

Lamb production in the 21st Century **or** **Life without subsidies**

We seem to have been talking about life after MTR for years, but now the reality is here, direct subsidies are a thing of the past. The general advice is clear, make each enterprise profitable, without having to rely on the Single Farm Payment. However it is far easier to say it than to achieve it.

The 2003/4 net margins published by EBLEX for both the lowland and LFA flocks show that only the top third producers can generate positive margins without subsidy - the top third lowland producers making a net margin of £15.82 per ewe after the subsidy was discounted.

It is widely felt that there will be a slow but gradual move in ewe numbers from the hill to the lowland. Although ewe numbers are expected to decline in total, the increase in productivity that this move will make is anticipated to almost maintain lamb production at the current levels.

The key to future lamb production must be by achieving higher outputs per ewe and /or reducing the fixed costs of the enterprise.

Achieving higher outputs per ewe comes down to :-

Improving the Lambing Rate and **Improving the Value per Lamb**

Improving the Lambing Rate

❖ Conception Management

Flushing ewes which are in poor condition with 0.25 kg concentrates per day from 2 weeks pre-tupping to 3 weeks post-tupping to ensure that the ewes are on a rising plane of nutrition at conception, has been shown to result in 16 EXTRA lambs per 100 ewes. This represents a return on investment of over 5:1.

❖ Nutrition in Late Pregnancy

Late pregnancy is a critical time in the quest for improving lambing rate with over 65% of lamb growth occurring in the last 6 weeks, equivalent to a 400-500% increase in the weight of the foetus. Generally the amount of forage which the ewes will eat declines, as rumen volume is reduced by the developing unborn lambs.

Scanning the ewes after 80 days can help to ensure that nutritional requirements are met and that feeds are used efficiently.

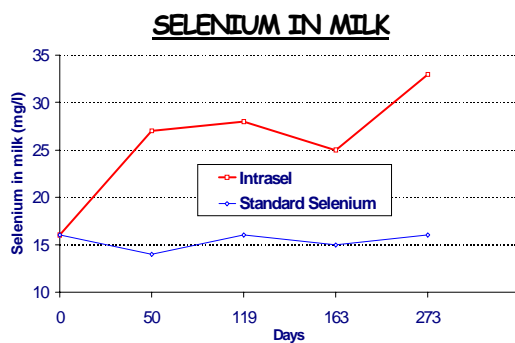
Increasing both the energy density and the quality of the protein supplied, in the form of concentrate, in this period significantly influences the lamb birth weights, which is fundamental in lamb survivability.

❖ Lamb Survival

Lamb mortality is a manageable problem, but requires vigil attention at lambing time by well trained staff. Inadequate nutrition in late pregnancy can result in poor lamb survival as a result of low birthweights and poor milk production.

INTRASEL, (a highly bioavailable form of selenium, unique to BOCM PAULS) and extra Vitamin E are included in the EWVOL range to improve the immune system of Ewes & Lambs and reduce lamb mortality.

INTRASEL naturally increases the amount of selenium transferred to the lamb before birth and increases the selenium content of the ewes milk, which means :



- Stronger lambs at birth
- Faster Brown Fat mobilization, therefore less hypothermia
- Extra selenium supplementation for ewes has also been shown to double the vitamin E level in the milk.

In MAFF funded trials, where vitamin E levels were supplemented at a daily intake of 100mg, lambs stood, 8 minutes and suckled 16 minutes earlier.

Improving lamb survivability improves flock profitability. So not only are BOCM PAULS ewe feeds ensuring that lambs have the best possible start in life, but are protecting flock profitability at the same time.

Deaths due to starvation, dystocia, mismothering, hypothermia and metabolic disease are all fairly common but should be prepared for wherever possible. Good record keeping should allow a sound analysis of lamb mortality and therefore better preparation as lambing progresses.

However, a well stocked supply of ewe's colostrum and a bag of Ewvol Vitality Milk Replacer will never go amiss at lambing time.

