

Teagasc Notes for week ending Friday 7th February 2020

Sheep: Ewe Nutrition in Late Pregnancy

The right nutrition and management during late pregnancy are key to profitable mid-season lamb production. 75% of foetal growth occurs in the final 6-7 weeks before lambing. The rapid growth of the foetus increases the ewe's need for nutrients and daily requirements can no longer be met by a forage based diet alone.

The level of concentrate feeding to ewes will be determined by the quality of your silage. By having a silage analysis report it will allow you to make management decisions on the levels of concentrate supplementation in late pregnancy.

Four factors will determine the amount of concentrates which should be fed to ewes during late pregnancy:

1. The **number** of lambs being carried by the ewe
2. The **stage** of pregnancy - number of weeks before lambing
3. The body **condition score** of the ewe
4. The **quality** of the hay, silage or other forages being fed

Meal Feeding to Ewes;

When feeding concentrates to Ewes in late pregnancy consider the following:

- Watch ingredients specification closely, don't skimp on cost
- Ideally feed 17-18% crude protein
- Use high quality protein sources to enhance milk output on both grass and preserved forages. Soya bean meal is an excellent quality protein source
- Feed a Ewe Nut with optimum levels of Cereals (barley, wheat, maize) in order to maximise energy intakes
- Ensure that the vitamins & mineral mix is suitable e.g. calcium & magnesium (Cal-mag) included reduces risk of milk fever and grass tetany post-lambing
- Introduce concentrates at a low level and build up slowly

Other Management Factors to Consider in Late Pregnancy

There are a number of other management factors which impact the nutrition of the ewe in late pregnancy:

Water: It is vitally important that a fresh clean supply of water is available to pregnant ewes at all times. A pregnant ewe will consume up to 6 litres of water per day where the feed being eaten is high in dry matter and especially on an all concentrate diet. Water bowls should be checked regularly (twice a day) and cleaned out if contaminated with faeces, hay or silage. Special care should be taken in frosty weather to ensure a clean supply of water.

Trough Space: Where concentrates are being fed it is vital to ensure that adequate trough space is provided. For a standard bay, 4.8 metres wide, there is not enough space to feed greater than 10 ewes, each of 70 kg in late pregnancy.

Clostridial booster vaccine - the annual booster injection should be given to ewes 4-6 weeks before lambing. This allows for the passing of antibodies in the ewe's colostrum. It avoids having to vaccinate lambs when born.

Summary

- Ewes must be correctly fed in late pregnancy in order to provide for the growing foetus and to ensure the ewe herself is prepared for the lactation period.
- Where silage or hay is being fed, supplementation with concentrates will be required. This will be determined by the number of lambs being carried, the body condition of the ewe and the quality of the silage or hay being fed.
- Where silage is of poor quality (< 60% DMD) or if silage is in short supply, consideration should be given to an all concentrate diet. Care should be taken however to build up concentrates gradually to avoid digestive upsets.
- Adequate trough space and a fresh supply of clean water are vitally important.

BEEF: Vaccinating Suckler Cows

Profit monitor data clearly and consistently shows that one of the key drivers of profit on suckler farms is the Kgs of beef sold per hectare. A key part of this story is to ensure that each incalf cow or heifer rears and weans a healthy bull or heifer calf. Abortion and scour are two diseases that are dreaded in every suckler herd. They can dramatically reduce the output of a suckler herd, are costly and put a huge amount of stress and workload on the suckler farmer. Prevention in the first place is without doubt the best course of action. There are a number of vaccines available now that can prevent the common causes of abortion and scour in cows and new-born calves. Talk to your vet about which suits your farm best and how and when they should be given, especially those that need to be given coming up to calving. However, remember a vaccine will only work if it is used correctly and it is reported that 50% of vaccines are used incorrectly. Vaccines need to be stored and handled properly. Always follow the instructions that are given with them. They should always be stored in a fridge at 2 – 8 degrees Celsius. Once opened, check the longevity of the product. Make sure you keep an accurate record of what vaccines were bought and used.

EVENT

Teagasc Kilkenny will host a Beef Seminar on Thursday the 6th of February at 8pm at the Springhill Hotel, Kilkenny. The event will cover technical subjects as well as scheme subjects. Paul Crosson will do a physical and financial analysis of calf to beef systems. While Martina Harrington (Teagasc) will set out how you can maximise grass utilisation in 2020. Many of you are facing into the final phase of the BDGP programme and its important that you are clear on the targets expected from the scheme for 2020. Chris Daly (ICBF) will address this topic. Cross compliance inspections are a source of worry for a lot of farmers, come to the meeting to get the latest guidelines on inspections for 2020 from Mairead Fanning, DAFM.