

## £1/Ewe – What is it Worth?



**A**t this time of year scanning will begin and the countdown to lambing really does get started. Most ewes seem to be in good condition. Keeping them fit, healthy and in peak condition to enable them to produce plentiful quality colostrum and milk supply to nurse two lambs will be the challenge going forward.

This winter has seen a huge shift away from energy blocks being available on hill units to feeding from a quad and snacker. Taking a tonne of energy blocks at £800 would equate to approximately 4,000kg of compound rolls in money terms. Feeding 0.3kg per day per ewe of a good quality, fully mineralised 12.8 ME ewe feed, along with average forage would give the hill ewe enough of the required minerals and energy to keep her in good health and condition until nearer the 8th week prior to lambing. Feeding 0.3kg would equate to 12,000 drops of feed for the equivalent of a tonne of blocks. So for those hill units that can utilise a quad and snacker huge savings could be made under this method.

At Davidsons, Animal Feeds our aim is to continuously improve animal performance and efficiency and this year sees a change to our 20% protein Super Ewe product. This was designed in conjunction with the SAC and was specifically targeted at the 3/4 weeks pre-lambing. The formulation in the past has been based on soya, beet pulp and barley. This winter the formulation will see a change to soya, maize and beet pulp based, so not only does it contain the best DUP protein source from hipro soya, it now has bypass starch from the maize and the best fibre and sugars from beet pulp. The super ewe feed will now provide the highest metabolic energy of all the ewe products available on the market.

As lambing only happens annually, we only get one chance to get the nutrition pre-lambing correct. At Davidsons, we advise that great care and attention is taken to looking and comparing the compound ewe formulations available on the market. When purchasing rams or females, farmers study these animals in

great detail and a similar close inspection process should be made of the ewe feed formulations.

Forage analysis has shown that those farms who managed to get an early June cut have some particularly good material. Unfortunately, those cutting later than this have found forage particularly poor quality. Interestingly, during the year whilst analysing the trace elements of forage, it has been found that many essential vitamins and minerals have been very low, probably due to the volume of rain, and in a year where there has been almost a four fold increase in some mineral costs, particular attention should be made when looking at formulations for the levels of such essential vitamins and minerals. At Davidsons our top ewe rations contain levels of 150mg/kg of Vitamin E, 10,000iu/kg Vitamin A 20,000iu/kg Vitamin D Selenium 1.8mg/kg part of which is as Selplex protected Selenium Yeast.

Vitamins A, D and in particular Vitamin E and Selenium together play a major role in the well being of the in-lamb ewe and the viability and vigour in the new born lambs. So despite the higher prices for these vitamins we have kept with the highest specifications.

Below is an example of a feed plan for twin bearing ewes based on three differently priced ewe rations in £10 increments, all being fed at the same rates. With the amount between the first and third feed being £20/tonne the actual price per ewe difference over a 3 month period only equates to around £1 per ewe or 50p per lamb. In nutrition terms, that extra cost in ration formulation provides much more quality raw materials which gains a huge increase in metabolic energy to the ration being used. This helps gain increased quality colostrum and milk, reduce the risk of twin lamb, reduce lamb fatalities, reduce prolapse, get more lambs out the pens and set on to single bearing mothers. With some cast ewes being valued at around £100 or almost half a tonne of feed, paying for that extra bit of increased quality nutrition can lead to huge savings and a much more profitable sheep unit.

TWIN BEARING EWES							
Weeks to Lamb	Feed (kg)	Cost pence per day £/Tonne			Cost pence per week £/Tonne		
		240	230	220	240	230	220
12	0.3	0.072	0.069	0.066	0.504	0.483	0.462
11	0.3	0.072	0.069	0.066	0.504	0.483	0.462
10	0.3	0.072	0.069	0.066	0.504	0.483	0.462
9	0.3	0.072	0.069	0.066	0.504	0.483	0.462
8	0.5	0.12	0.115	0.110	0.84	0.805	0.77
7	0.5	0.12	0.115	0.110	0.84	0.805	0.77
6	0.5	0.12	0.115	0.110	0.84	0.805	0.77
5	0.75	0.18	0.173	0.165	1.26	1.21	1.16
4	0.75	0.18	0.173	0.165	1.26	1.21	1.16
3	1	0.24	0.230	0.220	1.68	1.61	1.54
2	1	0.24	0.230	0.220	1.68	1.61	1.54
1	1	0.24	0.230	0.220	1.68	1.61	1.54
<b>Total cost per ewe</b>					<b>£12.10</b>	<b>£11.59</b>	<b>£11.09</b>
<b>Total cost per lamb</b>					<b>£6.05</b>	<b>£5.80</b>	<b>£5.54</b>

Contact your Davidsons feed adviser who can give advice on a balanced feed ration for the forage you have available, along with a planned feed programme leading into lambing and beyond.

