



Highgate Veterinary Clinic

Lambing Special Newsletter - Jan 2008

Many of you will be in the most important period of the sheep breeding calendar - the weeks leading up to lambing time.

Nationally, 15-25% of the lamb crop is lost around lambing and according to SAC figures, the biggest influence you have on your income is how many lambs you sell. So how are you going to reduce your lambing losses to a target of lets say 5%?



Here are a few points to think about:

Ewe nutrition

In the last 6 weeks of pregnancy, the ewe's demand for energy increases and her appetite decreases as the lambs inside her grow. Poor feeding can lead to twin lamb disease, low lamb birth weights, weakly lambs unable to suck, poor milk production and poor quality colostrum. Therefore lots of dead lambs or at least lots of extra work!

The presentation of feed has a strong influence on nutrition. If you're feeding the ewes with cake, allow at least 18" of trough space per ewe. If this isn't possible in housed ewes, feed them on clean bedding. Outside snackers are better than troughs as you don't limit trough space and the feeding area can be changed easily each day so improving hygiene.

Condition scoring ewes six weeks before the start of lambing helps to identify ewes with poor body reserves but it doesn't identify how adequate your feeding will be leading up to lambing. Forage qualities vary from year to year so that ad lib hay and a kilo of cake may have worked last year but it might not this time. Blood sampling 3 weeks before lambing is a useful but underused tool to check that the sheep are getting enough before it's too late.



Twin lamb disease

Ewes carrying twins and triplets have greater energy demands and less appetite than those carrying singles. They use their body fat but this can soon run out. Poisons called ketones appear in the blood leading to the usual clinical signs. Often the lambs die due to starvation and their rotting bodies add to the toxins. Treatment is often unrewarding but includes oral propalin glycol, vitamin and steroid injections.

You'll get the odd ewe who develops the disease but if you get several, this may indicate the flock as a whole is low in energy. A simple a reasonably safe emergency measure is to feed treacle ad lib to all the ewes.

Listeriosis

This is an infection of the base of the brain by a bacterium that lives in soil but grows well in mouldy and spoiling silage. Treatment is with high levels of penicillin and steroids but often response is poor.

Prevention is aimed at avoiding feeding poor silage and not letting it become stale or contaminated with soil while in the trough.

Cervical Prolapse

Although fat ewes and ones carrying multiple lambs are more likely to prolapse the cervix, the actual cause is unknown. Prompt replacement under epidural anaesthesia is the most effective treatment, but many fail to dilate their cervix sufficiently when in labour leading to further complications.

Ewes that prolapse should not be put in lamb again as they will prolapse in subsequent years.

Lambing

Hygiene is essential at lambing time. Aborting ewes should be isolated from the flock and the lambs and placentae disposed of to minimise disease spread.

If you have to assist lambing, ensure hands are clean or use disposable arm length gloves. Follow up with an antibiotic injection for the ewe and finadyne if she's had a rough time.

Lambs

Lambs should receive about 200 ml of colostrum within the first few hours of life. If in doubt, top them up with ewe, cow or powdered colostrum sooner rather than later.

We recommend dipping navels in strong iodine soon after birth.

Watery mouth is due to E. coli growing in the lambs guts and releasing toxins which cause gut stasis and dehydration. Treatment with antibiotics, finadyne and oral fluids (rehydion) is often ineffective. Prevention includes general hygiene, early colostrum, and oral antibiotics at birth (Spectam Scour Halt or Tribriksen Tablets)

Hypothermia accounts for 40% of all lamb deaths. Lambs exposed to cold weather conditions are obvious victims but small lambs with little body fat and little colostrum will die of hypothermia even in a building. Treatment involves drying and warming. Lambs under 5 hours old need warm colostrum by stomach tube in addition lambs over 5 hours old benefit from 50 ml 20% glucose injecting into their abdominal cavity.

Lambs with joint ill respond best to very early treatment of penicillin daily for 5 days and steroid or finadyne on the first day.

Mastitis

Although a bacterial infection, mastitis is caused by lack of milk. Thin ewes and or those with triplets and are not producing sufficient milk are most susceptible. Hungry lambs repeatedly sucking empty teats cause damage which allows staph. bacteria to enter or they introduce pasteurilla into the teat from they're throats.

This requires prompt treatment with finadyne and antibiotic (e.g. Nuflor) but if unsuccessful and the bag goes cold, euthanasia should be considered.

Prevention includes good ewe nutrition and supplementing hungry lambs.

If anything in this newsletter has prompted any questions or you would like any help with specific problems, please don't hesitate to phone the surgery and speak us.