

Lambing Prep

Benjamin Franklin said “failing to prepare is preparing to fail”. You can obviously apply this to most situations and lambing time is no different. While some of you might already have lambing well underway, for others it will be fast approaching. When I say preparing I don't mean just checking the cupboards are fully stocked with lube, iodine, antibiotics and all the other bits and pieces you will be needing, although this IS a critical task. I wanted to mention a couple of other things that you should be getting done at this time of year if you haven't already done them.

Those of you who have scanned should be checking that ewes are identified and separated according to number of lambs they are carrying so that feeding can be tailored and adoptions can be as fast as possible.

It is useful to go through the flock to look for lame ewes and treat appropriately to prevent the problem getting worse or spreading, while the ewes are kept in closer quarters.

Body condition scoring to pick out any over or under weight ewes should be carried out while there is still plenty of time to alter things. Remember weight change should be managed carefully as heavily pregnant animals are prone to succumbing to metabolic imbalances.

It might be worth brushing up on some of the skills that you only call on at this time of the year. How to treat a hypothermic lamb and which lambs to give intraperitoneal injections, being two lifesaving skills that really make the difference.

First make sure you keep a thermometer to hand, otherwise how do you know if a lamb is hypothermic or not? A lamb with a temperature below 37.5C is regarded as hypothermic, the next question should be is it older or younger than 6 hours.

Lambs less than 6 hours old still have a reserve of brown fat which they can use as energy. This means you can warm them straight away and the brown fat will support their energy needs. Once this had all been used up, at around 6 hours they will require either a feed, if they can hold up their head, or warm glucose solution via intraperitoneal injection BEFORE warming to ensure they have plenty of energy. All wet lambs should be dried before warming to prevent further heat loss through evaporation. Once a lamb is able to hold its head up it should be stomach tubed with warm colostrum.

Intraperitoneal glucose injections can be a life saver for hypothermic lambs, getting a fast acting energy source directly into the abdominal cavity. But it is best to check you have remembered correctly the location of the injection (1 inch below and 1 inch to the side of the navel aiming toward the tail head) the amount (15ml of 40% glucose solution mixed with 15ml pre-boiled warm water) to inject and size of needle used (1” 19Gauge) to make the most of this skill. If you have never tried this before get your vet to show you as it really is a lifesaving skill and with lambs that are so close to death you have nothing to lose by trying it.

No lambing prep article would be complete without a mention of colostrum management. Make sure you have a supply of powdered colostrum at the start of lambing for those early lambs. If you want to freeze some this is a great idea but be careful when thawing and warming it as using a microwave can denature the essential proteins found in colostrum. Make sure all equipment is clean and free from damage and you have a way of disinfecting between uses.

For further information, please contact our Launceston practice on 01566 86985.

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