

# September 2018

# **Preparing for Tupping**

The nights are drawing in and tupping time is approaching once again - some early lambers may even have already put the rams in.

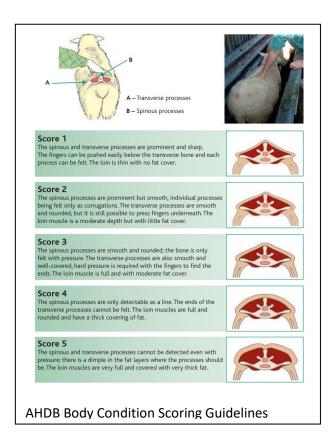
This newsletter will cover top tips to ensure ewes and rams are in tip top condition ready for breeding.

#### **Body Condition Scoring**

As always, body condition score of ewes prior to going to the ram is vitally important. If ewes are too thin they will have poor ovulation

Target BCS at Tupping (AHDB Lamb)	
Lowland	3.5
Upland	3
Hill	2.5

rates, but if they are too fat they suffer high embryonic loss.



Ewes should gain some condition between weaning and tupping, see table for target scores at tupping.

Monitoring body condition 6 weeks prior to tupping allows alterations to be made before breeding if needed.

### **Flushing**

Ewes with a body condition score between 2 and 4 may benefit from an increased plane of nutrition in the few weeks leading up to tupping, this can be in the form of silage or high energy cake / feed blocks. This level of nutrition should be maintained for 3 weeks once rams have been removed, the stress of a diet change in early pregnancy can lead to early embryonic death.

Take care with ewes which are already high parity such as Aberdales and Lleyns.

#### **Trace Element Status**

Trace elements, particularly selenium can have a big impact on fertility. Blood sampling a selection of ewes around 6 weeks prior to lambing is a good practice to get an idea if there are trace

element problems on your farm. Do not sample ewes while on concentrate feed.



#### Beware of feeding

supplements without prior testing, not only is it a waste of money, there is a risk of overdose, especially copper - toxicity may not be seen immediately but levels can build up over time leading to a big problem in the future.

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#### **Selection of Ewes for Breeding**

This should start at lambing the previous year any ewes which have had problems such as prolapses, or mastitis should be marked as a culls.

Prior to tupping, teeth should be checked, along with udders, feet and BCS. Any ewes with issues should be culled. If there seems to be a large number of thin ewes, or you have had a lot of ewe deaths, it is possible there is underlying issues with one of the iceberg diseases (OPA, Johnes, MV) and may be worth having some investigative work done.

#### **Vaccinations**

Enzootic and Toxoplasma abortion are responsible for 60% of ewe abortions in the UK. Vaccines are available for both these causes - Enzovax and Toxovax. Toxovax has a licence for 2 lambing seasons and Enzovax for 3 - 4 years so they do not need to be repeated annually. Both vaccines must be given at least 4 weeks prior to breeding for protection.

# Worming

Ewes should NOT need worming prior to tupping. The exception is if there is a problem with Haemonchus on your farm, in which case a narrow



Haemonchus appearance under microscope

spectrum product can be used (Clostantel). If you are concerned about levels of worms in your ewes, then drop us in a faecal sample for worm egg counting. If there are high numbers of worms present this is suggestive of an underlying issue such as trace element deficiency.

#### The Boys... RAM MOT

It is important to give all rams a once over prior

to use to ensure they are fit to serve the ewes - with an AHDB recommendation of 1 ram to 40 - 60 open ewes, they have a lot of



work to do in the breeding period.

Rams should be checked around 10 weeks prior to mating, spermatogenesis takes 6 weeks, so it is important to address any issues long before work is started.

#### The 5 T's:

**Teeth:** Check for over / undershot jaws - this is a genetic issue, so these rams should not be used for breeding, check for missing teeth and any abscesses. Rams need a lot of energy in tupping time so anything that will stop them eating is a big problem.

**Toes:** Check feet, locomotion and watch for signs of arthritis, a lame, painful ram will not be inclined to serve many sheep

**Testicles:** Feel for firmness and evenness. Using a tape measure, check scrotal circumference at the widest part of the scrotum. This should be >36cm for mature rams or >34cm for ram lambs.

**Tone:** Rams will often use 10 - 15% of their bodyweight in the breeding season so they need to be in good condition at the start, aim for BCS 3.5 - 4.

**Treatments:** Rams can often be overlooked as they are kept separately for most of the year, make sure their vaccinations are up to date. They are much more susceptible to worms than ewes, so it is worth worm egg counting them.

## Don't forget to check the penis...

Finally make sure the penis is freely movable in the prepuce and has no signs of trauma. It can be quite difficult to extrude the penis at first, but practice makes perfect!

If you have any doubts about fitness of your rams, we can perform an electro-ejaculation and have a look at the semen, both

numbers and viability.

Good luck, Sarah