

LAMB LOSSES AT A RECORD LOW

Lamb losses on a Welsh farm are at a record low after a focus was placed on ewe nutrition pre-lambing.

Gerald Brown and his son, Mathew, lamb 340 ewes, sponging 100 ewes to lamb at the end of January to capitalise on the early lamb market. The remainder lamb from early March.

They were keen to improve ewe and lamb health post-lambing and were advised to supplement the ewe diet with minerals, vitamins and trace elements.

Two years ago they introduced Lifeline Lamb and Ewe prior to lambing. “We have seen a big improvement in the health of the flock overall,” reports Gerald.

Ewes lamb easier and, as a consequence, both the ewe and lamb are healthier and stronger post-lambing.

Gerald says far less intervention is now needed at lambing. “The ewes seem to be able to bring the lambs on themselves without any strain. During lambing we might pop into the house for lunch when there are no ewes lambing only to go out an hour later to find newly born lambs. The ewes rarely need assistance and because they haven’t had a big struggle to lamb they are healthier.”

This has a positive impact on the lamb, Gerald adds. “If a ewe has an easy birth she will stay on her feet for longer and this makes it easier for the lambs to suck.”

The Browns use Lifeline before lambing and during lambing. They have noticed that lambs are thriftier at birth, benefiting from Lifeline while in their mother’s womb and later through her milk. “The most important thing for us is that the lambs are lively and suckling straight away because it can be time consuming if they’re not,” says Gerald.

The Browns farm 96 acres at Llanpumsaint, Carmarthenshire, where the land rises from 450 feet to 800 feet, and they rent a further 24 acres. They breed Whitefaced mules, sourcing ewes from Sennybridge and Llandovery markets and crossing these with Bluefaced Leicesters. This season’s crop of earlier lambing ewes scanned at 154% and the March lambers, which included 66 ewe lambs, at 174%

“We creep feed the January-born lambs to get them away early, but finish all the March-born lambs on grass,” Mathew explains. All the lambs are sold to the Dunbia abattoir at Llanybydder. Thirty-five acres of haylage is harvested as winter feed for the flock.

Lifeline Lamb and Ewe has made a big difference to the management of the flock. Colostrum quality has noticeably improved and there is less need for colostrum replacer.

“It is obvious when a lamb hasn’t had enough colostrum and in the past, especially at night time when we wanted to get back to bed, it would be necessary to give lambs a replacer to help them along. Since using Lifeline we have used far less,” says Mathew.

The combination of better quality colostrum and a stronger lamb at birth have led to a sharp reduction in illness and mortality in the flock. "The lambs seem to come on in leaps and bounds, especially last year when they could go outside because the weather was good so they weren't picking up bugs in the shed," says Mathew.

Lifeline's value to the shepherd has been proven by independent trial work. For example, an SAC study has shown that feeding it pre-lambing can significantly increase immunoglobulin levels in the colostrum. Ewes fed showed a 25% increase in colostrum immunoglobulin content.

Immunoglobulin content is an important measure of colostrum quality that infers passive immunity to disease in young lambs. As all shepherds know, healthier lambs have increased feed intake and growth rate, show improved early vigour and general health, thrive and are less likely to suffer from conditions such as coccidiosis, hypothermia and mis-mothering. Losses due to predators may also be reduced when lambs are livelier if born outside.

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