

# Facts and figures are vital for introducing new sheep

## Lambing time is busy enough without having to record data, why is it so important?

Keeping records can be very difficult particularly when large numbers of lambs are being born over a short space of time or at the end of a long, tiring shift.

They can, however, be invaluable at the end of a season when things haven't gone as well as expected. By analysing simple records, improvements can be put into place to make next lambing season more profitable. Even if the season has gone well it is still good to compare against targets and national averages to make sure you are maximising your potential.

## My number of barren ewes was higher than expected, what could this mean?

If you have more barren ewes than expected (aim for less than five per cent) then this could be a sign of underlying problems such as faulty nutrition, trace element deficiencies (copper and selenium in particular), stress and infertility of the tup and/or the ewes. Perform a ram MOT ten weeks pre-tupping, check the body condition score (BCS) of ewes going to the tup (aim for BCS 3), and ensure there are enough tups to serve the ewes (particularly if you have a few young tups). The top end ratio is usually one tup to 40 ewes although with more robust tups more ewes can be served. Barren ewes may have been in lamb but resorbed/aborted their foetuses during early pregnancy and so an infectious cause could also be to blame.

## I don't scan my ewes and haven't had any problems, is scanning necessary?

Scanning is an invaluable tool that allows barren ewes to be removed to prevent wasting resources and allow correct feeding of the ewes when split into groups according to their litter sizes. Increasing the number of lambs born will only improve profits if the ewe can rear the additional lambs. If multiples are produced then nutrition at tupping could be controlled to try to limit the incidence of triplets and quads.

## Abortions have been a problem this year, what could be the cause?

An abortion storm can be devastating. If abortions count for greater than two per cent of births, get the foetus and placenta samples to your vet ASAP. Early recognition of more problems than expected at the beginning of lambing can aid early diagnosis and help reduce financial losses. Toxoplasmosis, enzootic abortion (chlamydia), listeriosis, campy-

## VETERINARY ADVICE

Looking back at lambing performance data with Laura Sloan of Millcroft Veterinary Group

lobacter, salmonella and mycotoxins can all cause abortion in sheep. Nutrition and the stress of handling or prolonged periods of extreme weather can also cause embryos to be lost. Appropriate treatment can help to reduce further losses such as antibiotic treatment for salmonella and enzootic abortion.

A vaccination programme could be put into place if appropriate vaccine is available such as for toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion.

Further blood samples of ewes after the lambing season may be needed in some cases.

## I've had a lot of birthing problems, is this just bad luck?

Body condition of ewes throughout pregnancy is important, aim for BCS

3 two months before lambing. Over conditioned ewes tend to produce larger lambs, have a reduced diameter of birth canal, have an increased risk of vaginal prolapse and becoming cast.

Under-conditioned ewes may have small, weak lambs which can be slow to suck, have reduced colostrum or may struggle with birth through getting fatigued. If nutrition is considered good then try to identify other problems such as disease, liver fluke or worms any of which could have an impact on the condition of the ewes.

## Why should I split lamb losses into different age categories?

At the end of the season if the number of lambs reared/finished is not

what was expected then the figures can be checked to see at what stage these losses occurred. Early lamb deaths can be due to:

- the size of the lambs
- genetic problems
- trauma from the birthing process
- low colostrum intake
- infection
- poor mothering

Some cases of abortion can increase the number of stillborn or weakly lambs. Lamb deaths after the first week of life to weaning include infectious diseases, coccidiosis, worms, poor mothering and predators.

If lambs take a longer time to finish consider fluke, worms and deficiencies as possible factors.

Aim to reduce overall lamb losses to five to ten per cent.

Post-mortem examinations can help to identify infectious causes of death such as clostridial disease and pasteurella in which case vaccination programmes can be started or reviewed. Don't forget other avoida-

ble losses such as dosing gun injuries which are surprisingly common.

## What replacement rate should I be aiming for?

Ewe deaths in association with lambing should be less than three per cent.

Record the reasons for these deaths and culls and if there a lot of ewes with the same problem then investigate.

For example, if footrot is common then check lameness in the flock and consider a control programme incorporating vaccination. When some problems are identified we can look for replacements from good mothers or choose a tup to complement the downfalls eg use EBVs for lamb vigour, birthweight or lambing ease.

Aim for a replacement rate of 20 per cent to keep the flock young and healthy.

Management of ewes and lambs before, during and after pregnancy is crucial to make this stressful time of year as rewarding as possible.



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