

April 2025

NEWSLETTER



Black Sheep Farm Health
Dedicated farm vets

Feeding Ewes for Maximum Milk Yield & Lamb Growth

We often focus on getting ewe nutrition right in the run up to lambing, but what do our ewes need for a successful lactation?

Nutrition throughout pregnancy affects milk production:

- Nutrition in early pregnancy impacts placental size and therefore how much hormone is secreted by the placenta—importantly lactogen, which is involved in preparing for lactation.
- Undernutrition in the last six weeks of pregnancy can result in a small udder, limited colostrum and a delay of several hours in the start of full lactation.

A number of hormones are involved in the initiation of lactation, including oestradiol and progesterone. When progesterone levels fall at lambing, full milk secretion begins.

Milk yield increases rapidly after lambing and the ewes nutritional requirements increase rapidly too in order to support milk production.

For example, an 80 kg ewe rearing twins will increase her daily energy and protein requirements by 60% and 44%, respectively.

If the ewe's nutrient demands are not met by good grazing or supplementary feeding, this results in loss of milk yield unless the ewe can utilise body reserves.

The addition of protein sources containing high levels of DUP (Digestible Undegradable Protein), ie soya, to low protein diets, will increase milk yield at a constant intake of energy, if the ewe has not reached her potential yield.

Animal Health & Welfare Pathway Update: MULTIPLE SPECIES

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway has been expanded and now allows keepers to apply for multiple species.

This means you can **claim for both cattle and sheep enterprises** at the same time.

There are up to 3 reviews and 3 follow-ups available per species.

You can apply for:

- **£522 for a beef cattle review**
- **£436 for a sheep review**

In addition to this, you can apply for the follow-up:

- **£215 for cattle with no BVD**
- **£837 for beef cattle where BVD is present in the herd**
- **£639 for sheep**

To be eligible for the AHWP, you must have:

- 11 or more beef cattle
- 21 or more sheep

Please get in touch with any queries!

Further BTV Update:

Consider vaccinating cattle?

We've been increasingly hearing of beef herds further south that have suffered very poor pregnancy rates and high calf losses associated with bluetongue. This, obviously, will have a significant financial impact on affected herds.

Cattle need two doses of vaccine, given three weeks apart. BTV vaccine cannot be given alongside any other vaccine.

Looking Towards Bull Testing; The Impact of Poor Bull Fertility

Poor bull fertility can have a significant impact on profitability of an enterprise. This example from the Farm Advisory Service follows three hypothetical groups of cows, with one bull put to 35 cows in each group. One bull is fertile, one subfertile and one infertile.

Bull Fertility	CR (%)	No. Cows	No. Cows Pregnant	No. Cows Barren	Average Calf Age at Weaning**	Tonnes Weaned***	Value (£) at 250p/kg
Fertile	60	35	34	1	211d	8.7	21,750
Subfertile	30	35	26	9	192d	6.16	15,400
Infertile*	0	35	31	4	190d	7.28	18,200

* Assuming infertile bull was noticed in week 4 of bulling when all cows coming over, and was replaced by a fertile bull

** Assumes weaning 250 days after calving starts

*** Assuming DLWG 1.0 kg/day, birth weight 45 kg

So what impact does a bull with poor fertility have?

- More barren cows
- Fewer calves born early in the calving period
- Calves are younger at weaning
- The combined effect of fewer, younger calves weaned results in the **infertile bull producing around 1.5 tonnes less calf weight** and the **sub fertile bull producing 2.5 tonnes less calf weight than a fertile bull**. Remember, this difference in output is for a 35 cow herd.
- Interestingly the sub fertile bull has the biggest loss, probably throughout his lifetime, as he is never identified, particularly where bulls are changed between groups during mating.

Please get in touch to get your bulls tested in ahead of bulling. Bulls should be tested 6-8 weeks before intended use to allow time to address problems or source replacements.

Consider Synchronising Late Calvers

It is easy for late calvers to slip further outside of the herd's calving pattern.

Synchronising these late calvers to resume cyclicity earlier in the breeding season provides an opportunity to get these cows to fall into line with the rest of the herd, shortening the calving period and resulting in a more uniform batch of calves.

A client synched 5 later calvers last year, and this bought their calving date by between 30-35 days, bringing them more in synch with the rest of the herd.

Please get in touch with Jack if you'd like to discuss synchronising late calvers.

Ensure BVD Check Test Done Before Turnout!

Turnout will not be far away, make sure that we have been out to do your BVD check test on 2024 born calves!

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