



The  
**GEORGE**  
Farm Vets



## Managing ewes pre-tupping - June 2023

There are plenty of well-grown lambs to be seen leaping about as we drive from farm to farm; as usual they steal the limelight in the late-spring and summer!

Our focus tends to be on lamb growth rates and how to provide the best grazing for lambs. However, in their first couple of months, lamb daily weight gain is largely dependent on the condition of the ewe; the quality of the grazing she has access to and any supplementary feed she may receive.

Ewes reach peak milk yield three to four weeks post lambing and so they need good quality grass to this point. If this isn't available, supplementation is necessary to meet the growing nutritional demands of the lambs at foot and if we fail to provide this, the consequences are seen in lamb growth and ewe health.

Weighing lambs at eight weeks can help you assess how this period has been. For example, if a lamb cohort on average is making 21kg each by this time, they will have been gaining 300g a day (given they started off at 4kg). This is reflected in the industry performance targets (if feeding any creep you would expect to achieve higher eight-week weights than these values):



**Table 1. Industry performance targets (excludes pure hill breeds)**

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

If the average lamb is falling below your targets, are you able to identify why?

It may be an issue that the lambs are facing – scald, worm burdens, coccidiosis – or it may be that the ewes aren't producing enough milk. When you choose to wean the lambs can and should vary from year to year, depending on the factors we have mentioned above. If the ewes are in poor condition, the lambs are below expected weight, or if grazing is restricted you may choose to wean earlier than last year. From eight weeks, a lambs energy intake is greater from grass than from milk and by 10 weeks old lambs will be beginning to compete with ewes for grass. Weaning to separate pastures at this age will reduce the pressure on the ewes and the grazing.

When you consider that a ewe has produced two healthy lambs and by 8 weeks they are meeting their 21kg target, it's easy to see why they will have dropped in condition whilst in late pregnancy and early lactation! Once lambs have been weaned off, the energy demand on the ewe to produce milk decreases as they dry-off, and now is the time to improve that condition.

## MEETINGS COMING UP

**MEDICINE HANDLING COURSE**  
**@ THE PRACTICE ON**  
**THURSDAY 22nd JUNE**  
**11AM TO 12.30pm**

It takes approximately two months for a ewe to gain 1 body condition score on good grass, which most will need to fully recoup. If mid-summer is a repeat of last year, with depleting forage availability and quality, condition may be added quickly by supplementing grass with hay/silage or whole cereals. We would expect a ewe to be body condition score 2.5 at weaning and aim for her to be a 3.5 when the tup is turned in (varies depending on breed - an upland type ewe tends to be half a condition score less). If the condition of an individual hasn't improved after one month, particularly when the rest in the cohort have, consider investigation or adding her to the cull list.

Culling these ewes, amongst others, help refine the flock and prevent you carrying problems to next year – you'll be glad to be rid of some of the problem individuals! Look back over lambing records and cull – who was blind on half her udder, who prolapsed, who has needed repeat treatments for lameness. It is more cost effective to sell a cull ewe and buy a replacement than to keep and feed a ewe for a year to lose her at lambing for a problem she had history for having once and was likely to have again.

At this time it's worth taking the time to add-up reasons for cull and compare to the previous years (if you haven't details from last year, start now!). Monitoring these numbers (not just a feeling!) can help change management decisions for next year.

For example you might find you have had to cull more ewes than previously, due to mastitis. Perhaps you know circumstances meant the ewes were fed less/poorer forage during early lactation than normal. This lower plane of nutrition resulted in poorer milk production and hungry lambs damaged teat ends, predisposing the ewes to mastitis. Mastitis is highly infectious and transmissible so the whole flock was at a higher risk. Low milk production is likely to have also caused a reduction in eight-week lamb weights, and the ewes have more condition to put on before they see the tup. Sometimes these decisions are out of our hands, but if you can plan ahead now for problems you think you are at risk of later, the solution might come more easily than when under pressure.

Consider a cull ewe screen, particularly if you have unexplained reduced performance in the flock (speak with your vet, you may be able to access free blood testing) or submitting two or three ewes to the APHA laboratory, particularly for iceberg diseases (MV, OPA, Johnes). These can be collected for free depending on the farm's location, post-mortem examination and disposal is approximately £105 ex VAT for up to three ewes (any additional tests will cost more depending on what is recommended however; this would be arranged on a case by case basis).

Remember to plan incoming ewe management! Replacements need to be on site 6-8 weeks pre-tupping. This gives time for quarantine dose for worms, fluke, scab treatment. Foot problems can be identified and treated. The ewes can settle into their new diet.

**Short reminder** to keep on top of your fly treatments: we are receiving plenty of advice and emergency calls regarding flystruck sheep and lambs! Preventative treatments and fast action to check sheep can make all the difference.

**15th of June** is the deadline for applications to this round of funding through the Farming Equipment and Technologies fund 2023. The Animal Health and Welfare part of this fund includes races, crushes, weighing equipment, EID reading kit – all good stuff for weighing lambs and making choices about weaning, dosing, finishing and culling as discussed above! (guidance and applications can be found if you 'google' Farming equipment and technology fund 2023). Whilst these grants do require serious investment from yourselves, if it is kit you were considering or planning for in the near future, please take advantage! The more information you collect, the better informed your decisions and our advice can be.

All the best,

Joe Pescod



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### Reasons to cull:

- Barren, unproductive, poor BCS, poor mothering ability
- Broken mouthed, too old, poor teat conformation
- Abortion, mastitis, lameness, prolapse