

# On the Hoof

Bite-size local updates from SRUC Veterinary Services

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## New to Outdoor Lambing - Top Tips

Outdoor lambing can be both challenging and rewarding, offering natural benefits for the ewes and lambs but requiring keen oversight and management to ensure success. Here are some top tips for those new to outdoor lambing, aiming to make the process as smooth and efficient as possible:

### 1. Pre-Lambing Preparation

**Field Selection:** Choose well-drained fields with natural shelter from trees or hedges to protect ewes and lambs from harsh weather.



*Image 1 Left: Staked lambing shelter crosses utilised by Matt Tile at Bairnkine. Right: Repurposed potato boxes used by Emily Grant at Coldrochie.*

**Lambing Kit:** Get your lambing supplies organised for portability – you want these with you when checking the lambing flock. This might be a container on the quad, a tool belt or a bag. Easy transport and access to these things will be important. Some even keep a flask of boiled water and colostrum powder ready for any lambs that need colostrum, although ideally, you want to utilise colostrum from the flock first.

## **2. Nutrition and Health**

Grazed grass is the best nutrition if there is enough in the lead-up to lambing. Singles should be grazed tightly in the last four weeks of pregnancy to avoid lambing issues.

Check ewe condition before lambing and identify those under target (BCS 3 for lowland and upland flocks or 2.5 for hill ewes). It is challenging to correct condition at this time, but these ewes should be allocated more feed and given more attention at lambing to ensure the lambs get sufficient colostrum.

Be vigilant and treat hypocalcaemia, twin lamb disease and prolapses promptly to avoid complications.

## **3. Lambing Management**

Regular Monitoring: Early mornings and late evenings are crucial times. Some use drones to check the lambing paddocks but these will disturb the ewes if they are not used to them.

Keeping the lambing ewes in small groups (less than 50 ewes per group) reduces mismothering risk.

Using devices such as a super crook or a restrainer will be useful if working alone in the field to keep the ewe in place whilst assisting her with her problems.

## **4. Post-Birth Management**

Many don't mark the lambs at all, as with little disturbance, the ewes and lambs bond well. For those unable to keep the lambing ewes in small groups, marking lambs at birth may be useful but give the ewes time to bond with their lambs before marking.

It is useful at this time to record those animals that require additional attention – this reflects genetics that don't suit the system and therefore they should be either marked to cull or, at least, to slaughter all progeny. It is also beneficial to record the causes of lamb loss as this will inform future management.

**Poppy Frater, SAC Consulting Sheep Specialist**  
[poppy.frater@sac.co.uk](mailto:poppy.frater@sac.co.uk)