

Keeping a sheep healthy will require a certain diet

What information do I need to feed my ewes correctly?

FIRSTLY, you need to know what condition score (CS) the ewes are in now and how many lambs they are carrying. It is very difficult to feed ewes well without that information.

Analysing your silage or hay allows you to work out how much energy and protein you can get from it. This makes it much easier to set feeding rates for concentrates and helps in choosing the correct concentrate to make a balanced ration.

Finally, you need the label declarations particularly ME and protein levels of the concentrates you are considering using. Traditionally, ewe concentrate has been sold based on protein percentage so you may need to work with your rep to get the energy levels too.

Why is condition scoring so important?

Thin ewes are likely to have underweight lambs, as well as insufficient colostrum and milk all of which severely affects lamb survival. Recent studies by SAC found that

SHEEP FEEDING

Judith Lee, of Westmorland Veterinary Group, looks at how to ensure you feed your sheep correctly

ewes lambing in a good enough condition to lose a CS from lambing to weaning reared 6.2kg more of weaned lambs. Aim for lowland ewes to be CS 3 at lambing, upland ewes CS 2.5 and hill ewes CS 2.

I usually buy my ewe concentrate based on price, what else should I be looking at?

The main reason ewes are fed concentrates pre-lambing is to bridge the energy gap between forage and the requirements of late pregnancy. For that reason, look at concentrate price in terms of pence per mega joule rather than pounds per tonne. Then check the listed ingredients. Look for high levels of cereals as energy sources. Soya bean or rapeseed meals are good protein sources. Beware of high-energy concentrates

containing high levels of oils and fat which can impair rumen function. Fibre should also be less than ten per cent unless high levels of sugar beet pulp, citrus pulp or brewers by-products are included.

I have heard a lot about "bypass protein", is it important?

Recent research work has suggested that prolific ewes or those with fast-growing lambs can benefit from higher levels of digestible undegradable protein (DUP or bypass protein). Some studies have found that feeding a protein supplement alongside a high quality/high ME silage can provide enough for ewes to perform well without extra energy sources. However, on most traditional sheep farms this quality of silage is difficult to achieve. Getting the



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energy levels right is the priority so inevitably concentrates will nearly always be required.

What else do I need to consider?

Make sure that you have provided enough trough /rack space to ensure all your sheep can eat what they need. They also need easy access to fresh, clean water.

How can I check I have got

the diet right?

Once you have made all the calculations, keep an eye on your sheep. Continue condition scoring and monitoring whether they are eating the amount of forage you predicted. Metabolic profiles (blood testing a small sample of ewes) to look at energy status and protein balance can be invaluable in late pregnancy. Ask your vet for details.

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