



The
GEORGE
Farm Vets

Optimising lamb growth rates this summer - June 2025

As the summer season gets underway, it's time to shift focus from lambing to maximising lamb growth rates. Whether you're selling store lambs or finishing at home, ensuring lambs reach target weights efficiently is key to profitability - especially with rising input costs and fluctuating market prices. Here are some practical ways to get the best out of your lambs:

1. Prioritise high-quality grazing

From eight weeks of age, a lamb's energy intake is greater from grass than from milk, so competition for high-quality grass between ewes and lambs reaches a critical point.

Weighing lambs at 8 weeks can give an indication of ewe milk supply, the health status of the group and forage supply. It also allows a weaning date to be planned.

In general, the following principles can be applied:

- **Young lambs need high-energy grass.** Swards should be leafy and at 7-10cm in height when ewes and lambs are moved onto it, down to 4-5cm before moving
- **Rotate grazing** to maintain quality. Move lambs frequently and allow rest periods of 18–25 days. This usually requires large paddocks to be divided into smaller ones to allow enough rest time. Maximising grass growth and utilisation will reduce costs and boost overall profitability

Grazing system	Expected grass utilization (%)
Set stocking (grazing large areas for long periods)	50
Continuous grazing or relaxed rotational grazing with limited control over sward height	60
Rotational grazing with reasonable grazing pressure, good control over sward height	65
Paddock grazing, frequent moves, good control over sward height	80

- **Avoid stemmy or mature grass** - this can be topped or mowed ahead of lambs to improve regrowth quality

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2. Consider creep feeding lambs

It is important to pre-empt potential problems early on. Lambs should be started on creep feed as soon as possible after birth, although they will not eat significant amounts of feed until they are at least three to four weeks old. Providing early access to creep feed gets lambs in the habit of eating dry feed and helps stimulate development of their rumens. It also reduces the stress of early weaning (< 60 days). Consider it for next season if lamb growth isn't hitting target.

Creep feeding should be considered when:

- Grass quality is poor
- Ewe milk supply is declining
- Lots of ewes with twins/triplets
- Land is drought-prone

3. Minimise the worm burden

Gastrointestinal worms can have a massive impact on first season lambs, reducing growth rates by up to 40% and can even cause losses in severe cases. It is important to take proactive measures as significant productivity losses can occur before clinical signs develop.

How can we get ahead?

- Regular weighing - poor daily live weight gain is often an early warning sign that there may be a worm burden
- Frequent sampling for worm egg counting - gives a good indication of worm burden and pasture contamination within each management group

Table 5: Lamb growth rate targets according to age and sward type*		
Timing	Daily target	Cumulative target
0 to 56 days (eight weeks)	>320 g/day	>280 g/day to 90 days (an average of 30 kg at weaning)
67 to 90 days (weaning)	>240 g/day	
Post weaning for finishing summer and autumn	>150 g/day pasture and aftermath	>250 g/day from birth to sale for spring lambing flocks aiming to finish most lambs off grass
	>180 g/day aftermath or high clover sward	
	>200 g/day forage crops and herbal leys	
	>300 g/day red clover and creep feeding	

* SRDP Farm Advisory Service (2023)

Grazing management can be used to reduce dependence on wormers but requires significant planning. Parasite burdens can be reduced by:

- Alternating grazing between cattle one year and sheep the next
- Grazing new leys after forage or arable crops
- Avoiding high risk fields i.e. pasture used year on year by sheep

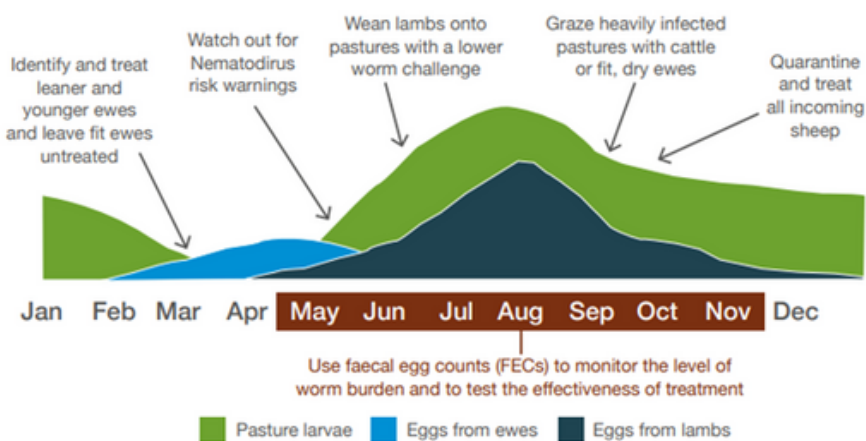


Figure 6. Diagram of worm challenges throughout the season

Using wormers effectively

- check the dose rate
- dose according to weight - don't guess
- calibrate dosing equipment using a measuring pot
- administer correctly - proper restraint is essential
- perform a post treatment worm egg count to ensure treatment has been effective
 - White/clear/orange/purple: 14 days post worming
 - Yellow: 7 days post worming



All the best,
Zoe