

Information Note:

Successful management of triplet rearing ewes and breeding hoggs



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Sustainable Sheep Systems webinar

“Two’s Company, Three Doesn’t Have to be a Crowd”

Breeding ewe hoggs and managing ewes for more triplets/better triplet performance can lead to increased flock output and profitability. However, if poorly managed, triplet bearing ewes and the breeding of hoggs can lead to poor lamb survival, disappointing lamb performance and impact future performance of the hogg.

This need not be the case with effective and flexible management, breeding and feeding strategies. In the webinar, Poppy Frater of SAC Consulting shared best practice advice on how to optimise the performance of triplet bearing ewes and breeding hoggs. James Drummond shared his experiences of rearing triplets on the ewe over the past 4 years with their stud flocks of Aberfield, Abertex and Aberdale ewes at Lemmington Hill Head farm in Northumberland. Hoggs are also bred with twin lambs left on the hogg for rearing. The flock is fully performance recorded on a forage based system.



Triplet rearing ewes at Lemmington Hill Head. Photo credit: James Drummond

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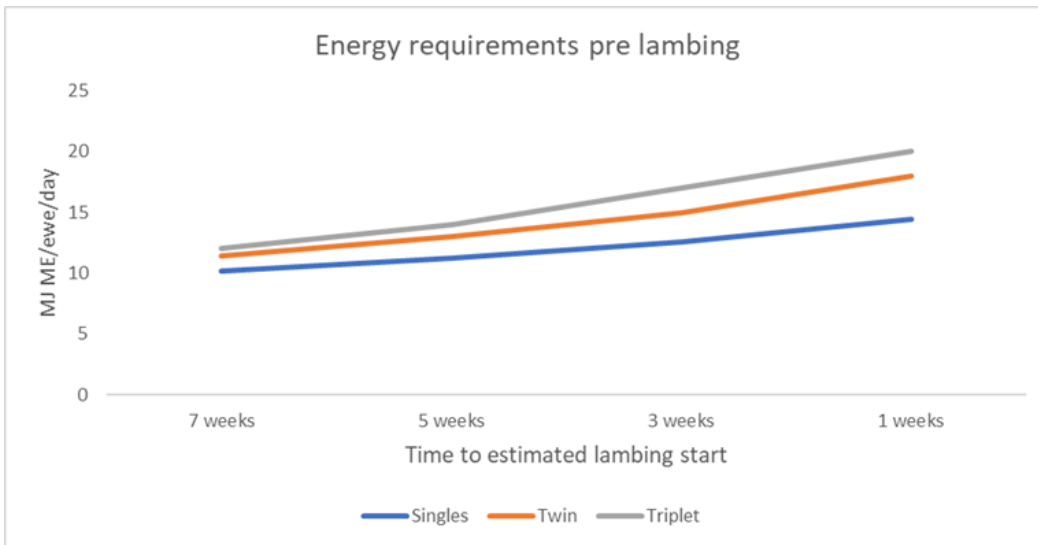


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Late pregnancy management of triplet bearing ewes

- Manage triplet bearing ewes separately from scanning.
- Weight gain from scanning leads to heavier birth weights and improved lamb survival.
- High nutrient density essential to meet high demands, and reduced rumen capacity, of triplet bearing ewes:
- Aim to feed high quality forage and concentrates – high quality silage >11ME can significantly reduce concentrate supplementation requirements and cost.
- Grass/herbal leys above 4cm can meet late pregnancy feed requirements without concentrates - provided ewes are in good condition >3 BCS.



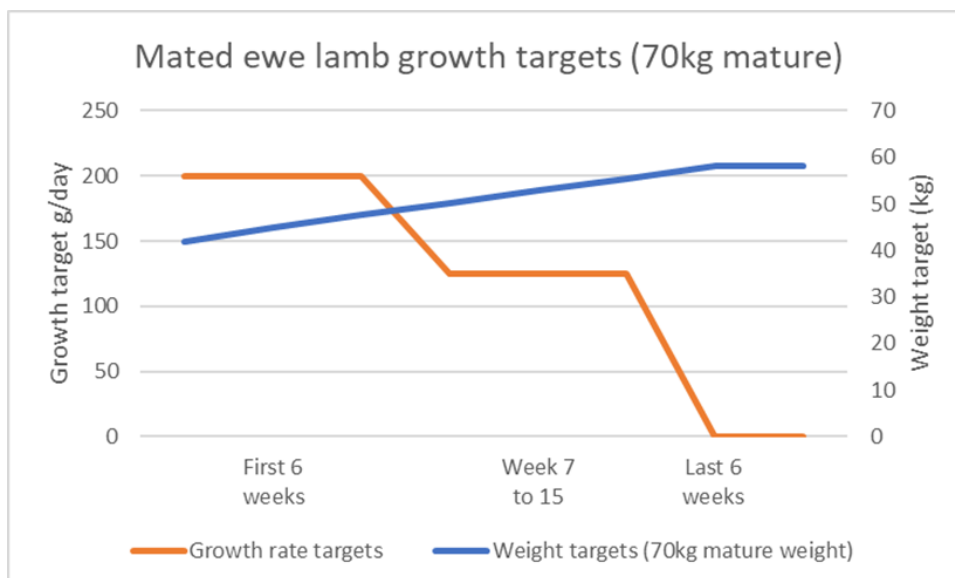
Triplet ewes require ~10% more energy and protein than twins in the last 7 weeks of pregnancy.

