

# Preparing Lambing Pens

Lambing will soon be upon us – it always pays to keep as many lambs alive as possible and with high prices it gives an even greater incentive – here are some ideas to help achieve this in conventional housed lambing flocks.

## Coping With Peak Demand at Lambing Time

- The traditional advice is to provide one lambing pen per 10 ewes. However, is this enough to cope at peak lambing and if a spell of bad weather prevents turnout of ewes and lambs?
- If you recall an exceptionally busy period at tupping or have many ewes marked (or identified by the scanner) to lamb tightly then provide a few more pens. It also pays to have a contingency plan to cope with the unexpected. Set up some larger pens where a group of 5 – 10 ewes and their lambs can be moved to once they are mothered up but before they are ready to be turned out. This will release the smaller pens for lambed ewes.
- These larger pens can be used instead of small pens for ewes with singles or even ones with strong twins if required. Having some larger lambing pens may also be useful to put ewes in that are prone to lying on their lambs in a confined space.
- If weather conditions are good consider turning ewes with strong enough lambs out very soon after birth – especially early in the day. Ewes with strong single ewe lambs could even be turned out almost immediately or as soon as all routine tasks are completed and you are sure the lamb has had sufficient colostrum.
- Having some smaller paddocks close to buildings is also useful for this.
- Try and leave as many small pens as possible empty for the night lambers.
- Do you need to castrate and tail lambs? If lambs are finished off their mothers these tasks are not always necessary.
- If lambing conditions are good why not turn out ewes to lamb at grass, always ensuring their nutritional requirements are met. Some ewes therefore will never need to see a small lambing pen. This might be a good option later in lambing as grass will be more plentiful, lambing difficulties should be fewer and healthier as the infection levels will be higher in a shed at the end of lambing.
- Some farms lamb outside in the day and bring them in at night. This should allow a few more pens for night time as well as a transition to a grass lambing system.

## Lambing Pen Construction

Most lambing pens are constructed from wooden hurdles, often home made. They can last for several years as long as they are carefully cleaned and stored after lambing. It is now possible to get lambing pens made from recycled farm plastic. Whilst they are more expensive they should last a long time and being much stronger than wooden hurdles they can be used for other sheep handling jobs as well. Additionally, being plastic they will be easier to clean and disinfect.

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