

# Bodyweight Changes During Pregnancy – Acceptable Limits

Now that many ewes are carrying electronic tags and some farmers have the ability to link EID to a weigh crate it is possible to monitor weight changes through the winter. What should these be? Weight changes are obviously affected by the growth of the foetus and the change in the weights of the products of conception including the increase in the weight of the uterus, extra fluids and membranes. Also in late pregnancy the udder grows significantly.

The table below shows changes in ewe weight and condition over pregnancy. For the first 30 days after mating the aim is to maintain ewe weight and condition, but once ewes have been scanned at around day 70 – 80 they can be allowed to mobilise body reserves. Up to 5 kg of weight lost during the period from day 30 to scanning is acceptable with a further 5 kg being lost between scanning and lambing. Once the ewes have lambed the ewe weight drops significantly as the birth weight of the lambs represents only about 60% of the total weight of fluid and placenta etc. Looking at the table the weight of fat lost at 10 kg is more than the actual weight loss of the ewe over the whole period at 5 kg.

This is because the ewe changes her body composition and increases the water content of her body at the expense of fat. Losing fat in mid pregnancy is good for ewes as it makes for an easier lambing and saves feed. Generally over the last 8 weeks of pregnancy ewes can lose 80 – 100 g per day and this will result in the release of around 2 MJ of energy which is equivalent to  $\frac{2}{5}$  of a pound of cereal. Once the ewe has lambed her appetite returns with a vengeance and she will be able to eat large amounts of high quality feeds, so in early lactation it is essential to meet these demands.

	Ewe Weight (Kg)	Products Of Conception (Kg)	Condition Score	Fat Mobilised (Kg)
Mating	75	0	3.5	0
Day 30	75	0.1	3.5	0
Scanning (day 90)	75	5	3	5
Lambing (day 147)	88	18	2.5	5
Turnout (day 156)	70	-	2.5	2

In conclusion ewe liveweight is not an accurate indication of what is actually happening in terms of energy mobilisation, because of changes in body composition, so a combination of weighing and condition scoring is the best approach. Figures shown are very much averages and individual ewes can vary. Ewes with high Maternal Index will tend to be more giving, releasing more fat and losing more condition during pregnancy and lactation and putting more into their lambs.

**John Vipond, SAC Sheep Specialist**  
[John.Vipond@sac.co.uk](mailto:John.Vipond@sac.co.uk)