



**Ross Sibbald, Rumenco area business manager for south Scotland and north east England, looks forward to another year working in partnership with Kelso Ram Sales', in 2017.**

"The Rumenco group's long-term commitment to the sheep sector is something we're very proud of and we are delighted to once again be sponsors of what is considered to be the biggest one day ram sales in the world here at Kelso. Rumenco and Nettex have together supported the sale for many years now and with over 5,000 rams going under the hammer, it's going to be another busy day!"

Even as the sale fast approaches its 180th auction it continues to go from strength to strength and to be held in the highest regard by breeders and buyers alike. We at Rumenco look forward to again working alongside the sales' main sponsor Norbrook this year and would like to wish all vendors a successful sale and look forward to seeing both familiar and new faces throughout the day."

## Preparing your ram for the breeding season



David Thornton,  
Rumenco Technical Manager

With a relatively short window for optimum performance afforded to tups each year during the tugging season, careful preparation is needed from physical checks, as listed right, through to management via nutrition to help achieve the best possible start to the breeding season

Rams that are able to work hard, be prolific and have longevity is the aim of all farmers whether breeders or buyers at the sales. Nutrition plays a key part allowing rams to be prepared, whilst helping to maintain their body condition during the rigorous six weeks of tugging.

Sperm production typically takes six to eight weeks, so ensure ram preparations start early. Grass palatability and quality will have been decreasing from approximately mid-July onwards so ensuring the rams' diet, even at grass, is adequately supported to maximise the opportunity of success during the tugging season is key.

### Rams need to be fit, not fat

Preparation not only covers nutrition to optimise sperm production, but also helps to contend with up to 15% of ram bodyweight potentially being lost during the breeding season. If ram condition is poor at the outset of the breeding season, then their fertility and performance may be affected in more ways, so ensuring the following areas are addressed will support performance at tugging:

- Energy – to prepare for the increase in activity
- Protein – for semen quality and libido
- Zinc and selenium – for healthy sperm production
- Vitamin B<sub>12</sub> – supports energy metabolism and post tugging recovery

Rumenco's Lifeline Ram Care has been developed alongside SRUC (formerly SAC), as part of the Easicare™ system, with the aim of balancing existing forage and grazing systems. Created to complement homegrown forages, Lifeline Ram Care helps supply rams with key minerals, vitamins and the required energy needed for the tugging period. It also includes a supply of fish oil, rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which helps to support ram libido plus Diamond V XP, a unique fermentation-based product proven to improve rumen function and therefore forage utilisation.

Carefully targeted nutritional supplementation can be cost effective especially where it aids better utilisation of on-farm grazing and forages at the same time as supporting ram health and performance as we approach this key time in the sheep calendar.



## RAM HEALTH CHECK

### TREAT

Undertake routine vaccinations (clostridia, pasturella) and parasite control as part of the whole flock health plan.

### TEETH

Check for under- or over-shot teeth, gaps and molar abscesses. If teeth are lost or become too long the ram will not be able to eat sufficiently to maintain condition in the run up to, and during, the intensive six-week tugging period.

### TOES

Check locomotion, arthritis and hooves. If a ram is lame, their ability to serve ewes will be limited. Treat any lame rams following best practice protocols.

### TESTICLES

Measure and check firmness, and for any lumps or bumps – they should be as firm as a flexed bicep. Large firm testicles produce 80% more semen each day than medium sized, soft ones.

### TONE

Ram body condition score (BCS) should be between 3.5 and 4 (depending on breed and type) at the start of tugging. 15% of bodyweight can be lost during the six weeks of tugging, and if ram condition is poor performance will be affected.



## Ewe management pre-tupping

Amidst all the ram sale preparations, don't forget to give thought to the other 50% of the genetics of your flock – the ewes. Ensuring ewe diets are managed to help maximise their body condition in the run up to tupping can have important and positive effects on ewe fertility.

The most effective flushing occurs when lean ewes are on a rising plane of nutrition, two to three weeks pre-tupping. But do check ewe body condition score (BCS) well before this, as it can take several weeks to increase depending on the starting BCS with those leaner/lower BCS ewes.

If ewes need to put on condition, increasing BCS can be equivalent to feeding a twin-bearing ewe in the lead up to lambing.

Where body condition recovery is needed then late summer/autumn grass alone may not be able to provide this, therefore balancing any potential deficiencies between energy supply and demand will be needed.

Energy in the diet is important to ensure that ewes cycle and subsequently hold to service.

On farm trials have proved that supporting a grass based diet with a high energy free-access feed lick such as Rumenco Maxx Energy to flush ewes can successfully increase ewe BCS's by 0.5 over a two-week period. Giving ewes the best chance of maintaining condition during tupping and into pregnancy will have positive effects on both lamb health and performance.

## New product launched to support ewes in lactation

Modern ewes are increasingly expected to produce more milk to ensure lambs finish quicker in order to improve margins.



With bigger, stronger lambs many farmers may need to look at providing greater availability of quality, bypass protein (digestible undegradable protein (DUP)) in ewes' diets post-lambing to ensure lambs aren't left lacking. Ensuring adequate milk supply for lambs allows for quicker lean growth.

With margins tight high performing, quick finishing lambs are key to many systems. With this demand in mind, Rumenco's GrazeDUP feed block provides the additional bypass protein critical to helping support ewe milk production.

In spring, a grass-based diet often can't meet the requirements for quality protein (DUP), which is needed for optimising milk output. Fresh grass contains high levels of crude protein, which is predominantly rumen available, so offering a product where 80% of the protein supplied is bypass protein (DUP) provides a solution to the potential shortfall during a key part of the ewes' lactation and lambs' development.

The GrazeDUP block is suitable for feeding to lambs and ewes immediately after lambing to help support the increased demand for protein that is linked with lactation whilst balancing the forage-based diet and replacing additional concentrate feeding requirements. This makes the block a step forward in sheep feeding, allowing for supplementation of silages and grass which minimises wastage.

With average intakes of around 150g per head per day, this equates to a cost of only 5p per twin ewe per day whilst trials have shown a 2.3kg increase per lamb (4.6kg per twin ewe) at weaning (10 weeks) over un-supplemented controls.

