

Feeding Sheep According To Condition

Producers may be facing unusual feeding situations this winter due to an excess of grass in some places and a severe shortage in others. Economic production depends on making the best of forages available to maximise output and minimise bought in feed. This means that it is vital to check ewe condition now and assess both feed supplies and quality in order to plan feeding supplementation.

- Ewes need to be in good condition after mating i.e. score 2.5 (hill) and 3 (lowland). If grazing restrictions have left some ewes in less than score 1.5 – 2 and very little grass is available feed supplements at 0.5kg/day to regain condition score to 2.5.
- Assess grass supplies – once grass stops growing sheep remove it at a surprising rate – 6 ewes/acre remove an inch per week. Any over- grazed fields are best left to recover as grazing leaf grown from root reserves in cold weather delays recovery in spring. Also bare fields are more prone to treading damage in wet weather. Complete loss of 100 acre of good lowland winter grazing equates to around 10 – 15 tons of hay.
- Do not overfeed highly prolific Lleyn ewes or ewe lambs of any breed after tupping as it is counterproductive, run them on bare grazings or poor quality pasture to limit intake.
- Estimate silage quality – have a sample assessed.
- Estimate silage available –if possible check weigh bales or measure up silage pits.
- Estimate winter requirements: Daily intake of precision chopped silage fed *ad-lib* pre- lambing will be about 1.4% of liveweight (in dry matter terms) if the ME is 9.5 (poor silage) and 1.6% with good silage of ME 10.5. Budget typically on about 1 kg/day of dry matter or 4 k, fresh at 25% DM for a Mule ewe. For a full winter (housed, no grazing) this comes to half a ton of made silage or 150 kg hay/ewe. When feeding baled silage from a ring feeder intake is 15 – 20% lower.
- Ewes in CS 3 can be allowed to lose 80 g/day of liveweight which releases energy equivalent to feeding 0.2 kg barley/head/day.

Buy concentrates on quality not price and accurately ration it out. Do not be afraid to rely heavily on silage. Provided access is good, with a 10.5 ME silage, flat rate feeding at 0.5 kg/head/day of mineralised whole barley for the last month will be adequate for a Mule ewe with twins. Add 200 g soya/head/day for the last 3 weeks to meet DUP requirements.

When some ewes are going into the winter too fat it pays to monitor condition and use these reserves to save feed. Housed ewes on *ad-lib* silage can quickly get too fit, to prevent this restrict *ad-lib* silage feeding to weekdays with straw on weekends, or up to 3 days a week. For farms where ewes are too thin feed them an additional 0.25 kg concentrates/day from scanning. Check them again when vaccinating at four weeks pre lambing. A little planning now, with rations based on information not guesses can keep winter feed bills under control.

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