

No 189: The Topping Period 2013

Sheep Notes - The Topping Period 2013

Rams

With many rams going into the flock during the first week of November, now is the time to increase the supply of nutrition and minerals to these important members of the sheep flock.

Increasing nutrition and mineral supply during this period will ensure that testes size is increased, as will subsequent sperm production. It takes approximately 7-8 weeks to produce sperm and high quality semen is dependent on a sufficiency of minerals including selenium and zinc.

This pre-topping "ram-flushing" period is often achieved by good grass and an additional supplement of approximately 0.2 kg of a low-magnesium 18% crude protein concentrate. If rams are below the ideal body condition score (BCS) of 3.5, a higher level of concentrate feed may be needed.

Once the mating period begins it is beneficial to maintain concentrate supplementation to the rams in order to minimise BCS loss during their period of work. When rams expect to receive concentrates every day it can make raddle colour changing a little easier.

After their work is done, restoration to BCS 3.0 during the winter feeding period is important and can be easily achieved with hay and 0.5 kg of a 16% crude protein, low magnesium, low phosphorus and low-copper concentrate.

Ewes

The importance of a rising plane of ewe nutrition 3-4 weeks before topping cannot be overstressed.

Ewe flushing increases ovulation rate, embryo implantation and reduced early embryo loss which in turn should increase litter size.

Ewe flushing is often achieved by moving them onto a good quality grazing sward. If sward density is low and grass height is less than 4cm then additional concentrate support may be required during this period to achieve a typical daily energy supply of 16-17 MJ/day for a 70kg ewe. Mineral and vitamin supply during this period is critical in order to support the ewe and the reproductive system.

Having delivered a high level of feed and management to both the ram and the ewe these benefits must be secured by maintaining the high level of nutrition for four weeks after topping to allow implantation of the developing embryos.

Feet & Forage

Sheep are notorious for having bad feet. Hooves can be hardened by feeding a biotin-enriched mineral-vitamin. 2mg of biotin per ewe per day will help to harden hooves which can be beneficial when sheep are on wet pasture.

Knowing the value of conserved forage is essential if rations are to be correctly balanced and energy supply targets are to be achieved. A reliable silage analysis can be a great asset in improving the efficiency of the flock.

Further information can be obtained from the Frank Wright Trow technical department on 01335 341102. Receive these technical publications directly via e-mail link. Contact Sarah Brandrick to register your interest on 01335 341128 or at sarah.brandrick@frankwright.com. You can also access this and past CONTACT and URGENT NEWS publications by registering on our website: www.frankwrighttrow.com