



 A presentation slide for the SRDP Farm Advisory Service. At the top right is the SRDP logo (SRDP in a blue square) and the text 'FARM ADVISORY SERVICE'. The title 'An Introduction to Lambing Sheep' is in blue. Below it is a bulleted list:
 

- Alistair McClelland, Academy Vets
- Alison Clark, SAC Consulting

 At the bottom are three logos: the European Union flag with 'The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development' and 'Europe investing in rural areas', the SAC Consulting logo, and the Scottish Government logo with 'Riaghaltas na h-Alba' and 'gov.scot'.

## What to expect from this course



- Some theory, some practical
- We cover preparation from before lambing through to care of the new-born lamb and post-parturient ewe.
- You will probably get cold and perhaps a bit wet!
- We are using dead lambs with unknown histories so hygiene is very important.
- By the end, you will feel much more confident about what you can tackle, and when to call the vet.
- You will know how to safely castrate and dock, give intraperitoneal injections.
- You will see how to 'skin' a lamb, but we aren't letting you loose with knives.
- Confidence in tackling a lambing.



## Health and Safety



- Anyone who is or could be pregnant should not be involved in lambing sheep.
- As such anyone who thinks they may be pregnant must not participate in the afternoon session.
- The causes of abortion in sheep can be passed to humans and could lead to death or serious disease in both mother and baby.



## An Introduction into Lambing Sheep



- Preparation for lambing
- Nutrition
- Vet care at lambing – lambs
- Vet care at lambing – ewes
- The orphan lamb
- Welfare code
- Practical session (the best bit!)
- Please ask questions



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## Lambing Systems



- Indoors v Outdoors



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## The (ideal) lambing field



- Sheltered – natural / provided
- Well drained – slight slope
- Can be easily observed
- Close to facilities – water/electric/cover/shed
- Rested from grazing stock
- Easily accessible (vehicles for feed etc)
- Ideally not used in previous year – disease reduction
- Clear of ditches and burns and also well fenced



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# Shelter can be added!







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# Ideal if huts can be moved around







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## Outdoor Lambing Systems



- **Set Stocking**

- Pros:

- Easy

- No subdivision required

- Low cost

- Cons:

- Mismothering

- Lamb pinching

- Chaos at feeding

- Disease build-up around camps and lambing spots



## Outdoor Lambing Systems cont'd



- **Drift Lambing** (See Flip Chart)

- Pros:

- Lambs/ewes have bonding time

- Reduced mismothering

- Less stress on stock (and shepherd)

- Cons:

- Requires skill to move sheep without disturbing the rest

- Requires three plus fields

- Internal fencing may be required to subdivide fields





## The (ideal) sheep shed



- Large enough for flock (including individual pens)
- Well ventilated
- Sufficient feed space + water
- No draughts
- Well lit and with all facilities at hand
- 6x3 ft or 4x4 ft individual pens, 1 per 10 ewes. Pallets fine.
- Set up in advance of lambing .....be ready for surprises!



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## Ewe grouping (possibilities)



- By scanning results – singles, twins, triplets
  - Common for ewes to have four (five) lambs
- By lambing date
- By ewe body condition score
  - Move skinnies up a pen
- Ewe lambs / gimmers best separate and lamb early or later
- Old ewes



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## Feeding the In-lamb Ewe



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## Foetal growth & nutrition



- 70% of foetal growth during last 7 weeks
- Tremendous demand on ewe to supply nutrients to foetuses
- Forage must be good
- Concentrate feed is highly likely to be needed:
  - a) to support growth of lambs
  - b) to produce sufficient colostrum



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## Foetal growth & nutrition



- In the last 6-8 weeks sheep need concentrate + forage.
- Concentrates provide energy & protein in small package.
- Rumen capacity reduced late pregnancy.
- Roughage intake decreases late pregnancy – especially when large quantities of concentrate fed.
- Energy critical to avoid TLD.
- Protein, Protein, Protein - At least 16% protein for single bearing ewes and 18% for twins.
  - Consider - soya bean meal or rape seed meal for protein supply
- Remember min/vit supplement if making up own feed



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# Flat rate v stepped feeding of concentrates



- Either method satisfactory
- Flat rate easier
  - 0.4 kg/day from 6-8 weeks pre-lambing
  - Oversupply at start/undersupply at end
  - Avoids acidosis and TLD/Hypo Calcaemia
  - Need to be in correct condition score (3.0) when feeding is commenced
- Remember - levels above 0.45 kg/day - split



