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Good ewe nutrition immediately before the rams go in sets the flock output for the rest of the year.

But this is often the time when pasture quality is in decline as we move into the autumn, so how do you reconcile the two issues? David Thornton from Rumenco highlights how to use effective supplementary feeding to maximise your 2017 lamb output.

Around this time of year, sheep producers across the country will be thinking how best to minimise the number of ewes showing anoestrus, maximise the number of eggs shed and getting them fertilised. You only get one chance each year to optimise lamb output, so it's important to make the most of it!

With every missed pregnancy costing around £1.70 per ewe, farmers will want to ensure embryos become safely implanted ready to develop into healthy, viable foetuses. Good nutrition will help enormously in achieving these objectives and ensuring ewes are on an improved plane of nutrition

pre-tupping will give a lamb output response for most breeds.

At a time when grass quality is diminishing, supplementary feeding is often crucial in this respect, with 12 trials showing that it can boost lambing percentage by an average 15% (range 7-22%). This often results from a reduction in barren ewes and more animals holding to first cycle service, which also makes for a tighter lambing period. Supplementary ewe feeding pre-tupping can also increase the proportion of twins over singles.

At tupping time the optimum ewe body condition score for hardy breeds in the hills is 2.5-3.0. Research has shown that ewes supplemented at tupping time remain in better condition score through their pregnancy; and with the memory of last winter still relatively fresh in our minds, it would be unwise to let ewes enter another winter in less than optimum condition.



GOLDEN RULES

This autumn, Rumenco is highlighting some golden rules for producers keen to maximise production potential come lambing time:

Keep ewes in body condition score 2.5 rising 3.0 at tupping time for hill breeds (rising to 3.5 for lowland breeds)

Keep the ewes as far away as possible from the rams well before tupping starts

If the sheep have to be handled for any reason, handle the rams at the end of the day

If possible, flush ewes on rested grazing from two weeks prior to tupping

Consider supplementary feeding using SUPALyx Super Energy Plus Fish Oil from two weeks pre-tupping and for six weeks whilst tups are working to those groups that need it

“It’s important to maintain ewes at body condition score (BCS) of between 2.5 and 3.5 (depending on breed and type), before, and during tupping.”

“Producers have been blessed with plentiful supplies of grass going into the autumn. But, with the high levels of rainfall we’ve seen in late summer, the quality (ME) of that grass is questionable, and will be variable across the region.



“If their diet is lacking in energy, ewes may not cycle, or hold to service. They also need sufficient supplies of the trace elements, which are responsible for stimulating follicular activity, resulting in egg production. Therefore, both trace elements and energy need to be

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readily available in the diet to ensure the right outcome.

“On-farm trials have shown that supporting a grass-based diet with a feed supplement can support forage and result in successfully flushing ewes, and can increase ewe BCS. MAXX Energy (35% sugar, 16ME) has been specifically designed to complement ad-lib forage and grass based diets, and contains all the vital components needed with special emphasis on cobalt, selenium and

iodine, to optimise ewe health and support foetal development at this time.

“The inclusion of a supplementary lick product, is a cost effective solution for farmers to easily manage intakes and boost performance.

A proactive approach to ewe nutrition at this stage will pay-off in the long term, improving the number of ewes holding to first service and ultimately the total number of lambs on the ground”.

