

Post Lambing Management of Hogg Practical Guide



Scotland is working towards the target to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2045. For the sheep industry, this gives an opportunity to evaluate systems and practices, while looking to enhance flock efficiency and productivity, which will in turn reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Having the first mating as ewe lambs, rather than gimmers is a mitigation strategy. It has a potential to reduce methane and nitrous oxide and therefore have a positive effect on a carbon footprint of a sheep system and farm. This is only possible with a combination of excellent management, health and genetics. Without this, the system can be wasteful and have the opposite effect.

This practical guide takes a closer look at the management of ewe lambs post lambing through lactation.

Lambing

At lambing time, ewe lambs will require space and time, with minimal interruptions, to allow for natural maternal behaviour to be expressed and for a bond to be created with her lamb.

Group size of lambing ewes should be restricted to a maximum of 30, to prevent miss mothering, this will allow them space for natural maternal behaviour.

In an indoor based lambing, ensure there is at least 1m² laying space per lambing ewe hogg. Once she has lambed, leave her for as long as possible in her lambing site, avoiding interruptions to allow her to bond with her lambs. Ideally this is at least 30 minutes. This will have a positive effect on mothering, as well as ease of following her lambs to an individual pen.



The aim is to have each ewe lamb rearing one lamb each, to ensure her future productivity and longevity in the flock. In the case of multiple births, twinning on to a mature ewe with a single is the ideal route. However if there are ewe lambs rearing twins, her nutritional requirement will be high, she should be offered priority grazing and managed with the mature triplet ewes.

Typically in a mature ewe flock lambing will start with twins, and the bulk of singles are born after the first two weeks. Some producers tup ewe lambs two weeks later than the main flock to allow for more single bearing ewes lambing at the same time for twinning.

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Lactation

Ewe lambs who are rearing, are similar to ewe lambs in mid pregnancy in that they require 20% more energy and protein than mature ewes during lactation. The reason being that they are growing, rearing lambs and have their own maintenance requirements. They should be allocated priority grazing to fulfil their requirements and ideally kept as a separate group. Any ewe lambs that are rearing multiples, should be managed with the triplet mature ewes to ensure she continues to grow through lactation.

If grass availability is low, supplementary feeding should be offered e.g. silage or hay, along with concentrate feeding (12.5 MJ/kg DM metabolisable energy and 18% crude protein) to ensure requirements are being met. Alternatively, high energy forages such as swedes or fodder beet would be another route.

Milk production in ewe lambs tends to be lower than mature ewes, and to aid the lambs nutritional demand offering a good quality feed in a creep for lambs can be beneficial. This can be done from one week old. This is especially useful if grass supply is short, which would be limiting to the ewes milk supply.

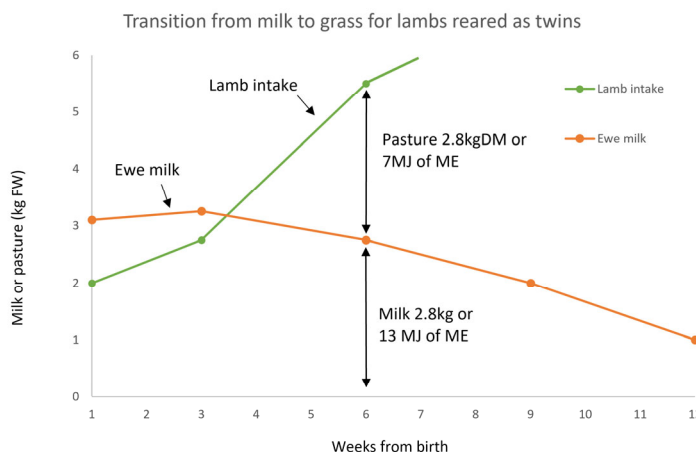


Stage of Lamb Growth and Weaning

In the first 6 weeks of a lambs life, they are fully milk dependant. This milk availability is largely driven by the mothers body condition at lambing combined with late pregnancy. Between 6 to 8 weeks, the lamb transitions to grass, which coincides with the mothers lactation declining. High quality grass is required for the lambs. From 8 weeks to weaning, the lamb will gain most of its nutrition from grass.

The lactating ewe lamb after 8 weeks from lambing will start to compete with her progeny for grass, demonstrated on the graph below. These lambs should be weaned when they reach between 8-12 weeks old to prevent limiting growth from either mother or progeny. The timing of this will vary year on year and should be a decision made on:

- 1) Ewe condition
- 2) Lamb performance
- 3) Forage availability



Graph: Transition from milk to grass for lambs reared as twins (Beef and Lamb NZ)

Weaning as early as 8-9 weeks would be more applicable if the lambs are being offered creep. These ewes should be fully weaned by the time the lambs are 12 weeks old.

Weaning to Mating

Between weaning and mating, a ewe lamb has time to recover from lactation and continue to grow until the next breeding cycle. Her weight gain target in this period tends to be around 200grams/day, unless she is below condition score target. To gain this weight a nutrient rich diet is required (7MJ). The target for going to the tup is 80% of her mature weight.

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