# Stepped Feeding Amounts to feed pre lambing



- It depends on weeks pre lambs, ewe condition and lambs carried
- A common diet for ewes on **hay** would be: 75 kg housed ewe

	8 weeks	6	4	2
Singles	0.1	0.2	0.35	0.5
Twins	0.2	0.35	0.5	0.8
Triplets	0.25	0.5	0.7	1.0

- A common diet for ewes on **silage** would be: 75 kg housed ewe

	8 weeks	6	4	2
Singles			0.25	0.45
Twins		0.25	0.45	0.6
Triplets	0.25	0.4	0.6	0.8



## Feeding cont'd



- For ewes below BCS 2 feed extra – Move up a pen
- Ewe lambs and lean gimmers need more
- Use buckets in addition for triplets, e.g. Lifeline but very expensive way to add nutrition!



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## Current thinking – probably best for larger farmers



- Can feed silage and soya (+ minerals) only for twin-bearing ewes all the way to lambing if have excellent silage.
- Analysis is essential to determine if silage is adequate quality. Must be at least 11 ME.
- Ad-lib access required. 15 cm per ewe.



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## Practical feeding – Many options

- Pelleted feed - Nuts/Rolls
  - £250/t, cheaper in totes
- Feed buckets in 22 kg tubs
  - £950/t
- Feed blocks - £575/t
- In troughs – allow space 30 cm-45 cm/ewe all must be able to gain access at the same time
- Rolls on floor
- Remove old/stale or mouldy feed
- Feeding conc. over silage – selecting occurs
- Hay in racks – best hay or selection occurs
- Essential only best of big bales - listeriosis



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## Feeding Post Lambing



- Peak Milk Yield is 4 weeks post lambing.
- Consider supplementing with quality forage post lambing if grass is short (<4 cm).

OR

- If short of grass, feed concentrate or blocks plus forage
  - Blocks prevent mismothering.
- If fresh lush grass = 4 cm or more, no concentrate
  - Except for hogs with twins, lean sheep, ewes suckling triplets.



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## D-Day .....Lambing Begins



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## Signs of approaching lambing



- Swollen abdomen and filling udder
- Restlessness
- Being vocal
- Pinching lambs
- Isolation and nesting behaviour
- Lying and lip smacking and star gazing
- Straining



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## Signs of approaching lambing



- Discharge and water bag
- Feet and nose max 1 hour after water bag
- If not scrub up and investigate



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## Assistance



- **No progress**
- **Hung lamb**
- **Tight – ewe lambs and gimmers. Beware the sheep just needing time for cervix to open**
- **Mal-presentation**
- **Jumble of legs + heads**
- **Bit of lube makes a big difference**



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## The Importance of Colostrum



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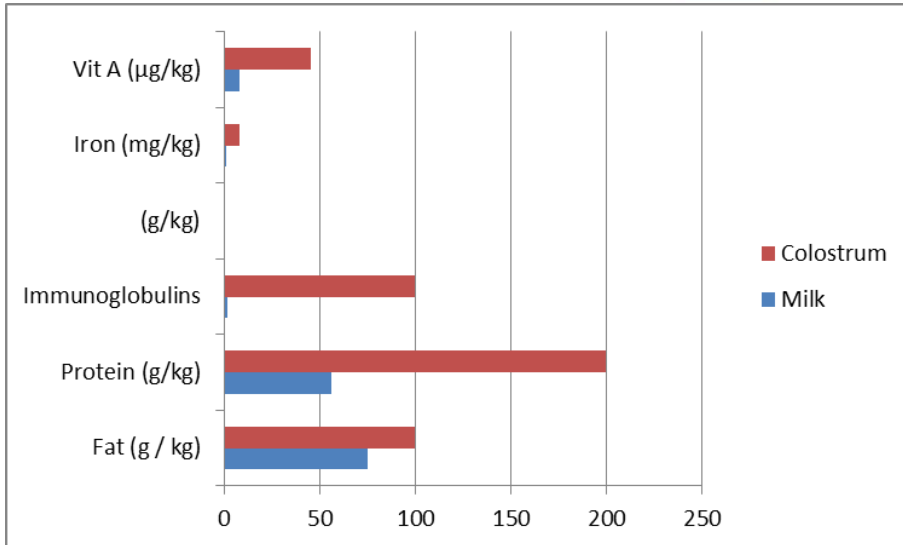


