



EIPWALES

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Collaborating for rural success



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How Anglesey farmers have cut antibiotics at lambing by 60%

Sheep farmers on Anglesey have cut antibiotic use during lambing by almost 60% over a two-year period.

By improving nutrition, hygiene, colostrum quality and management, a group of seven farmers reduced the number of animals treated with antibiotics without impacting on production or welfare.

In the lambing periods from 2017-19, the seven farms used an average of 59.8% less antibiotics.

With veterinary and nutritional advice funded by European Innovation Partnership (EIP) Wales*, the farmers demonstrated that a proactive approach can significantly reduce reliance on antibiotics at lambing.

One of the farmers, Gareth Thomas, of Tregynrig, Cemaes Bay, says one of the simplest but most effective measures he put in place was to allow sufficient feeding space for ewes – 15cm per animal for ad-lib forage and 45cm for restricted concentrates.

He reduced the numbers at each trough from 50 to 40.

The ewes are fed ad-lib silage and receive concentrates twice a day, at 8am and 4pm.

Tregynrig is a family-run farm which supplies fat lambs to Woodhead Bros in April and May.

Mr Thomas runs a flock of 650 Suffolk x North Country Mules ewes which he breeds to Charollais or Texel rams.

He disinfects the sheds twice when ewes are housed for lambing in January, with a two week gap between groups to reduce E.coli levels - singles are grouped separately from twins and triplets.

After lambing, the ewe and lambs are moved from big pens into small, individual pens.

Mr Thomas says the EIP project taught him that he needed to lime more around wet areas, such as troughs and feeding areas.

To aid the reduction in antibiotics, bedding in the pens housing all groups is analysed for bacteria that can cause mastitis, joint ill, scours and watery mouth.

“Bedding tests in the pre and post lambing pens are vitally important for us to know if we need to do anything to reduce E.coli,” says Mr Thomas.

“By testing the bedding we can action against the results by disinfecting and liming.”



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Good pre-lambing nutrition is another reason why fewer antibiotics were used; for the project, silage quality was analysed for dry matter, protein, digestibility, metabolisable energy, minerals and fermentation.

Tregynrig is a family-run farm which supplies fat lambs to Woodhead Bros in April and May.

Mr Thomas says the project had allowed all the farms to lower their lambing costs.

“We did this without compromising on animal health and welfare as our ewes are in the best possible condition before starting lambing, and we are now concentrating our spending on the places where it needs it most,” he says.

Each farmer worked closely with independent sheep consultant Kate Phillips and with Karen Wheeler of ADAS to formulate the correct ration.

Sheep vet Kate Hovers, who advised the farmers, says the project demonstrated what can be achieved with good hygiene and nutrition and simple management changes.

“Wide adoption of these approaches could have a dramatic impact on antibiotic usage across the sheep industry,” she says.

Protocols at lambing on the project farms

- Pre-lambing pens are cleaned out, disinfected and limed between batches
- Water troughs are cleaned out regularly
- Lambs are treated promptly and managed separately, to avoid spread of infection
- Castration and tailing of lambs in the first week of life is avoided to minimise stress and wounds where joint ill bacteria could enter
- Everyone involved in lambing wears rubber gloves and also when they handle sick lambs
- Stomach tubes are washed in warm soapy water and disinfected in baby bottle solution
- Lambing pens are set up in a separate area away from the main lambing pens for sick ewes or lambs and for ewes that have aborted
- Where cow colostrum is used, the quality is assessed using a refractometer and only colostrum at 22 IgG (Immunoglobulin G) or higher is fed to lambs