



The
GEORGE
Farm Vets

Achieving success this spring

- March 2023



Spring is around the corner; some may be nearing the tail end of the busy lambing season and some may just be starting. In either case, now is the key time to be thinking about an effective and economic rearing plan to get the most return from the long hours spent getting lambs on the ground.

Hitting targets

Weaning: between 8-12 weeks depending on...

Ewe BCS: 90% of ewes with BCS 2-2.5 at weaning, leaner ewes will benefit from early weaning.

Grass growth: as lambs near weaning (e.g. 8 weeks) energy realised from grass overtakes that from milk, capitalise on abundant grass growth with early weaning to benefit both lambs and ewe

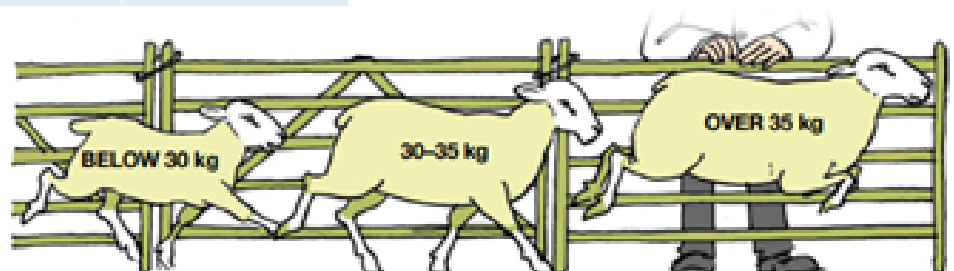
Monitor growth

Lamb growth rates: aim for >200g a day based on an 8 week weight, concern over lower growth rates should prompt consideration for early weaning and issues such as under-nutrition or worm burdens.

| Key performance indicator (KPI) | Industry target |
|-------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| Average eight-week lamb weight (kg) | >20 kg |
| Average age at weaning (days) | <100 days |
| Average weight at weaning (kg) | >30 kg |
| Average daily liveweight gain to weaning (kg per day) | >250 g |
| Average 90-day lamb weight (kg) | >30 kg |
| 90-day lamb weight per ewe to ram (kg) | >45 kg |
| Weight of lamb reared per ewe to ram (kg) | >60 kg |



Make early decisions around sales based on growth rates and feed availability to avoid growth checks from over-stocking.



AHDB, Growing and finishing lambs for Better Returns (<https://ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/growing-and-finishing-lambs-for-better-returns>).

LONG KEEP
more than twelve weeks
Total gain = 12-18 kg
80-100 g gain/day

MEDIUM KEEP
six to twelve weeks
Total gain = 6-12 kg
90-110 g gain/day

SHORT KEEP
less than six weeks
Total gain = 5-6 kg
140-160 g gain/day

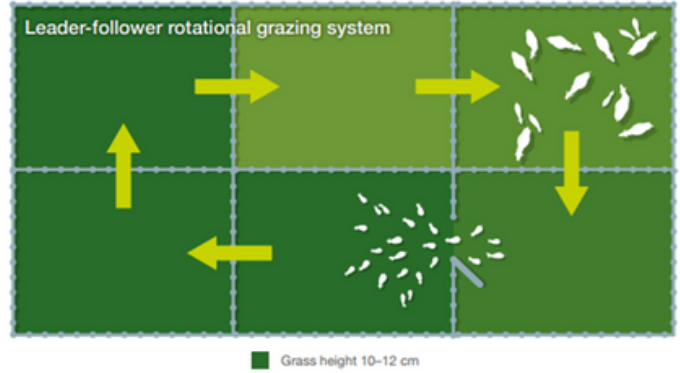
COMPASSION RESPECT INTEGRITY SUSTAINABILITY PROGRESSION CARE

T: 01666 823035 Option "1" for visits or enquiries, "2" for medicines or shop, "3" for TB testing