Steven Turnbull

# Don't leave it too late to think about Bulls!



**W**ith February just around the corner, many producers will be looking forward to turning their bulls out for the farming community to cast their eye over.



More often than not, many of these bulls are bought from sales, taken home to a strange location, put into a bull pen and then forgotten about until they are needed in the spring/summer. How often do we see bulls go home to farms and 'melt'? It is fundamental that these bulls are given

just as much attention post-sale as they have been receiving prior to the sale. Taking a bull home and immediately cutting the feed right off them can lead to disastrous consequences in terms of fertility. Many of these animals have been eating large quantities of feed in order to have them in prime condition for showing. However they must be weaned off this volume of feed gently to avoid metabolic issues associated with a rapid change in diet.

Buyers should be encouraged to ask the producer for a bag of the feed the bull has been on to take away with them in order to reduce the stresses associated with changing environments so suddenly. Keeping many of these practices the same or as close as possible will enable a bull to settle into a new home and go on and perform at his best.

It's not just young bulls that need attention too. Now is the prime time to be assessing older stock bulls; condition scoring, assessing feet and general health checks.

Once the bull has come back in from working, it is pivotal to ensure that he regains any condition lost during the mating season. Many bulls will have been working bulling spring and autumn calving cows and will be requiring extra maintenance. Younger bulls will lose more condition than more mature stock bulls as they are still growing whilst working as well. These animals should be fed little and often to build them back up to a suitable condition, ready for the next mating season.

Fraser MacNicol & Laura Wight



# Could concentrates be an economic way of conserving forage?



**T**he most important component in all ruminants diet is forage, it provides a good energy source and also allows for correct rumen function. Many rations will be formulated to have a forage level of 40% DMI.

Many dairy farmers will be facing a potential forage shortfall and poorer silage this winter, therefore they need to plan carefully in the forth coming months to ensure they make the best use of forage stocks.

A wet summer tampered with grazing and harvest resulting in livestock being housed earlier this year, this also adds to the pressure of forage stock being in short supply. To balance forage shortage and increase NDF in a ration, straw can be an additional extra to help. However this year straw is also in short supply. This has resulted in a significant increase in the price, whereby straw is as high as £120/tonne delivered.

However, there are other ways to improve your ration, and save forage this winter. The use of a well balanced diet with concentrates could help to achieve this whilst maintaining litres.

## Straw

Including straw into the lactating cow TMR can increase the effective fibre within the ration for improved rumination. Hence, during the shortage of silage, straw can be an additional extra within the TMR, however the inclusion is limited to avoid reducing intake or decreasing the energy density of the TMR for lactating cows. Both of these factors can have a detrimental effect on production.

## Concentrates

Concentrates can help to provide a well balanced diet, complementing your forage. They can help to provide the essential extra energy to support production levels. Concentrates balanced along side forages can result in efficient rumen digestion, greater cow productivity and more cost-effective herd performance.

## Is it worth while using more concentrates than straw this year to help with the shortage of silage?

The tables below helps to clarify this:

Comparison of Cost between Straw and Concentrates	
Straw	Concentrates
2.35kg fed @ £120 = £1,692	2.27kg fed @ £220 = £2,996.40
Difference between = £1,304.40	

(\*Calculation based on 200 milking cows)

From the table above straw may seem more favourable due to price, however straw does lack in energy, which in turn reduces the energy within a ration, thus reducing litres.

Difference in Energy between Straw and Concentrates	
Straw	Concentrates
2.35kg	2.27kg
ME: 7.0 MJ	ME: 13.0 MJ
$\frac{2.35 \text{ kg} \times 7}{5.2} = 3.161$	$\frac{2.27 \text{ kg} \times 13}{5.2} = 5.681$
Difference = 2.521	

The result of using straw would equate to a loss of 2.521 in turn a loss of £4,233.60 per month (\*Calculation based on 200 milking cows @ 28p/l). If you take into account the concentrates cost £2,996.40, the extra milk will equate to a gross of £1,237.20.

In conclusion from the extra litres provided from feeding concentrates within a balanced diet, this would be a more economically viable option than feeding straw this winter.

Holly Dyer