

PRODUCT FOCUS



Now is the time to be thinking about what you need to put in place for a successful 2022 lambing season, says Dr Jessica Cooke from Volac.

Gearing up for lambing

Volac's Dr Jessica Cooke says: "Good preparation will help you maximise the number of healthy newborn lambs to finish in 2022 and the priority at this time of year for most flocks is to get pregnant ewe nutrition right. "Ewes must be in the best condition possible for the last six weeks of pregnancy when 70% of foetal growth takes place. Get it wrong and you may have to cope with poor lamb survival rates, low birth weights and inferior quality ewe colostrum." Dr Cooke suggests grouping and feeding ewes according to scanning results and their condition score. She says: "Getting the mineral balance right is important too, so

ask your nutritionist for advice. It is also worth asking your vet to blood sample ewes four to six weeks pre-lambing, just to make sure their diet is delivering the required energy and protein status." She adds that a chat with your vet will also remind you of the essential disease management interventions pre- and post-lambing. Dr Cooke says: "For example, do not forget to boost your ewes' clostridial disease and pasteurellosis cover four to six weeks pre-lambing; make sure any lame sheep are separated and treated well before housing; and check your protocols for recording any lamb losses [when and how many] and dealing with any abortion problems or joint ill."

Volac Eco Feeder helps to save on labour and secure better lamb growth rates.



Dr Jessica Cooke

Any sheep housing should also be well prepared, which involves thoroughly cleaning and disinfecting the accommodation before ewes come inside. Dr Cooke says: "Good lighting is important too because it makes it so much easier to check stock without disturbing them too much. "Avoid overcrowding, otherwise stress and disease issues can spiral out of control; a typical 70kg ewe needs 1.2-1.4cu.m of floor space and 45cm of trough space." She also says it is important to

have a system in place for rearing surplus lambs. "Ad-lib milk feeding systems using either a thermostatically controlled bucket or a computerised feeder, such as the Volac Eco Feeder, will help you save on labour and secure better lamb growth rates. "Why spend hours a day bottle feeding when you could be prioritising your time elsewhere?" Dr Cooke says maximising the number of lambs sold per ewe put to the ram is one of the key benchmarks for a successful sheep enterprise.

With lamb prices forecast to remain firm during 2022, it looks like it will undoubtedly pay to make every lamb count. Dr Cooke says: "Neonatal lamb mortality continues to be a challenging issue for the sheep industry, but improving colostrum management and feeding practices could make a significant difference on many farms.

Essential first feed

"Once surplus lambs have received enough of this essential first feed during the first 24 hours of life – or a proven alternative such as Volac Volostrum – they can then move onto a performance-formulated ewe milk replacer, such as Lamlac, to make the most of their significant early life growth potential." Following an adequate colostrum intake, feeding a surplus lamb enough ewe milk replacer is the key to healthy, profitable growth. A single lamb reared artificially to weaning (at an average of 35 days of age) will require a minimum of 9.5kg of Lamlac (equating to 47.5 litres of reconstituted ewe milk replacer).

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Deborah Dobson



CASE STUDY: LOW-MAINTENANCE SYSTEM FOR EXTRA LAMBS

● Rearing 1,600 breeding ewes means time is of the essence for the Dobson family during peak lambing season, so a slick system is essential to take care of any lambs which require additional support early on. The Dobsons farm 445 hectares (1,100 acres) in Wear-dale, Co Durham, and the farm is set predominately on moorland, with some parts classed as severely disadvantaged areas and disadvantaged land. They also have grazing rights on Bollilhope and Pikestone Common.

Their flock consists of 400 North of England Mules, 850 Swaledale ewes put to a Bluefaced Leicester tup and a pure flock of 350 Swaledales. On average, the family has 170 lambs per year which need rearing independently from a ewe and they are usually removed within 36 hours of birth. If they are born in the morning, they will be parted 24 hours later, whereas if they are born during the night, it will be around 36 hours later. Deborah Dobson says: "Trip-let-bearing ewes are usually relieved of one lamb to help the remaining two prosper without over burdening, while ewes giving birth to twins are left alone unless we notice a problem with feeding or one starts to deteriorate.

"The lambs we take away are just as important as the ones which remain with the ewe and our 20 years of experience using Volac Lamlac means we are more than confident to raise them on it." Two years ago, Deborah invested in the computerised Volac EcoFeeder, which is maintained by independent feeder engineer Sam Potter. This has dramatically cut the time spent mixing milk and feeding and has the potential to handle up to 240 lambs at once.

Impressed

One area Deborah has been impressed with is the easy maintenance, which provides a high level of hygiene for lambs. The Eco Feeder does not require topping up everyday, so the need to constantly monitor feed levels is greatly reduced too. She says: "It takes just minutes to clean the Eco Feeder in between feeds and I do it daily to keep on top of any potential bacteria build-up. The auto-clean setting means I just add water and it goes through a cleaning cycle automatically. This saves a lot of time compared to our old unit."

The Dobsons buy Lamlac through rep Laura Robinson at Eden Farm Supplies, who is always on-hand to provide advice should it be needed. The temperature-controlled milk is consumed little and often from the Eco Feeder, which means faster growth rates and less risk of digestive upsets, which has been noted by Deborah, and she says lambs appear healthier and happier than in previous years. She says: "I have seen a clear increase in the health of lambs since we brought the Eco Feeder two years ago. The milk is mixed on demand with only a small amount sitting pre-mixed. "Once lamb starts sucking, the Eco Feeder mixes it automatically, which is a big improvement."

FEEDING/MIXING QUANTITIES

Bottle feeding rearing system

- To make one litre of milk, mix 200g of Lamlac with 800ml of water.

Volume of Lamlac to be fed per day

- One to three days: One litre (split into four or five separate feeds).
- Four to seven days: One litre (split into four separate feeds).
- Eight to 35 days (weaning): One-and-a-half litres (split into four separate

feeds initially; reducing to two separate feeds until weaning).

Ad-lib feeding rearing system

- When using a labour saving, ad-lib feeding system (warm milk bucket feeding or computerised machine feeding), lambs will drink more (albeit on a little and often basis, which reduces the risk of digestive upsets), but also grow faster.

Whatever the rearing system, lambs should have access to fresh water, roughage and a good quality creep feed at all times to encourage rumen development. Lambs will begin to nibble on creep feed at seven to 10 days of age. Consumption will be low to begin with and offering small amounts and keeping the creep feed refreshed at least once a day will encourage intake.

When it comes to weaning surplus lambs effectively, they should be: ● A minimum of two-and-a-half times their birthweight (9-10kg). ● A minimum of 35 days old. ● Eating 250g of solid feed per day for 10 days. ● Abrupt weaning is recommended because it reduces the risk of digestive upsets associated with gradual weaning.

For more information on rearing surplus lambs, visit lamlac.co.uk

