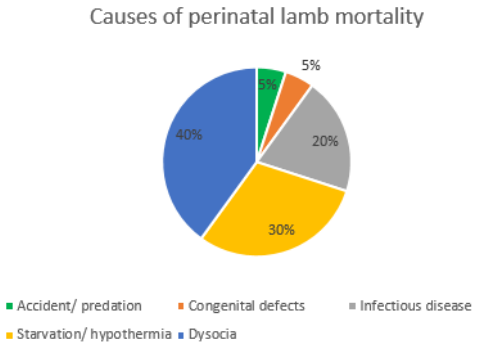
Lamb Crop 2022

Maximise lamb survival indoors

Health Focus: Heather Stevenson, SRUC Veterinary Services

The Lamb Crop webinar series focussed on highlighting methods to maximise lamb survival for indoor, outdoor and hill systems. The first in the series focussed on indoor lambing where we heard from Poppy Frater, SAC Consulting Sheep and Grassland Specialist, Heather Stevenson, SRUC Veterinary Investigation Officer and Graham Lofthouse, Bankhouse Farm.



There are many reasons for lamb losses in the early days of birth, the largest cause being dystocia, associated with large lambs. Starvation, hypothermia and infectious diseases together account for half of perinatal lamb losses. The key to reduce these lamb losses is ensuring the lambs get adequate colostrum quickly, giving them antibodies to fight off infection and energy for heat production. Ewe nutrition is vitally important pre lambing to ensure the colostrum is good in terms of quality and quantity.

A new born lamb should receive **50ml/kg bodyweight** of colostrum as soon as possible after birth. The lamb is most efficient at absorbing the antibodies in the first few hours after birth. In the first 24 hours after birth, they should drink 200ml/kg bodyweight, meaning a 5kg lamb would require 1 litre in the first 24 hours. The levels of antibodies in the colostrum falls between 0 - 23 hours post lambing and the lamb is only able to absorb antibodies for the first 24 hours.

Ewe colostrum is the most nutrient full and antibody rich feed the lamb can get, however if supplies are insufficient then pooled cow colostrum or powdered supplements can be used. Ewes with surplus colostrum e.g. single bearing ewes can be milked out, and the colostrum stored for when its required by another lamb. This can be stored in the fridge for one week or frozen for six months. This should be heated at no more than 40^{o}C, to ensure the antibodies are not damaged. Powered supplements are useful to provide energy but should not be relied upon to provide sufficient antibodies.

Bacteria are everywhere in a lambing shed and can gain access to the lamb through its mouth when searching for the teat or sucking, inhalation through the nose, or via the navel, wounds, etc. The number of bacteria in a shed builds throughout lambing. Disinfectants are an excellent way to reduce bacterial levels, remember they work best if given a clean surface to work on. Lambs should be treated in the same way as a new born baby, in that all equipment is sterilised, including teats, bottles, tubes, as well as shepherds' hands. 10% iodine should be used on the whole navel, and this should be repeated 2 - 4 hours after the first application.

Tips for reducing bacteria in house

- Have a sensible stocking density in house
- Have sufficient bedding, so that when you kneel down your knees are dry
- Remove the ewes cleaning
- Dag ewes and treat lame ewes pre housing
- Ensure the buildings are maintained e.g. no leaking guttering, troughs, etc.

There is a drive to reduce antibiotics in neonatal lambs by 10% by years, and increase lamb survival rates there is some excellent information available at Sheep - Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (ruma.org.uk)

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