MONITOR FARM Scotland

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Are EWE ready for Lambing?

7th December 2023

A successful lambing with Graham Lofthouse

Over 60 members of the farming community came along to Wallets Marts on Thursday 7th December to hear from Graham Lofthouse.

Graham farms near Stow in the Scottish Borders with the sheep side of the business farming 470 UltiMate ewes, 138 UltiMate ewe lambs, 16 tups/tup lambs and has on average 960 lambs sold/retained.

What is success to Graham?

1. Lower mortality that the target set

<5%

2. Ewes that require the lowest levels of intervention at lambing.
3. Healthy vigorous lambs that grow well

Where is time best spent?

Pre Lambing

- Grouping
- Plenty of feed space to reduce stress
- Blood testing
- Clean bedding
- Individual pens

Post Lambing

- Limiting stress
- Iodine x2 (blood will dilute iodine so should be changed out regularly).
- Water available at all times
- Base ration

Data capture

Data capture that makes a difference! Don't spend time collecting if you are not going to use it. Always think of the 3 W's to make data collection relevant to you.

WHY? WHAT? WHEN?

Enough space to eat reduces food competition, subsequently reducing stress on the ewes.

Top 10 Essentials: Preparation is key

1. Health Status

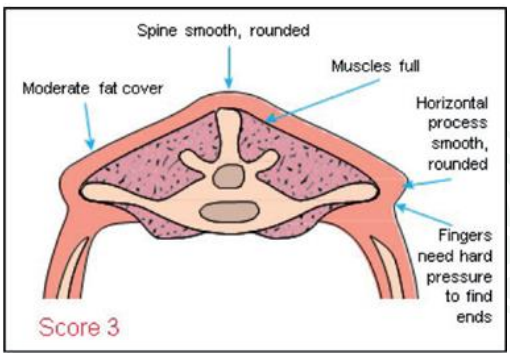
Are there any abnormalities in the scanning results? Do you vaccinate?

Iceberg Diseases such as Border Disease are potential threats to consider and manage effectively during the lambing period. Vaccination against Iceberg Diseases and regular monitoring can significantly reduce the risk of infection.

Vaccination for clostridial diseases should take place 4 weeks pre lambing

2. Body condition scoring

Monitoring body condition six weeks before lambing is crucial. **Aim for a BCS of 3, 50 days from the date of tupping** to ensure adequate nutrition and health for both the ewe and her lambs.



3. Nutrition

Target nutrition for body condition of ewes and for those carrying multiples.

Check the ration provides enough energy and protein - important for colostrum production. **Metabolic profiling can help to check if nutrition is adequate.**

4. Colostrum

Milk ewes and **store surplus colostrum in 250ml portions** in freezer bags or disinfected plastic bottles. These can be kept in the fridge for up to a week or frozen for a year.

- Top Tip - write the date the colostrum was taken on the bag with a permanent marker to help with stock control
- Make sure to **disinfect stomach tubes** between lambs to prevent contamination

5. Hygiene

Disinfect frequently and make sure bedding is fresh to reduce risk of infection and disease spread.

Consider placement of sick lambs / ewes to prevent spread of disease to healthy lambs.

6. Organisation

Do you have a pen system?

Using a simple laminated piece of paper attached to each pen can help to communicate lamb colostrum intake, twin ons, antibiotic use or lambing issues.

7. Recording your losses

Recording losses at lambing time can help identify areas for improvement in future years. **See overleaf for a simple tally chart** which can be put on a whiteboard and counted when you have the time.

8. Shelter

Do your fields have shelter? A bale or **a simple shelter can reduce number of lambs getting hypothermia** when the weather takes an inevitable turn for the worse!

9. Equipment

Are you prepared? Store items in toolbelts or boxes to have everything in one place - saving time and energy! Some items you may require include:

- **Gloves**
- **Iodine**
- **Lubricant**
- **Rubber rings**
- **Marker spray**
- **Syringes and needles**

10. Future planning

Understanding the genetic factors involved in lambing is crucial for breeding programs and ensuring a smooth lambing process.

Think about

1. Ease of lambing,
2. Pelvic size
3. Breeding selection

Can you record these at lambing to inform breeding decisions for next years lambing?

Recording Losses at Lambing

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Reason for loss	Tally
Ewe death (lambs carried)	
Reabsorption	
Abortion	
Stillborn (fresh)	
Stillborn (smelly)	
Premature/small/weak	
Hung	
Big lamb	
Not licked/suffocated	
Rejected/pinched	
Lack of colostrum	
Deformed	
Hypothermia	
Scour	
Joint ill	
Predation	
Unknown	

Initiative supported by:
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A case study investigation into lamb mortality on a commercial farm:

A focus on colostrum quality and failure of transfer of passive immunity.

As part of the monitor farm programme, Barnbackle are completing a study to determine the cause of lambing losses with a focus on colostrum.

This is a collaborative project funded by Monitor Farm Scotland and Livestock Health Scotland and run by The Stewartry Veterinary Centre and University of Glasgow, School of Biodiversity, One Health & Veterinary Medicine.

Reasons and motivations:

Perinatal lamb morbidity and mortality was highlighted by a post lambing review at Barnbackle as an area to target.

The farm recorded their 2023 losses on a whiteboard in the lambing shed. This allowed them to identify main causes and are now going to take a focus on **ewe nutrition and health, colostrum quality and lamb immunity.**

The ultimate aim is simple:
More lambs, to increase number of lambs available for sale.

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