

Practical Methods of Feeding Hill Sheep

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Hill ewes carrying twins have high requirements for metabolisable protein (MP). When supplied with supplementary Digestible Undegradable Protein (DUP) heavier lambs, more colostrum and higher lamb vigour, leading to fewer losses are possible.

Trials show greater response where ewes are thin (low body reserves of protein) and when parasitised (worms). This is often the case in areas where grazings are used year round and weather affects sheep, so is particularly relevant to hill sheep. Many hill farmers are unaware of how much colostrum and milk hill ewes can produce until they see it demonstrated.

Years back I formulated a compound with 8 % fishmeal for a farmer who commented that he never realised what milk was until then. Now that fishmeal is not allowed we have to look to other sources. Only target ewes with twins and only in the last 3 weeks of pregnancy with DUP, single bearing ewes do not need extra DUP, so requirements on a hill farm will not be huge.

There are many ways to get DUP into hill ewes

SOYA supplementation of the normal diet

Feed 200g of soya to twins for the last 3 weeks of pregnancy.

In practice start three weeks before the first lamb is due and feed it until the end of lambing, usually around 40 days later. Feed 200g soya in addition to the normal diet for thin ewes at score < 2.0 and replace 200g of the conventional compound for fit ewes, CS > 2.5. So allow 8 kg in total.

For hill ewes on hay and concentrates fed from troughs it can be added in the trough, but it will blow away in high winds so unless you bring them in to feed it may be better to buy 30 % soya enhanced nuts and feed using a snacker.

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Ewes on grass

Significant savings in feed are possible where the ewes are set stocked for lambing on grass but in this situation feeding causes disturbance and mismothering. Blocks containing DUP are useful here and Rumevite Graze DUP blocks based on protected soya giving enough DUP for twin bearing ewes.

Guide to products containing DUP (costs March 2016)				
Feed	CP (g/kgfresh)	DUP (g/kgDM)	Cost £/kg DUP	£/t delivered (1t most areas)
15% Soya Compound	180	65	3.84	250
Sopralin/Ultraso	520	315	1.34	425
Soya Meal	565	198	1.64	325
DUP based feed block	160	128	4.29	550
Ultraso rolls (25kg's)	340	245	1.75	430

Sopralin and Ultra soy are the same formaldehyde treated soya product with different commercial names and are used with top quality silage only Ultra soy rolls are a new product for feeding with top quality silage (ME 11MJ ME/kg.Dm) or good spring grass. Ewes need body reserves (CS 3) and can be fed 100g /day or 200g every second day to reduce labour-mainly used for crossed ewes on upland/lowland farms

Tackling low lambing % with supplementary feed

For hill ewes at 70-80% lambing there are insufficient good ewe lamb replacements to maintain flock quality. To get out of the downward spiral, target nutrition at tugging time to increase lambs born. Use high energy feed blocks from 3 weeks pre –mating to the end of the first cycle- about a block per 3 ewes. Mineral blocks and tubs will not have the same effect, to get more lambs you need to feed about 10-15% extra energy so there is a significant cost.

If lambing % improves then it becomes worthwhile scanning so that twins can be fed separately at up to 0.45kg /ewe /day pre lambing. Surviving twins really add to output but unless you are prepared to feed ewes, it's better to aim for singles. Condition score is key to hill ewe management and it is relevant to score a sample of ewes every time they are handled and write down the scores so you get a picture within and between years of what is happening to body reserves, which for hill ewes are vital to productivity.

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