

How to receive maximum returns from your lambs

I want fatter lambs. How can I achieve this?

What factors influence lamb growth rates? There are lots of things that contribute to getting lambs to optimal market conditions, which include genetics, including breed choice of ewes and rams, environmental factors, ewe nutrition, grass availability, creep feeding and disease, including parasites. These should be factored by the farm's management with target market in mind.

How do you assess if your lambs are ready?

The only way of knowing when lambs are ready is by putting your hands on them. Weighing lambs is important but isn't the only thing that needs to be considered, lambs should also have a suitable level of fat "finish" over the ribs, loin and dock. Carcasses are graded using the EUROP system and the fat grade is assessed over these three points. Eblex runs courses that demonstrate such grading on live lambs and lamb carcasses on Alive to Dead courses which are worthwhile for anyone selling lambs in

FATTER LAMBS

Holly Critchley of the Minster Veterinary Practice, York, on improving lamb growth rates

the market, or deadweight.

When is it best to wean without stunting growth rates?

Lambs may be weaned from eight weeks old as by this time they will be gaining more energy from grass than milk. Lambs and ewes will be competing with each other for the best quality grass; in good years weaning may be delayed. However, if there is a shortage of forage, weaning lambs and allowing them access to the best grass will maximise growth rates. Time of weaning also depends on ewe factors – body condition score, next year's tupping etc.

Should I feed lambs creep or not?

Creep feed can be used as a supplementary feed for lambs at grass, especially where grass availability is low. In good years, lambs can

match growth rates and finish on grass alone – feeding creep will not necessarily be cost-effective. A cost benefit analysis using daily consumption and expected growth rates should be planned in advance.

Can feeding creep do any harm?

If feeding creep it should be introduced gradually so lambs do not gorge themselves and get acidosis. The creep feeder should be checked daily to make sure that ewes and lambs are not stuck in it and also that it is kept topped up. Once lambs are being fed ad lib, the feeder should always be topped up. If the creep feed keeps running out lambs will not grow as well as they would having a constant diet – this would have a negative impact on any cost benefits gained by using creep feed.

Does worming lambs

improve finishing lambs?

Worms can affect growth rates in lambs. However, worming lambs will only improve growth rates if worms are a problem. Before worming lambs, a worm egg count should be carried out to decide whether they need worming or, indeed, treatment for coccidiosis. If lambs are wormed then a post-worming egg count should also be done to check that the wormer has worked and there is no resistance.

Should male and female lambs be separated for finishing?

Entire male lambs should be separated from ewe lambs by five months old. Male lambs have higher growth rates but will need a high-quality ration for finishing. Keeping ram lambs over eight months old can affect the meat quality.

Why are some lambs heavy enough but are not finished?

This may be due to breed, sex, nutrition or disease. Identifying the cause is important for future years



HANDS ON: Holly Critchley

but may also change from year to year. Lambs should be checked for signs of disease – lameness, worms, blow fly strike. It can take weeks for lambs to start putting condition on after a period of disease, even if they have a large frame.