



September 2018

Preparing for Topping

The nights are drawing in and topping 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 rates, but if they are too fat they suffer high embryonic loss.

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

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

Monitoring body condition 6 weeks prior to topping 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 topping, 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 Lleys.

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.

A – Transverse processes
B – Spinous processes

<p>Score 1 The spinous and transverse processes are prominent and sharp. The fingers can be pushed easily below the transverse bone and each process can be felt. The loin is thin with no fat cover.</p>	
<p>Score 2 The spinous processes are prominent but smooth, individual processes being felt only as corrugations. The transverse processes are smooth and rounded, but it is still possible to press fingers underneath. The loin muscle is a moderate depth but with little fat cover.</p>	
<p>Score 3 The spinous processes are smooth and rounded; the bone is only felt with pressure. The transverse processes are also smooth and well-covered, hard pressure is required with the fingers to find the ends. The loin muscle is full and with moderate fat cover.</p>	
<p>Score 4 The spinous processes are only detectable as a line. The ends of the transverse processes cannot be felt. The loin muscles are full and rounded and have a thick covering of fat.</p>	
<p>Score 5 The spinous and transverse processes cannot be detected even with pressure; there is a dimple in the fat layers where the processes should be. The loin muscles are very full and covered with very thick fat.</p>	

AHDB Body Condition Scoring Guidelines

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 tugging, 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 tugging. The exception is if there is a problem with Haemonchus on your farm, in which case a narrow

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



Haemonchus appearance under microscope



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 tugging 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

