

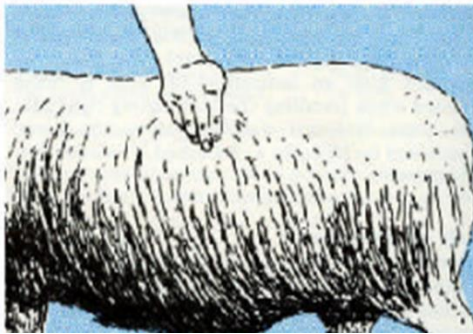
Planning for a Successful Lambing

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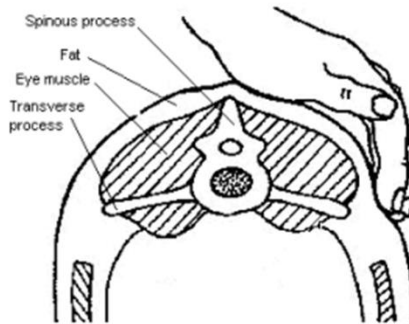
For the majority of mid-season lambing flocks, the scanning of ewes has already been completed or is fast approaching. Scanning of your ewe flock is one of the most important management tools that a farmer can use to plan for the forthcoming lambing season. It gives the farmer an idea of what's coming in terms of lambs per ewe, thus allowing for a more tailored feeding regime so as to ensure that the lambing season will be as successful as possible.

At scanning time, we can also body condition score our ewes and this along with the results from scanning allows the farmer to plan their feeding regime to match the ewe's requirements for the weeks coming up to lambing. They then can be grouped and fed according to litter size and body condition. Body condition scoring is a method of evaluating the body fat reserves in animals. It measures the level of subcutaneous fat just below the hide of the animal. Body fat reserves are important because they are the main energy reserves of the body which the animal can use to maintain her production when she is underfed or incorrectly fed. It is important to handle sheep on a regular basis so as to get your "eye in" on the condition of the ewes in your flock.

Ewes should be handled at the following points: over and around the backbone, the loin area behind the last rib, above the kidney along the top and sides of the backbone.



Keady, T. Bohan., A (2018)



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Body condition is scored on a scale from 1-5. A score of 1 would indicate an undernourished animal whereas a score of 5 would indicate an over fat animal. Over fat and equally thin ewes at lambing can lead to lambing difficulties and increased mortality.

Body Condition Score Targets	
Time	Condition Score
Mid Pregnancy	3
Lambing	3

Campion, F., Lynch C.(2018)

Why should we condition score ewes at scanning time?

Having the ewe at the correct body condition score coming up to lambing ensures that ewes will lamb down fit, have a good mothering ability and a good supply of colostrum to feed the new born lamb.

In most cases coming up to lambing, silage is the main feed fed to ewes along with concentrate. The quality of the silage fed will determine the amount of concentrate required in the weeks leading up to lambing.

Given that silage plays a large part of the pregnant ewe's diet, getting a silage analysis done is good value for money. A silage analysis of the first and second cuts will determine the quality, dry matter and the potential intake of the silage and will allow you to decide how much and for how long concentrates will need to be fed. Excellent quality (75% + DMD) silage will meet the ewes feed requirements up to lambing but the reality is that most ewe's feed requirements must be supplemented as the average silage being produced has a DMD of about 65%-67% DMD.

Where scanning results indicate a litter size of near to 2, it would indicate that a significant percentage of ewes are carrying 3 or more lambs. The ewes bearing triplets or quads should be started on a concentrate feeding regime immediately after scanning or at least 8 -10weeks prior to the expected lambing date. This is to ensure that both lamb birth weights approaching 4kg each is achieved and also to maintain the ewe's body condition score so that she produces sufficient milk to feed the lambs.

Smaller weak lambs, particularly in multiples, will lead to higher mortality levels. Depending on ewe body condition and quality of forage available the level should rise to around 1kg per head per day split into two feeds so as not to "sicken the ewe" in the weeks before lambing.

The general guide to feeding the rest of your ewe flock is as follows:

Twin bearing ewes are fed 30% less than triplet bearing ewes building up to a maximum of 0.8kg in the week before lambing. Start the concentrate feeding of ewes carrying twins 7 to 8 weeks before the expected lambing date.

Feeding of single bearing ewes can be delayed a further few weeks and should be fed 30% less than those carrying twins up to a maximum of 0.5kg prior to lambing.

If silage quality is extremely poor, such as with a DMD in the low 60s or worse, higher levels of concentrates will be needed. Also assess body condition at this stage.

Twin bearing ewes in poor body condition would need to be fed with similar concentrate levels to the triplet bearing ewes. Also single bearing ewes in poor body condition would need to be fed similar concentrate levels to twin bearing ewes.

The overall aim in the last three weeks of pregnancy for all ewes' pregnancy is to ensure that the intake of protein is sufficient. Protein intake is most critical. The twin bearing ewe needs to take in 200 grams of protein per day in the last stages of pregnancy. All feeds that the ewe eats contributes to this daily requirement but in terms of quality, soya is the best available. Soya is the main protein source food in most good sheep rations or nuts. The listing of ingredients on the feedstuff manufacturers label is in order of inclusion with the first listed being the biggest constituent. Ensure when buying a ration or nut that soya is listed in the top three of the ingredient list. The inclusion of soya which has a high percentage of protein is to ensure that the ewe has enough of top quality colostrum for her newborn lambs.

Other considerations coming up to lambing is the provision of enough water and enough trough space for the ewe. A guide of 600mm per head of trough space should be enough for all ewes to eat together at one time. Split concentrate feeds into 2 daily feeds (morning and evening) so as to avoid digestive upsets, the little and often approach should maximise the intake. Sheep can consume up to 6litres per day if they are on dry feed so having a fresh supply of water is critical.

