

## CONTINUING SNOW PROBLEMS

Continuing snowfalls mean farmers have used up considerable reserves of forage and with more snow forecast face shortages. Most farmers reacted quickly to the first cold spell and snowfalls so can expect normal scanning percentages and a tight lambing pattern, unless they were unable to get rams out to the flock. Most farmers put out big bales of roughage but many could not risk disturbing sheep to put marker raddles on rams. However if they scan for litter size most operators can now pick out late lambers for later allocation of ewes to the sheep house.

Having started feeding it can be worrisome when to stop, the table below shows it is advisable to keep going at least until seven weeks post ram turnout by which stage embryos are safe. After this time it is important to feed to maintenance levels

Day	Events	Key stages	Management tasks
0	Mating	Pre - implantation	Avoid stress and handling ewes
3	Fertilisation		
15	Migration		
34	Implantation	Implantation	
40	Foetus weighs 5 g	Placental growth	Embryos safe feed for maintenance
90	Foetus weighs 700g		

Where grass is under snow forage should be offered as long ewes are cleaning it all up. Intake of 3.25 kg of 25 % dm good quality silage for a 55 kg ewe and 4 kg/day for a 75 kg ewe provides maintenance but fat ewes can be fed 25% less so knowing condition score and having silage analysed can help ration dwindling supplies. The problem is that with bunker feeding sheep eat 20 % more than maintenance but this can be solved by giving access to silage for 4 – 5 days a week straw for 2 – 3. Feeding less than 75% of maintenance can reduce lamb vigour at birth, particularly with lowland breeds so the target is to avoid losing more than half a body condition between now and scanning.

High quality silage fed *ad lib* to prolific Lleyms or ewe hoggets can be counterproductive leading to small weekly lambs, feed these lower quality forage.

### Making the most of forage reserves

Where no extra forages are available to buy, ration what is left for the rest of the winter and start supplementing now with small amounts of cereal, compound or home mix. Sugar beet pulp fed at up to 0.45 kg .day can replace 0.6 kg of hay.

Scan ewes and get rid of barren ones straight away. Singles can perform well on a sacrifice area fed straw and 0.3 kg/day of up to 30% CP dark grains or 0.5 litres of pot ale syrup or proprietary molasses and urea lick until six weeks pre lambing. *NOTE – in Isle of Man situation where dark grains are less readily available, other protein sources such as peas or beans may be used as a useful, high protien supplement*

## **Use body reserves**

During pregnancy carcass fat, muscle and internal fat all contribute to nutrient supply. If ewes are thin by lambing they will have used up 'mobile' protein reserves and will need 200 g of soya/day for multiple bearing ewes in the last three weeks. Hill sheep in recent winters have been able to get adequate forage from hill pastures. 20 kg of well made hay provides 3 weeks of maintenance feeding for sheep snowed off grazings. This is normally enough for the winter but around 35 kg per ewe or more may be needed this year. Budget on half a ton of 25% dry matter silage or 120 kg of hay as forage for lowland ewes. A straw based ration for housed ewes could be 150 kg straw, 50 litres of Pot ale Syrup and 20 kg cereal +10 kg soya.

## **Supplementation of grazings and deferred grazing**

It may be possible to get a derogation to graze conservation areas and there may be some deferred grazing available if snow clears. Where available, these should be grazed up to 6 weeks pre-lambing. Keep hay for use in an emergency on the grazings. Sheep can graze 40% of the current season's growth of heather without damaging it. However heather on its own is too poor to maintain ewes and by late pregnancy heather is only capable of providing 30% of nutrient requirements. Heather intake in mid pregnancy is increased when feed blocks containing urea is available. If snow clears the cheapest way of supplementing accessible grazings is to use a snacker. Most farmers use compounds as the ewes can eat the pellets off the grass but the cheapest feed is a sticky mix of 50:50 whole barley and pot ale syrup. Whole beans can also be an effective supplement for organic farmers.

Hill swards of fescue type grasses with access to feed blocks can support twin bearing ewes up to scanning and singles up to lambing. Allow 1 block /30 ewes initially and expect usage to be 5-6 blocks /100 ewes/ week blocks should be 22% CP & 12.5 ME.

Where there is no alternative grazing lowland farmers who intend housing ewes will have straw available. This can be fed and ewes housed on alternative bedding (Copies of a booklet on alternative bedding can be downloaded from the QMS website at [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk) or hard copies are available free of charge by contacting QMS on 0131 472 4040)

Straw contains low levels of both energy and protein compared with other forages, but is useful in emergency feeding situations if supplemented correctly and where stock are given scope to be selective. Sheep are selective eaters and will pick out the most leafy and hence digestible parts of the straw, giving a higher nutritional supply than theoretically expected. The nutrient supply can be further enhanced by feeding a urea based supplement, such as a molasses/urea liquid feed or a cereal/urea feed block (12.5 ME/22%CP). Urea given this way provides the fibre-digesting rumen bugs with a frequent small dose of nitrogen. This they can use to reproduce more quickly enhancing straw digestion and food intake and increasing the supply of microbial protein to the ewe. Properly formulated urea-containing supplements also supply the correct ratios of minerals and vitamins, including sulphur, which are important as urea doesn't provide any and straw contains very low levels.

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