



ACTISAF HELPS IMPROVE FLOCK PERFORMANCE FROM FORAGE

Many sheep farmers are looking to reduce costs and improve profitability, and that is certainly the route that husband and wife team, John and Louise Hastings, have followed.

Farming at Tucks Farm, near Charlcutt in Wiltshire, John and Louise have around 500 Texel x Wiltshire Horn ewes and sell the lambs as stores, with a few being finished on farm. Traditionally, the couple would have run a high-input flock, with high concentrate use around lambing along with the forage source. Yet in the last year that approach has completely changed, and they have now moved to a system that relies on high forage use and no supplementary concentrate feed, other than feed blocks, which are supplied by Chris Willett at Dallas Keith in Witney, Oxfordshire.

"We had several issues with the old system, which motivated us to change," explained John. "Our primary reason was to try to increase our margins, as feed prices were having a big impact on overall profitability. We were also seeing an unacceptable level of prolapses – 31 in the 2014/15 season, which was frustrating."

John and Louise have changed ewe breeding as well as changing to late tupping in December, resulting in a late lambing period in May. Ewes are fed a high forage diet based on hay throughout the winter, along with a high energy and protein feed block from Dallas Keith, which contains Actisaf protected live yeast, and which is available ad lib for the last 6 weeks prior to lambing.

In this new system it is important to maximise the use and digestibility of home-grown forage, to ensure adequate energy intakes for the ewe and her lambs, as well as for milk production.

"We aim to lamb outside," John said. "We have very wet, heavy ground, so we tend to have to house in January and February, but it

grows plenty of grass, so it means we can paddock graze the ewes and lambs and our focus is to develop the lamb off grazed grass. Having the Actisaf yeast in the feed bucket definitely helps as well, as it enhances how the rumen of the ewe functions by improving fibre digestion, meaning that there is more energy available. This is important as the energy requirement of the ewe is higher at this time, yet dry matter intakes are typically reduced."

One of the things that John particularly noticed was how ewes seemed to settle post-lambing. "Because we don't feed concentrate now we are very reliant on ewes getting enough energy from forage, which can be challenging when ewes are heavily in lamb because of the limits on intake as the lambs are pressing on the rumen. I'm confident that Actisaf helped in this regard, by increasing fibre digestion from forage and, therefore, energy availability, resulting in increased utilisation of forage. It was great to see our ewes settle very well and have plenty of milk, which supported early lamb growth."

As well as seeing a marked reduction in pro-lapses since adopting the new management approach, with only three in 2016, John is also pleased with the results. "On our previous system the best we ever achieved was 2.2 lambs sold/ewe, but that came with cost and hassle. On the new system, we achieved 1.75 lambs sold/ewe last year and 1.6 this year but margins are improved, lambing went more smoothly, and we have been pleased with the way the lambs have grown."



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PRE-LAMBING SHEEP NUTRITION

As we head towards the lambing season it is important to focus on ewe nutrition to ensure optimum efficient flock performance. If ewes aren't provided with adequate nutrition at this time they can suffer with poor body condition and milk yield and colostrum quality can be reduced.

This can result in smaller, weaker lambs that are slower growing and more susceptible to disease. Overfeeding can also cause problems, including ewes that are too fat, increased risk of prolapse and twin lamb disease, and oversized lambs, which can lead to lambing difficulties.

Ensure adequate energy and protein

The last six weeks prior to lambing are probably the most important of the whole year. In this period the foetus is growing,

taking over space from the rumen in the abdomen and reducing the ewe's daily dry matter intake, while energy and protein demands are increasing to cover the growth of the lambs. Indeed, 70 per cent of a lamb's birthweight will be put on in the last six weeks before birth, and she also must develop udder tissue and produce colostrum during this time.

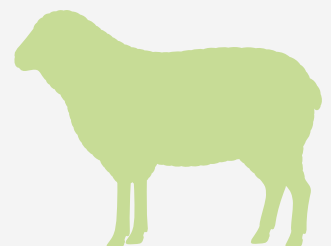
In fact, the ewe's nutritional needs will often double during this six-week period (although this obviously depends on how many lambs the ewe is carrying), making feed supplementation important.

This is the key reason why scanning is recommended, as it allows the grouping of ewes based on how many lambs they are carrying, with feed provision then being adjusted accordingly. Weighing ewes on a regular basis, as well as routine body condition scoring,

Concentrates requirements (kg per day) for crossbred ewe offered good quality precision chop silage (10.8 MJ per kg DM of ME and 14% Crude Protein). Concentrates should start 2 weeks earlier and be 200 grams per day higher than this if the ewes are in poor condition, the forage is poorer or if it is not precision chopped.

Number of lambs expected	Weeks from lambing			
	6-8	4-6	2-4	0-2
Singles	-	-	-	0.3kg/d
Twins	-	0.2kg/d	0.3kg/d	0.6kg/d
Triplets	-	0.2kg/d	0.5kg/d	0.9kg/d

Source: HCC (Meat Promotion Wales)



can be very helpful in determining the appropriate feeding level. A simple rule of thumb is that a ewe carrying a single lamb needs 1.5 times her normal maintenance requirement for energy in the last two weeks before lambing, whilst a ewe carrying twins requires 2 times maintenance and a ewe carrying triplets requires 2.5 times.

Providing a high-quality forage source is very important as feed costs make up a significant proportion of the total costs in a sheep flock. Maximising the use of high quality forage can help to reduce the quantity of purchased concentrate feed required, saving money. It is important to get forage analysed, as this provides a starting point to base ration formulation upon. Energy will be the main limiting factor, so a high ME supplement is crucial.