- **Feeding**

Paying close attention to feed quality and abundance is more crucial than ever, grazed forage is still the cheapest feed source available and, whilst a challenge to manage last year, should still be a focus this year. As can be seen below, **well managed grazed forage can achieve economical growth rates.**

| Crop | Sowing time | Period of use | Growing costs (£/ha/yr) | Potential lamb growth (g/day) | Yield (tonnes DM/ha) | DM (%) | ME (MJ/kg DM) | CP (g/kg DM) |
|----------------------------------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|
| Rye-grasses e.g. perennial and Italian | Apr-Sep | All year | 300-450 (for 5 years) | 250 | 10-11 | 15-25 grazing | 10-12 | 15-16 |
| | | Or as silage | | | 13-14 | 30-45 silage | 10-12 | 12-16 |
| Red clover | Apr-Jul | Grazing: Aug-Nov | 350-600 (for 5 years) | 300 | 10-15 | 12-18 grazing | 11-12 | 20-25 |
| | | Or as silage | | | | 25-30 silage | 10-11 | 14-19 |



When grazing to maximise return, sward height is key. Aim for 6-8cm in set stocked or 10-12cm pre-grazing in rotational systems, to get the most energy from spring growth and promote re-growth through the season. Prioritise weaned lambs when breaking into fresh pasture, followed by ewes (+/- later lambs) or cattle as this maximises energy intake whilst reducing parasite risk

- **Potential pitfalls**

Many of these will be familiar problems that rear their heads year on year, having a plan in place and spotting the early warning signs is key to prevent a disaster!

- **Parasite burdens**

Look out for poor growth, faecal stained wool and speak to your vet about FAMCHA scoring for specific issues like Haemonchus

Worm burdens are hard to predict, a hot summer last year does not mean an easy ride this year; an easy way to keep on top is **regular worm egg counts**. There is no strict protocol for doing this but the more frequent the better; starting from 3-4 weeks at first-turnout or post-lambing and continuing at regular 4-6 week intervals through summer or times of high risk.



SCOPS provides an invaluable tool for forecasting and field mapping potential high risk parasite burdens, in particular for the strongyle worm *Nematodirus* which can often strike quicker than realised on WECs. Utilising this tool in the coming months as lambs are growing at grass will be crucial to avoid growth checks.



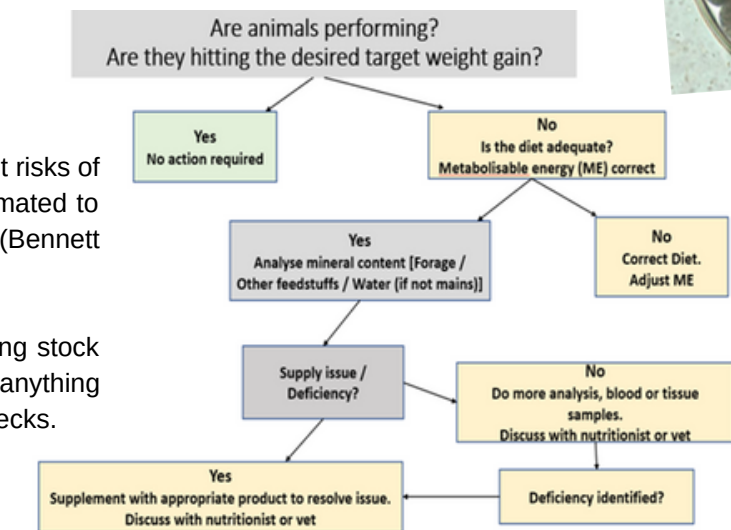
- **Vaccinations**

Clostridial disease and Pasteurellosis pose significant risks of growth checks to growing lambs, with the latter estimated to cost the industry between £7-15 million per season (Bennett R., 2005).

Make sure to plan primary courses for future breeding stock and late-kept fattening or store lambs (generally anything kept over 10 weeks of age) to avoid costly growth checks.

- **Trace Mineral deficiencies**

'Minerals and vitamins' are often turned to as a cause for poor growth rates during spring but often at the expense of more obvious causes as outlined in the decision tree on this page.



All the best,

Will Balhatchet

