Management Groups

Scanning is an excellent time for reassessing the ewe's condition score and acting on your findings. Split the sheep into management groups according to the scan result and her condition (thin singles with twins etc.) and tailor nutrition to her needs.

An additional management group can be ewes who have been tupped in the second or third cycle, identified by the raddle colour. These later lambing ewes will be about three weeks later to lamb with their nutritional needs being less than the main flock. This is a simple and effective way to reduce the pre lambing feed costs by starting their feeding three weeks later.

If there are no spare fields or paddocks for them, they could run with the single bearing ewes until their increased nutrition is required.

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Why An Easy Birth Is Essential

The consequences of a difficult calving are numerous and have a huge impact on overall profitability. The more difficult the birth the greater the impact and cost.

Effect On The Cow

- Delay in standing and licking the calf etc. In extreme cases this can result in a downer cow who eventually has to be slaughtered with no sale value.
- Poorer bonding with calf – delayed time to the calf suckling.
- Longer time needed for reproductive tract to recover, delaying first heat and extending the calving interval. This is significantly increased if there is damage eg tears, and/or disease is introduced to the reproductive tract.
- All this increases the risk of barrenness.

Effect On The Calf

- Increased risk of anorexia, physical damage and death.
- Slow to rise and suckle, delaying and reducing the amount of colostrum taken, reducing immunity to disease. This increases the risk of disease, increasing treatment costs and depressing performance.

Financial Impact

- Labour, pens, etc needed to supervise calving.
- Labour and capital needed for individual pens for feeding, bedding, mucking out cows which have been assisted.

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- Increases deaths and costs of disposal.
- Reduced income from less stock sold, increasing fixed costs per head for the reduced number sold.
- Sales further reduced due to higher replacement rate needed.
- Increased instances of disease, reducing growth rates and resulting in increased “days on farm” and reduced feed conversion efficiency.

A reasonably guestimate of the costs involved in having to calve cows would be –

A hard calving with a calving jack	£250
Caesarean	£500

It is also reasonable to expect these figures to dramatically increase as the size of the herd increases. For example when calving difficulties are expected in a 300 cow herd calving in 3 months, full night time cover would almost be essential.

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This article is from SAC’s monthly publication Sheep & Beef News. If you would like more information or to subscribe please contact Val Angus on 01835 823322 or val.angus@sac.co.uk