

Sheep Feeding Guide

As with all animals the quantity of feed needed to maintain the sheep in good condition, without becoming overweight, will vary according to many factors.

Highland breeds will naturally tend to "do better" on lower quantities of concentrate feed than lowland breeds. The time of year that ewes are due to lamb will also have an effect.

It is always a good idea to have a "hands-on" approach to assessing the condition of sheep. Feeling how much condition a sheep is carrying across its ribs and hindquaders is much more reliable than a glance over the field gate! The quantity of feed can then be adjusted accordingly.

After weaning, ewes should be kept on a low plan of nutrition, and grazing should be kept 'tight'. Over fat ewes will not be in optimal condition for tugging. Ewe condition should be assessed in late summer and where possible they should be fed according to condition (fat level). This can be assessed by feeling either side of the spine, between the rib cage and the pelvis. Over fat ewes should be monitored on limited grazing.

Ewes in poor condition should be given Ewe Nuts or Sheep Mix, with the quantities fed gradually increased prior to tugging, a technique known as 'flushing'. As a guide, start with about 0.25kg per head per day, two weeks before tugging, and build up to about 0.5kg, tailing off again after tugging.

Feeding extra nutrients is essential if grass is limited. A rising plain of nutrition before tugging will result in an increased ovulation rate and an increase in lambs.

In most cases ewes will need to be fed a compound feed from six to eight weeks pre-lambing, and certainly in the four week period leading up to lambing ewes will require a carefully balanced, high-density, low volume diet to enable the rapid development of the unborn lambs.

Lambs actually gain three-quarters of their birth weight in the last four weeks of pregnancy, so it is vitally important that the ewe is not underfed at this time to avoid loss of condition and 'twin lamb' disease.

Introduce Ewe Nuts at a level of 250g/day, and build up (to approximately 1kg/head/day) over the six week period leading up to lambing. Together with good quality hay or silage, this will provide the ewe with all the essential protein, digestible energy and vitamins and minerals that she requires for healthy lambs.

Do be careful not to overfeed, especially young ewes, shearlings, or ewe lambs lambing for the first time. This can result in large single lambs which may present lambing difficulties. Fed at up to 0.5kg a day, Ewe Nuts also make an excellent maintenance diet.

Start young lambs on Lamb Starter/Grower from the age of about seven days. This will provide optimum controlled growth, incorporating top quality proteins and easily digestible energy sources. Always start by feeding small quantities to ensure that feed remains fresh. Discard any stale feed that has not been eaten.

Supplementary feeding will be particularly important if lack of grass limits the ewe's ability to produce milk. Ewes themselves will also continue to need supplementary

feeding, particularly older ewes who can lose condition very quickly in late lactation.

In late season when forage is in short supply, Lamb Finisher can be fed at up to 1kg per head per day. Introduce feed gradually and build up the quantity fed to the desired level.

Sheep Mix can be fed from five weeks onwards and be used to improve lambs that are to be used for breeding purposes. It should be fed in conjunction with forage and fed at up to 1kg per head per day.

Depending on the grass available, it may be necessary to provide extra hay, especially if summers are extremely dry resulting in poor grass growth. In winter you should allow for approximately 2kg of hay per sheep per day.