Improving the Value per Lamb

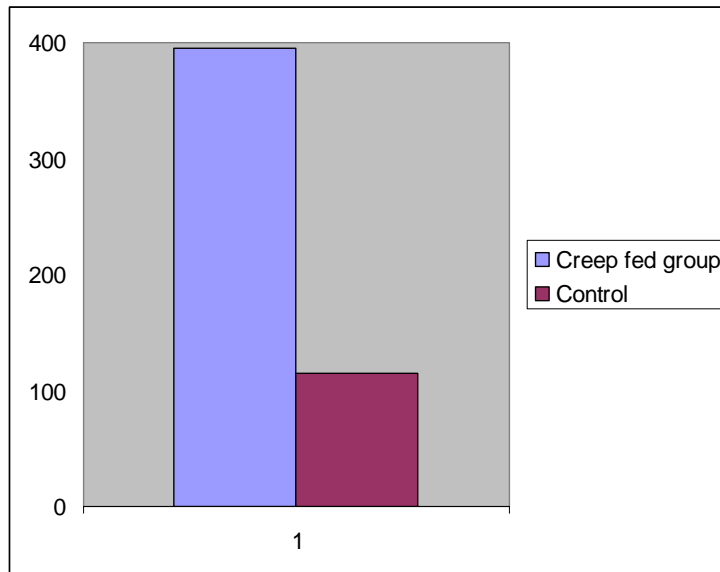
The best returns for lambs come from selling a quality product which matches the expectations of the consumer, but currently only 60% of all lambs sold meet their markets specifications.

The use of high index rams and improved lamb selection for slaughter can add an extra £8 per lamb to the bottom line, making a big contribution to farm profitability.

Timing is all important in the early lamb market in order to catch the premium prices. With current concentrate prices, creep feeding can be economic if it results in a more rapid sale of lambs at higher prices.

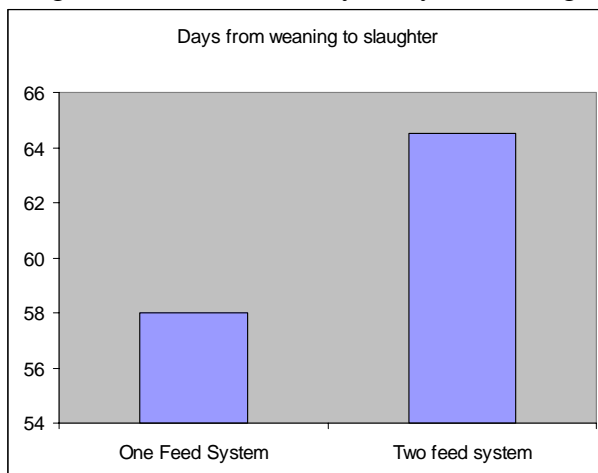
The practice of creep feeding has been evaluated on ewes suckling twins, as part of BOCM PAULS ongoing Ethos development work.

December born creep fed lambs grew more than three times faster than non creep fed lambs. This head start continued until the first creep fed lambs were ready for slaughter. The average weight of the creep group was 32.2kg compared to the non creep group at 16.2 kg.



Daily liveweight gain over 8 week period

There are also extra benefits for those pushing spring lambs for the earlier finish, by using a dual feed approach, feeding a 20% protein diet, such as Ewbol Lambwena, in the early stages of growth i.e. up to 8/9 weeks, then reducing to a 18% crude protein level Ewbol Prestige, for finishing. Compared to a single creep feed system, the time to slaughter can be reduced by 7 days, with large savings on feed and better market prices.



Comparison of Two feed versus One feed production system

Concentrate supplementation both pre-weaning and post-weaning in either early or mid-season lamb production increases lamb growth rates, killing-out percentage and results in earlier finishing, although evidence suggests that responses to concentrate supplementation are generally better pre-weaning compared to post-weaning.

Also there is an improvement in carcass conformation for which farmers may receive premium payments.

The sheep industry is very resilient and has faced difficult times in the past and has bounced back again. Whilst the immediate future will be unsettling for some, for those who are motivated and focused on developing their business, prepared to examine and drive out unnecessary costs, willing to seek and adopt new technical innovation, there will continue to be a sound and profitable future for the British sheep industry.