

Sheep: Preparation for turnout

It is getting to the time of year when sheep are due to be turned out to grass (often with lambs at foot). Whilst animals at grass require less intensive husbandry than while housed, there are many conditions that can present a problem. However, with a little forward planning, these conditions can often be avoided.



Vaccination

- Clostridial diseases are very common, and can result in major financial losses if not prevented. Vaccines provide good protection against the diseases, and should be administered yearly, especially if there is a history of clostridial disease on farm. Ewes should ideally be vaccinated before lambing to provide maximal immunity to lambs through colostrum.
- Pasteurella – vaccinating ewes against this disease pre-lambing will protect their lambs until they are 5 weeks old. For protection beyond this, lambs can be vaccinated with 2 doses from 10d old.
- Bluetongue – vaccination is the only protection for your stock against this notifiable disease. All stock over 3 months should be vaccinated before turnout.

Nutrition

- Hypomagnesaemia – this condition is a consequence of lush grass and/or inadequately mineralised rations, especially in ewes milking well after lambing. The condition can result in convulsions and sudden death, and as it is very difficult to overdose animals with magnesium supplementation, licks or supplemented rations should always be provided to sheep at grass.
- Hypocalcaemia (*right*) – often occurs alongside hypomagnesaemia, and can be prevented by using licks/supplements in the same way.
- Trace Elements – Cobalt, Copper, Selenium and Vitamin E are the most common trace element deficiencies. These will tend to affect all the lambs grazing on the same pasture. If there is history of soil/grass deficiencies on farm it can be worth supplementing/bolusing to prevent problems developing. However supplements can be expensive and toxicity can be a problem if lambs are inappropriately supplemented, so groups of lambs with poor growth, poor wool or lethargy should be investigated before treating.



Parasites

- Fluke – any cases of ill thrift in animals grazed last season should be investigated and/or treated for chronic fluke.
- Gut-worms—a number of different stomach and gut worms affect lambs. Strategies to combat these parasites are evolving all the time, and use of faecal egg counts is increasingly recognised as a vital tool. If you'd like to discuss your worming strategy for this season, please contact one of the team and we'll be happy to help.
- Coccidiosis—can be a major cause of poor performance and scour in lambs. Maximising hygiene will help prevent this.
- Flies – Dagging of tails and pour-on products can be used to reduce the incidence of fly strike (*right*).



Lameness

Scald and footrot are the two biggest causes of lameness when sheep are turned out. See separate factsheet for more information.

