



Newsletter

August 2024

Finally we seem to be having a warmer, drier spell at the moment which is welcome with harvest beginning across the area.

This month Alberto gives us some reminders about the importance of management around weaning lambs.

Time for weaning.... What to consider

Weaning is a significant and potentially stressful event for both ewes and lambs, which can lead to various health and management issues. Therefore, special consideration should be taken when planning for weaning to achieve an uneventful transition.

1. When to wean?

Generally, lambs are weaned when they reach

Factors to consider	Wean	Don't wean
Lamb growth (from 8 weeks to weaning)	<200 g/day	>200 g/day
Grass availability	Poor	Good
Ewe BCS	2	3+
Table adapted from AHDB (2020a)		

between 12 to 14 weeks of age. However, the timing of weaning should not be a fixed date (due to variability in weather conditions, flock health and production between years) and should be determined by factors such as lamb growth rates, grazing availability and ewe body condition.

It is recommended that lambs are weighed and BCS of ewes assessed at eight weeks of age. This would allow early identification of problematic animals, such as thin ewes or underperforming lambs, helping planning for weaning.

- **Lamb growth rates**

Ideally, target growth rates for lambs up to eight weeks of age should be greater than 250 g per day. When lambs do not meet this target, it may be an

indication of poor milk supply, poor grass cover, a heavy parasite burden or other underlying disease. Up to eight weeks of age, lamb's energy intake relies more in milk rather than grass. After this point, they are more reliant on the forage and so there will be competition between ewes and lambs.

- **Grazing availability**

If conditions are good and grass supply is adequate, ewes will maintain their body condition and lambs liveweight gain won't be affected. Therefore, weaning can be delayed.

Nevertheless, if grazing availability is poor, lamb growth rates will suffer due to the competition for forage intakes. When lamb growth rates fall below 200 g per day, this should trigger weaning, moving lambs onto a better pasture with sufficient grass cover.

- **Ewe body condition**

Under normal circumstances, it takes approximately eight weeks to gain one condition score. This means that a ewe with a BCS 2 at weaning will need to gain 1.5 units of BCS to achieve the target of 3.5 at mating (system dependant), needing 12 weeks of recovery time. For a 70 kg ewe, 1.5 BCS will translate to a gain of 10 kg of weight (1 BCS = 10% of a mature ewe's liveweight). Identifying thin would allow early weaning, minimising long-term detrimental effects on reproductive and productive performance of the flock. The impact of poor body condition score at weaning is well documented and it is associated with lower litter size, lower lambing percentage and lighter lambs in the following season.

Other important considerations after weaning are:

- **Ewe MOT**

Not only BCS is crucial for a breeding ewe but also making sure they are fit and healthy to carry another pregnancy and go through a new lactation. Therefore, examining teeth, feet and udder after weaning and pre-mating should be considered as gold standard practice.

- **Regular FWEC**

Parasitic gastroenteritis is still one of the main causes of lamb losses and production-limiting disease in growing lambs. Routine monitoring of gastrointestinal nematodes infection by FWEC would allow us to treat accordingly and reduce their impact in lamb performance. Submitting 15 randomly taken faecal samples per management group is advised for pooled FWEC.



Vaccine supply issues

As seems to be a regular feature, we have some medication supply issues at present. The main one of concern is a lack of vaccine against Enzootic Abortion of Ewes. Both products are currently unavailable, one may be available in September but this has not been confirmed and possibly too late for many of you. If you have any concerns please contact the practice to discuss.



Cases for Farm Animal Hospital

As always at this time of year we rely more heavily on cases in the Farm Animal Hospital for student teaching. We are always grateful for any cases that you may have for the hospital. In addition to donated cases, we can do Ram vasectomies in the hospital for a reduced rate with the students. Please contact Ali or any of the vets to discuss further.