb is born disinfect the navel. Access to hot water is required plus a supply of colostrum, ensuring the lamb receives adequate amount in the first few hours of life- 1 litre in 24 hours. Keeping lambs warm and well fed greatly reduces the risk of mortality. If required measure lamb temperature with a thermometer and place hypothermic lambs in a heat box/lamp. Other items to have to hand include sterilising solution, stomach tubes, bottles/teats, glucose solution, electrolytes, prolapse harness. A discussion with your vet based on previous year's issues will be a guide for what drugs and needles/syringes you need to have to hand. Don't go looking for items at 4 am in the snow!

The importance of good lighting is obvious inside and out for man and animal in helping prevent accidents and deter predators. On most farms it will be single person supervision and the use of a camera monitor can allow some sleep especially as the season drags out and fatigue creeps in. Hoping these simple actions and favorable weather will leave additional lambs for market!

