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Ewe nutrition during pregnancy

Good nutrition is really important for the ewe from tugging through to weaning and getting it right during pregnancy is especially important for lamb growth and development.

Be Prepared!

Make sure the ewes are **body condition scored (BCS)** - and then formulate the feeding plan to match their needs. Ewes should be fed according to the number of lambs carried and their BCS from six weeks pre-lambing.

Remember!

Stable rumen function is really important during pregnancy. In order for feed intake to be the best it can be, focus on three things:

1. Feed the ewes at the same time, with the same number of feeds each day
2. Grazing and forage must be available, high quality, digestible, fresh and free from mould and contamination
3. Give the ewes enough trough space and short distances to walk to supplements if fed outdoors

Under or over feeding is a risk during pregnancy, - something which can be lessened by analysing ration content to match the ewe needs. **Ration or forage analysis** helps to determine the amount and type of energy and protein available so that the ewe's requirements are met at each stage of her pregnancy.

Be aware!

Diseases and health issues such as twin lamb disease, hypocalcaemia, hypothermia, joint ill, watery mouth, liver abscesses, pneumonia, and dysentery can arise as a result of inadequate nutrition during pregnancy.

Early pregnancy

- **Plan** the forage availability so that the ewes are fed to maintenance requirements in the first three months and avoid abrupt changes in the type and level of feeding.
- If prolific breeds are **overfed** in early pregnancy, low blood progesterone levels can reduce embryo survival.
- At 70-90 days, **scanning** the ewe will help to determine nutritional needs for single, twin or triplet bearing ewes.



Mid pregnancy

Maintain or slightly increase the ewe body condition score (BCS) to allow full **placental development**- this is essential for good birthweight, survival and growth rate of the lambs that are born.



Late pregnancy

- 70%: this is the amount by which the unborn lamb grows in the last few weeks of pregnancy- its weight, health, skeletal development and major functioning organs are all affected by the mother's nutrition. During this period the ewe will need more **energy and protein** to match her live-weight and the number of lambs she carries.
- Most **udder development** also takes place in the last month of pregnancy and research has found that colostrum production, so vital to the new born lamb's first few hours, is linked to the ewe's **energy intake during the last three weeks** of pregnancy, balanced with the right amount of protein.
- The role of **vitamins and minerals** is also important - correct calcium and magnesium levels in late pregnancy and early lactation are required to prevent metabolic disease; an additional 100mg/day of vitamin E in concentrate feed is recommended which can improve lamb vigour and viability.
- Don't forget **water!** Allow at least 4.5 litres of water per ewe per day in late pregnancy and 10 litres in early lactation or two litres per ewe per day with moist silage or root diets.



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[Technical article: The nutritional requirements of the ewe during gestation \(2018\)](#) Author: Dr Elizabeth Hart: IBERS, Aberystwyth University (online)

[Feeding the Ewe \(2016\)](#) by Povey, Stubbings and Phillips (AHDB Beef and Lamb online)