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## Properties of Ewe Colostrum



## Colostrum is gold



- Contains antibodies to fight disease
- Provides energy and nutrition
- Acts as a laxative to clear the gut of the meconium
- Powdered colostrum is **always** a poor second best to ewe colostrum



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## Feeds that Improve Colostrum Quality



- Hi Pro Soya – 100 grams per lamb carried per day from four weeks pre lambing.
- Sopralin – 50 g /lamb carried.
- Lifeline ewe and lamb tubs or crumb – Immuno globulins.
- Megastart ewe and lamb – IG Saffmannan
- Equally important is the body condition of the ewe. A poor ewe will have a lower volume and poorer quality colostrum than a ewe in correct body condition.



## Ensuring the Best Start



A new-born lamb should

- Ingest 50 ml/kg BW of colostrum within first 2 hours (4 kg = 200 ml)
- 200 ml/kg with first 24 hours
  - If none, strip from another ewe, use colostrum replace or safe cows colostrum (cow colostrum can be tested for anti-sheep antibody)
- Have navel dipped in strong iodine
  - Within first 15 minutes
  - Repeated at least once 2-4 hours later





## If in doubt – Tube



## Common Ailments at Lambing

- Not exhaustive!



## Vaginal/cervical prolapse



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## Dealing with a Prolapse



### Pre Lambing

- Often a two person job
- Scrub up, be clean – Dettol
- No sharp nails or rings
- Use a spoon or harness
- If necessary re tighten (or slacken if spoon )
- Avoid stitching as there is a high risk of tearing when lambing starts

### Prolapsing post lambing

- Stitch her up. See flip chart

In both cases, mark and cull. No prisoners!  
They will do it again next year!



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## Dealing with a Prolapse



- Prolapses are much easier to replace if a vet carries out an epidural.
- Some slip back in easily when ewe stands up and come back out when lies down – treat promptly when it's easy.
- Treat with long acting antibiotic and anti – inflammatories for pain relief.
- This is a painful condition!!
- Close observation needed at lambing. More likely to need assistance.



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## Uterine prolapse



- Occurs after lambing
- Often whole uterus is turned outside in and dangling down to the ground
- Call the vet
- Likely to follow lambing where ewe is hypocalcaemic or where there has been excessive straining due to oversize lamb
- It is acceptable to retain these in the flock as there is no evidence of recurrence in subsequent years



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## Hypothermia



Insulatory property of coat greatly reduced when wet

- Ewe failure to lick and or dry coat of birth fluids of new-born lambs
- Lambs exposed to rain / sleet / snow

Increased risk with low temps and high wind chill factor



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## Susceptible lambs



- Premature, small, weak lambs
- From ewe lambs / gimmers
- Triplets / quads etc
- From thin ewes
- From ewes lacking milk
- Lamb jackets can make a huge difference



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## Reviving Hypothermic/Comatosed Lambs



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## Hypothermic Lambs ctd -



**Dry lamb** before you try to heat it.

If less than 6 hours old:

- warm up in box at 45°C – they have brown fat reserves which are mobilised to produce glucose.
- Feed or tube with colostrum at 50 ml/kg when they come round and can hold their head.
- If unsure of age treat as if over 6 hours old.

If more than 6 hours old:

- No brown fat reserves left – become hypoglycaemic and hypothermic
- Give intraperitoneal glucose injection 25 ml – must be at body temp.
- 20% Glucose solution.
- Put in warming box at 45°C. Check regularly to avoid overheating.
- Feed/tube once lamb can hold head up.



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IP Injection – 2-3 cm across, 2-3 cm down  
2.5cm needle , aim for tail head



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- Cleanliness is essential.
- Iodine the site you are planning to inject through.
- New sterile needle and syringe every time.
- Draw up half the volume of cooled boiled water and half of the 40% glucose solution.
- Keep bottle clean and discard by use by date.
- Glucose is an excellent material for bacteria to grow in.



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## Watery mouth



- Excess salivation
- Off feed/milk
- Lethargic
- Tucked up
- Distended stomach + pain
- No poo
- Comatose
- Death often within 24 hours



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## Watery mouth



- Caused by overgrowth of E. coli bacteria.
- Treatment : antibiotics and fluids.
- If lamb cannot stand, consider euthanasia.
- Prevented by clean lambing pens and prompt belly full of colostrum.
- If having problems, oral antibiotics may be needed to prevent deaths.
- However, this should **not** be considered routine.
- Consider giving to weak lambs or those known to have had powdered colostrum.
- Should be no need for routine antibiotics in strong lambs that get up and suck quickly.
- Work with your vet for preventative plan for next year if you have run into problems.



