BOCM PAULS

Information Sheet

FEEDING STRAW TO EWES

Good quality barley straw has an important part to play in feeding ewes both before and after lambing. It is simple to feed and can be adequately supplemented with good quality concentrates. On the arable farm it clearly offers a simple and low cost feeding programme which avoids alternative forage conservation. On the livestock farm it may well be complimentary to hay or silage or can be a total replacement if particular circumstances prevail.

Housing of ewes during the last 6-10 weeks prior to lambing, has the benefits of having a higher stocking rate, less poaching of grassland, less lamb mortality and easier management. Farmers operating this system are mainly feeding untreated barley straw as the principal source of long fibre.

The barley straw, however, must be clean, dry and free of mould. It should be fed ad lib. Some wastage of eating straw must be expected as the ewes should be allowed to be selective. This means cleaning out the straw racks every other day and using the unwanted straw for bedding. It is important that additional straw should be offered in racks in addition to straw in the bedding as this will increase the intake of straw.

The intake of straw per day for ewes weighing about 70kg, typical of Greyface and Mules, is in the range of 1.5 - 2.0kg. However, in the last two weeks of pregnancy, this will fall to 1kg per day due to the space taken up by the developing foetus reducing rumen capacity.

The supplementation of barley straw compared with hay or silage, will require to be at a higher level, at some 250g per day extra, and at 18% crude protein as a minimum. A typical feeding programme would be as follows for ewes expected to lamb in excess of 170%.

Weeks Before Lambing	Straw (KG)	Super Ewbol (KG)
10	1.5	0.3
9	1.5	0.4
8	1.5	0.5
7	1.5	0.6
6	1.5	0.7
5	1.5	0.8
4	1.5	1.0
3	1.5	1.2
2	1.0	1.4
1	1.0	1.5

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The **SUPER EWBOL 19** should be fed in two feeds to ensure evenness of intake per ewe and also to aid both the intake and digestibility of the barley straw.

The level of supplementation gradually increases with advancing pregnancy. The most cautious farmer may choose to change to hay feeding in the final fortnight of pregnancy but this is not necessary if satisfactory intakes of 1kg straw per day are being achieved. Maintaining the correct balance between concentrates and roughage in the last fortnight is very important to minimise the risk of acidosis.

Ethos trial work on Mule ewes has included the feeding of barley straw both before and after lambing. Ewes were supplemented at grass in December with both SUPER EWBOL 19 NUTS and barley straw before housing in early January.

Just prior to lambing ewes were transferred to individual pens, and one group was fed on hay at just under 2kg per day, the other group fed untreated barley straw. All the ewes were shorn at housing.

Lambing commenced the first week of February and the average birthweight of all twin lambs was 5.7kg. Growth rates were recorded to 28 days of age and were in excess of 300g per day as follows:

Treatment	**Liveweight gain per lamb (twin lambs) (kg)**	**Liveweight loss off ewes (kg)**
HAY	9.1	5.6
STRAW	9.4	5.7

The SUPER EWBOL 19 intake of the straw fed groups was 2kg per day being 0.5kg higher than the hay fed group.