Source: AHDB, Feeding the Ewe. Graph produced by Poppy Frater.

Managing in-lamb hoggs

Fine balance between achieving adequate growth rates in hoggs whilst avoiding issues with heavy lamb birth weights leading to lambing difficulties:

- Manage separately to mature ewes and dry hoggs. Pregnant hoggs require 20% more feed than mature ewes' mid-pregnancy to grow on sufficiently. However, feed similar to mature ewes from 7 weeks pre-lambing to avoid issues with large lambs.
- Consider sire breed for hoggs with a focus on ease of lambing.



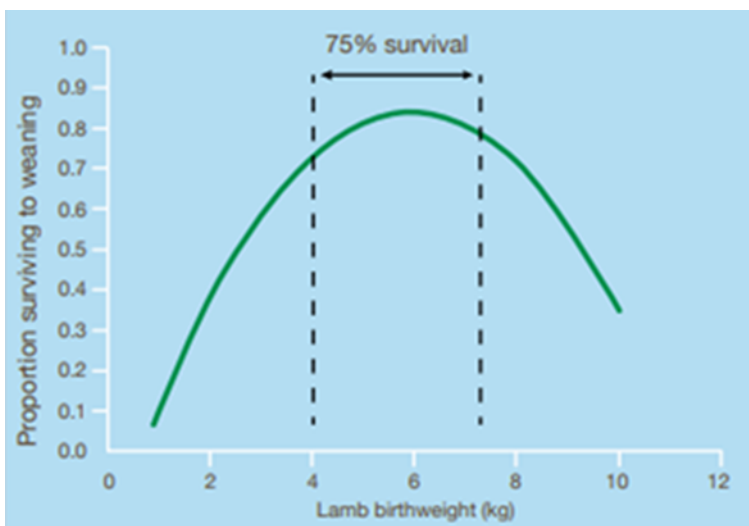
Hogg growth rate and weight targets. Aim to gain 12-15kg during pregnancy.

Source: AHDB, Feeding the Ewe. Graph produced by Poppy Frater.

James notes that a focus on achieving target growth rates through effective winter feeding, as well as a change in genetics, has led to steadily improving scanning performance in hogs with no detrimental effect on gimmer performance. In fact, the hogs that are bred show better mothering ability as gimmers. Hogs are overwintered on brassicas before being put on silage and DUP buckets only for the last month of pregnancy so to minimise the risk of large lambs and dystocia. They are then set stocked on pasture for outdoor lambing and rotationally grazed during lactation.

Key issues to consider during mid-late pregnancy

- Prolapses – avoid grazing triplet ewes on root crops too close to lambing. Cull all ewes that have prolapses.
- Twin lamb disease and hypocalcaemia – these are high demand stock meaning high risk. Consider metabolic profiling to make sure nutritional requirements are being met.
- Acidosis – build up concentrate and grain intakes slowly, no more than 0.45kg in one feed when at full intakes and feed whole grains.
- Competition – minimum feed space requirements per ewes: 50cm for concentrate feeding, 25cm on restricted forage and 15cm on ad-lib forage.



Aim is balance birth weight to optimise survival whilst limiting issues with dystocia. Particularly with hogs. Source: AHDB, Feeding the Ewe.

Data analysis at Lemmington Hill Head has found that only 10% of lambs have birth weight higher or lower than 3.75kg to 6.25kg but that these lambs account for 50% of losses.

Effective lambing management of triplets and hogs

Consider:

Small weak lambs – be prepared. Remove lightest lamb if required.

Colostrum – triplet bearing ewes produce more colostrum but often not enough. Consider supplementation. Best colostrum is from single bearing ewes with surplus.

Mismothering and lamb abandonment:

Manage triplets in small groups of 20-30 ewes.

Provide plenty of space for lambing to avoid disturbance - at least 1.2m² per ewe/hogg indoors.

Triplet bearing ewes are lambed outdoors and reared on the ewe at Lemmington Hill Head with one lamb only removed if it is poorly or the ewe is in sub-optimal BCS/has issues. Orphans are wet foster on to single ewes.

James notes that splitting up of fields into small paddocks for their rotational grazing system gives the additional bonus that group size at lambing can be reduced and triplets better management. Triplet ewes are stocked at 15 ewes per 2ha paddock with water infrastructure in place. Post lambing, triplet rearing ewes are rotationally grazed. Two groups are amalgamated at 1 week of age on to one 2ha paddock. They then settle for 2-3 weeks before further mobbing up to commence full rotation.

