

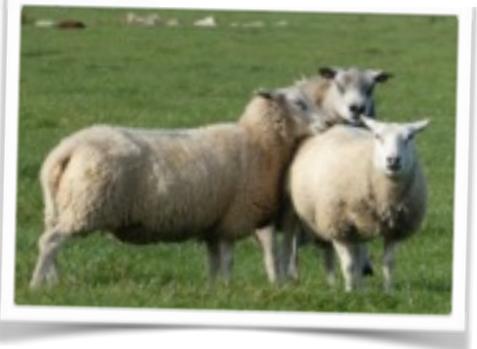


It's Nearing Topping Time!

Dr Olivia Turley BA MVB MRVCS

Sheep are seasonal breeders and mating signals start to become active when day length shortens, this is why sheep are often mated in the autumn. There is a wide breed variance to this and even within breed variance. Regardless of when a farmer elects to begin topping during or out of season, there are some universal body condition scoring tips that will help to get the best fertility returns from ewes and rams.

Summer 2019



Why is body condition scoring so important for optimising sheep fertility returns at topping?

- Ovulation rate is positively related to BCS up to a certain level. Studies suggest that across various breeds, a ewe with a BCS of <1.5 or >3.5 is more likely to return to service than those at 3. A ewe at a BCS of 4 is more prone to ketosis, prolapse and a difficult lambing and a ewe at BCS 2 carrying twins is more predisposed to pregnancy toxemia ("twin lambs disease").
- Ram sperm takes 49 days to mature, therefore the 2 months prior to topping are critical. Both under and over-conditioned rams have reduced production, quality and viability of mature sperm. For example, a ram with a BCS of 4 or 5 in the 50 days prior to topping is more prone to heat stress which denatures sperm production.
- There is no feeding strategy that works for the flock altogether. Failing to identify the individual needs of each sheep can mean missing those that would benefit from a higher supply and plane of nutrition, and conversely those that would not benefit.

How can I BCS my flock?

- Body condition scoring is performed by placing a hand along the backbone and around the loin after the ribs to feel for fat and muscle mass. A BCS of 3 means that the spinous processes can be felt as rounded bones only slightly elevated above the eye muscles, but it is not possible to press deeply between them. This is compared to a BCS of 1 where backbones are easily felt and the end of the short ribs are obvious. Further, a BCS of 5 would mean that the backbone can only be felt, if at all, with firm pressure applied, and there may be a portion of fat over the tail.

What are target BCS for rams and ewes at topping?

Ewes ideally at 2.5-3 out of 5

Rams ideally at 3-3.5 out of 5

What should be done for animals below or above target BCS?

- The term flushing has been used to describe the weeks before topping when ewes are placed on a higher protein and high energy diet. This strategy has proven to be very effective in fertility returns, but only for ewes of BCS 2-4. Ewes at a BCS above 4 will not benefit from this diet alteration. Ewes and rams at a BCS of 2-3 should be placed in the best pasture available for 2 months prior to start of topping and on good quality protein rich rations.

Over conditioned rams and ewes need to have a reduction of feed intake, trying not to reduce quality excessively. Explore group dynamics and feeding spaces to see if certain animals have more or easier access to feed.



Responsible Use of Medicines

Dr Ed Pilkington BA VetMB MRCVS

On June 5th Chapelfield Vets hosted Paul Uglow from Norbrook to present a talk and discussion on the Responsible Use of Medicines. We had a good attendance, with one farmer travelling from as far as Bedfordshire!

The focus of the talk was far from how to give injections (teaching your grandma how to suck eggs!), but instead it was given from the perspective of farm assurance schemes and production contracts. The talk centred on the idea of staying one step ahead of the curve with regards to medicine regulations so that clients can demonstrate their high standards - very important when the market is only getting more competitive and with greater pressure to be squeaky clean. It is also thought that before long, attendance at the course will become compulsory in order to remain accredited.



Some of the top take-home tips from those that attended:

- If a medicine is in a dark-coloured glass bottle e.g. Norodine, Adrenacaine, it needs protecting from the light (ideally keep in the box in your locked medicine cupboard)
- Calciject and Magniject bottles for treating low calcium and magnesium, respectively, need to be recorded in your medicines book as they are classed as a POM-VPS (prescription-only medicine that can be dispensed only by your vet)
- if you administer vaccines on-farm, ensure they are adequately refrigerated - make sure the fridge is in good working order - often the one used for medicines is the old one from the kitchen that's temperamental - but in fact it makes sense to have a better fridge for your several hundred pounds worth of medicines than the £60 of food!
- for any medicines used on farm, it creates a good impression to the inspector if there is one datasheet from each product (the sheet of paper with tiny print that comes in the box) attached to the front page of your medicine book - so that they are there and available if you need to refer to them at any point - dose rates & withdrawal periods
- use your smartphone to make logging in your medicine book easier - set up a dedicated WhatsApp group chat between all staff that give medicines. Whenever one of you gives a product, take a photo of the animal's ear tag, a photo of the product (inc. batch number and expiry date) and type in the amount given and how (under skin, into muscle) - that way, the date is there to see on your phone, then at the end of the week write them all into the medicine book!

A WORD FROM DR GIOVANNI CAPUZZELLO MRCVS ON bTB.....



"The South East Region is a net importer of cattle and the main risk of TB introduction is due to the movements of cattle into this area from higher bTB risk areas of England and Wales. There are only a few relatively low volume cattle markets remaining in the region. The majority of the larger finishers in the South East have to source their cattle from the higher bTB risk areas due to the numbers required at one time to maintain the size of production groups.

There is currently no evidence of a reservoir of *Mycobacterium bovis* infection in the wildlife in any of the counties in the Low Risk Area (LRA) of the SE Region. Culled deer are routinely inspected by hunters and on occasion suspicious lesions are reported to APHA, but no *M. bovis* infection has been identified to date."

Source: Bovine TB: epidemiology reports, 2018 www.gov.uk