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## Prevention of scours



- Hygiene.
- Suitably prepared clean facilities, e.g. All gates power washed.
- Lambing pens mucked regularly or at least fresh straw or disinfectant prills or spray.
- Remove all afterbirth.
- Fleecy udders clipped.
- COLOSTRUM ESSENTIAL ASAP.
- Clostridial vaccination booster 4-6 weeks pre-lambing to prevent lamb dysentery.
- Out of individual pens asap ~ 24 hours.
- Into group pen or outdoors.
- If outbreak happens – get accurate diagnosis, many are not bacterial.



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## Pregnancy Toxaemia (aka Twin Lamb Disease)



- Multiple carrying ewes usually late pregnancy
- Isolation
- Apparent blindness – no eye reflex
- Head and body tremors
- Sweet smell of acetone on breath
- Collapse
- Abortion
- Death
- Treatment PMD, Twin Lamb Formula  
Prop- Glycol, Ketophyton,  
Redbull!!! Induce abortion



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## Pregnancy Toxaemia



- If ewe and lamb survive
- Ewe likely to have little/no colostrum – usually one lamb left with her is enough
- Lambs may have suffered brain damage
- Additional support and feeding for lambs essential
- Mildly affected lambs can recover given time and nursing
- Can be difficult to keep in pen during recovery period!



## Hypocalcaemia (aka milk fever)



- Calcium deficiency
- Symptoms as TLD

Often best to treat for both, i.e. High energy supplement for TLD and 20 or 40 % calcium



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## Mastitis



- Infection and inflammation of udder
- Udder may be hot and hard
- May be detected immediately after lambing
- Often first signs of problem are hungry lamb(s) or ewe that looks lame
- Lambs may produce black tarry faeces if milk is bloody



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## Mastitis: treatment



- Antibiotics and anti-inflammatories are essential.
- Frequent stripping out udder can help.
- Control.
- Mastitis is infectious, a single case of mastitis in one ewe increases the risk of mastitis in other ewes.
- Contaminated lambing pens increases the risk of mastitis.
- Excessive suckling by hungry lambs causes teat lesions and this increases risk of mastitis – likely if triplets are turned out without sufficient grass/feeding to allow adequate milk production.



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## Fostering lambs



- Strong and suckling
- Have had colostrum
- Evenly matched for size if twinning
- Well covered with birth fluids – suggest catching fluid in a tray/basin or poly bag – fresh lambs are easier to twin
- OR
- Fitted with skin covering back of head and tail as much as possible



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## Ewes as foster mothers



- Have plenty milk
- Be 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> crop lambed
- Avoid ewe lambs or gimmers for twinning extra lambs
- Avoid old ewes (too wise!!)



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## Basic rules to fostering



- Ensure lambs have received colostrum
- Use ewes with plenty milk
- Match size with strong, keen lambs
- Never let lambs starve
- If at first you don't succeed

GIVE UP!!!



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## Rearing surplus lambs



- Sometimes artificial rearing of lambs can't be avoided.
- Have warm pen ready.
- Do not use the sick bay for surplus lamb rearing.
- If lifting triplets make the decision promptly.
- Leave lamb with dam for 24 hours if she has adequate colostrum to fill all lambs.
- Easier to train to bottle/feeder when young.
- Bottle feed if 3 or less.
- Consider bucket/teat system if 4 or more lambs.



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This can be taken to extremes





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Some Legislation



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## Castration and tail docking



- **Welfare code recommendation 62:** Farmers and shepherds should consider carefully whether tail docking and castration within a particular flock is necessary. Tail docking may be carried out only if failure to do so would lead to subsequent welfare problems because of dirty tails and potential fly strike.
- Do I need to dock/castrate? If males will be finished and away before sexual maturity is reached then no need to castrate.
- Rings simplest option but must be done with rubber ring before 7 days old.
- Other options for tails are hot knife, sharp knife and fly treatment.

Essential that ewes and lambs are well bonded before tailing/castration. Must have had colostrum before procedures carried out.

- Will demonstrate on lambs later.



## Lunch then Let's practice!





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Thank You