Top tip from James is to not only spray number ewes to lambs but also have a spray system that it can be identified if lambs are single, twin or triplet to make the job of solving mis-mothering easier.

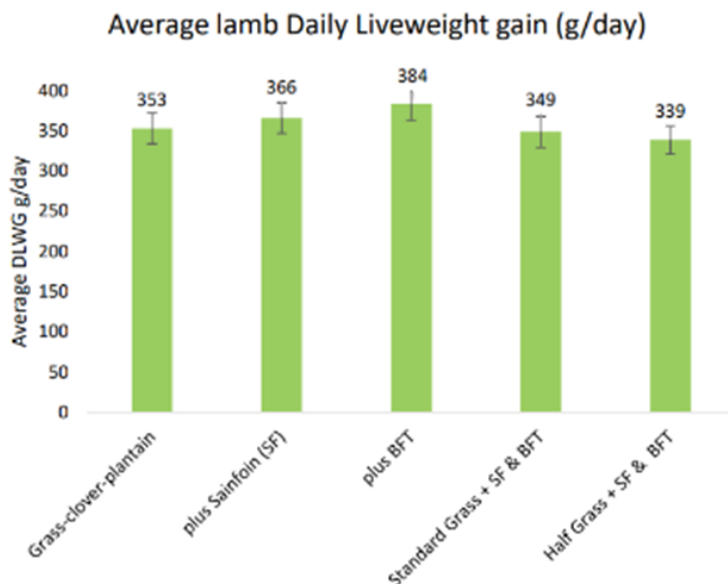
Triplet rearing options

| Rear 3 lambs | Foster on to single | Orphan lambs |
|--|---------------------------|---|
| Lactating triplet rearing ewes requires 40% more feed than a twin rearing ewe. | Check foster milk supply. | Most expensive option. |
| Manage on condition. | Take 'odd one out'. | Take smallest lamb. |
| Consider creep feeding – particularly if grass is <6cm. | Wet fostering works best. | Hygiene is critical – high lamb survival essential for profitability. |
| Or multi-species sward. | | |
| Lower stocking rate. | | |
| More prone to staggers – Mg supplementation/avoid high P level swards. | | |

Lactating hogg management

Focus on lamb performance and whilst achieving weight targets for the hogg itself:

- Consider removing second lamb – less demand on hogg and less tail end lambs.
- Consider creep feeding (particularly if grass <6cm) – improve lamb growth rate and less pressure on hogg but increased cost to weaning.
- Wean early 8-12 weeks depending on grass, hogg condition and weight and lamb performance. Weaning earlier will give the hogg more time to recover before next mating – target 80% of mature weight.



Impressive lamb growth rates to 8 weeks of single lambs off hogg on herbal leys at Lemmington Hill Head. Source: James Drummond.

Value of monitoring to review success

- Monitor lamb and ewe mortality and causes by litter size to determine whether is worthwhile doing certain practises and identify means for improvement.
- Monitor lamb performance by weighing lambs at key time points such as 8 weeks and weaning to identify means for improvement and refine grazing and feeding systems.
- Monitor hogg growth rates and weights to make sure they meet weight targets at lambing and tupping as gimmers to optimise future performance.

In the first year of rearing triplets on the ewe and twins on hogs at Lemmington Hill Head, it was identified that cases of mastitis were above average in these groups. The feeding system has now been adjusted for these groups with ewes receiving a small amount of concentrates for 4 weeks post-lambing (£3.20/ewe). This is then ceased, and lambs given creep for just 3-4 weeks. In 2020, 500 lambs consumed just 2t of creep at a cost of £1.1/lamb. Ewe nutritional demand is better met to peak lactation and giving creep to lambs 'takes the edge' off lamb demand on the ewe. This has led to very low levels of mastitis now found in these groups at minimal additional cost - still much lower cost than rearing orphan lambs.

| | | B Wgt | DLWG-8WK | DLWG-Weaning | 90Day Weight |
|------------|-------|-------|----------|--------------|--------------|
| Hogg Twins | 2020- | 3.8kg | 272 | 242 | 25.58kg |
| | 2019- | 4.1kg | 283 | 245 | 26.15kg |
| Triplets | | | | | |
| Shearlings | 2020- | 4.1kg | 285 | 262 | 27.68kg |
| | 2019- | 4.2kg | 332 | 290 | 30.3kg |
| Ewes | 2020- | 4.2kg | 328 | 286 | 29.94kg |
| | 2019- | 4.3kg | 362 | 316 | 32.74kg |

Lamb performance of hogg twins and triplet rearing ewes at Lemmington Hill Head. Herbal leys provide a higher quality feed than conventional pasture to the benefit of lamb performance, ewe and hogg condition and hogg mating weights as gimmers. Source: James Drummond.

Contributors:

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Visit the FAS Sustainable Sheep Systems webpage to watch the webinar and access the other webinars, technical notes and podcasts produced through the series: [FAS Sustainable Sheep Systems](#)



Ewes on rotation at Lemmington Hill Head. Source: James Drummond



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