When it comes to protein, the overall crude protein requirements are not particularly high, but the amount of microbial protein available to the ewe is crucial. Ensuring the rumen is functioning at an optimum level is, therefore, very important, as it will increase the amount of microbial protein produced within the rumen. It is important to note, however, that in the last few weeks before lambing, when space is becoming limited, especially in multiparous ewes, and the demands for colostrum and milk production are increasing, there is a greater need for a higher quality, higher UDP protein source, for example soya.

A concentrate feed should be chosen based on the quality of forage available on the farm. In most cases, using a higher specification concentrate will mean that less needs to be fed. This means forage utilisation will be better, improving the health of the ewes. What's more, lambs will be born with more vitality and will grow faster earlier in life.

Typically, high quality concentrates will include a high proportion of cereals, which will drive rumen digestion and stimulate glucose production, which is necessary for foetal growth and colostrum production.

Don't forget water...

Water is extremely important in sheep, as with other ruminants. Sheep prefer fresh, clean water. Intakes of water increase dramatically as ewes lamb and it is essential that sufficient clean water is available at all times.

How you feed is as important as what...

Ensure good access to feed. On an ad-lib forage system, there should be approximately 15cm of feed space per ewe. This may mean feeding between pens as well as in front of pens.

If feeding concentrates, then at least 45cm of feed space per ewe is required. One solution for feeding ewes is to scatter the concentrates on the floor (if the bedding is clean and dry). This encourages exercise, as well as slowing down intakes, but also increases access to feed for all ewes in a pen. This has been shown to reduce prolapses in ewes.

If significant quantities of concentrate feed are being fed, then it is best practice to split this over 2 or 3 feeds a day to minimise acidosis risk. Feeding less of a better-quality concentrate will pay, not only with reduced feed costs overall but also reduced health issues, including fewer cases of twin lamb disease, prolapses, watery mouth, and a lower worm burden post-lambing.

Acidosis risk

Remember, optimising rumen health is key. Feeding too much concentrate reduces the pH of the rumen, which impacts on digestive efficiency. Rapid transition between different rations can also lead to digestive upset. The aim should be to maximise forage intake and supplement (not substitute) with concentrate.

Supplementation delivers benefits...

Feeding Actisaf protected live yeast to ewes is beneficial because Actisaf reduces rumen oxygen content and stimulates the growth of the rumen organisms that digest fibre and starch, increasing energy utilisation from forage and helping efficient digestion, particularly during diet transitions. Actisaf stabilises rumen pH by reducing the build-up of lactic acid in the rumen, which causes acidosis. It also increases volatile fatty acid (VFA) production and microbial protein synthesis, which both increase milk yield and quality.

Adding Safmannan premium yeast fraction to ewe rations also delivers real benefits, by supporting the immune system of the ewe around lambing time, when she is under the most stress.

Trials have shown an improvement in colostrum quality, which resulted in better lamb performance - one recent farm trial demonstrated that the lambs from ewes fed a concentrate containing Safmannan grew at an average of 50 grams per head per day faster than those from ewes fed concentrate without Safmannan. This concentrate was only fed pre-lambing. What's more, there were fewer losses from the group fed Safmannan, even though these turned out to be a group with a higher lambing percentage.

Adding Safmannan and Actisaf to a good quality concentrate will benefit ewes and ensure maximum performance and results on farm at this crucial time of the year.

SUMMARY

- The pre- and post-lambing period is critical for flock performance.
- Ewes must be provided with high quality grazing or forage and supplemented with sufficient high quality concentrate to meet their energy and protein requirements.
- Adding Actisaf live yeast to ewe rations improves fibre digestion and rumen stability, increasing overall performance.
- Adding Safmannan premium yeast fraction to ewe rations supports the immune system of the ewe, ensuring maximum performance.



ACTISAF IMPROVES LAMB FINISHING

Despite good grazing conditions, Lancashire sheep farmers David and Lynda Holt were struggling with lamb performance. The couple keep around 500 ewes at Newhurst Farm, Bolton-by-Bowland and in 2014 they struggled with lambs scouring.

“We were having real problems with lambs scouring,” David explained. “We had plenty of lush grass but we just couldn’t straighten the lambs up at all – dungs were very loose and they weren’t thriving.”

Obviously concerned by this, David and Lynda asked their vet for advice, yet dung samples and subsequent blood samples indicated that everything was fine, which just made the situation more concerning.

“We were getting a bit worried, but our feed adviser suggested that the lambs might be suffering from a bit of acidosis, and recommended we tried feeding Actisaf live yeast,” David said.

Typically, lambs are creep fed on a pellet before going on to a

grower ration to finish. They have access to high quality grazing, including silage aftermath once first cut has been taken.

“We started feeding Actisaf farm pack, which we purchased from our local Carrs Billington farm store in Skipton. We mixed it with the feed every day and the change in the lambs was amazing. The dung firmed up very quickly and the lambs were just visibly better, growing well,” said David.

“They were on lovely grazing – lush grass with very little structure, which was rapidly digested. The lambs were eating but they didn’t even seem to be cudding before we put the Actisaf into the feed, whereas afterwards they were much more content.”

It seems that Actisaf made all the difference then – and David certainly agrees. “We have used Actisaf again subsequently as part of our routine and we wouldn’t be without it now. Lambs really do seem to flourish on it and we haven’t seen any of the problems we had before,” he concluded.

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