

ME 11+ silage allows minimal inputs pre lambing saving time, labour and lambs

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Introduction

A change in silage policy at Hundleshope the QMS monitor farm in Peeblesshire has saved time and money according to farmer and QMS board member Kate Rowell. By producing a high quality ME 11+ silage ewes have been supplemented with a high DUP source rather than energy containing cereals or compounds.

Recent research shows ewes on most lowland farms are not energy deficient when given high quality silage and have no need for cereal as indicated by low betahydroxybutyrate (BOH) levels in their blood, but they continue to be protein deficient as evidenced by high faecal egg counts showing loss of immunity.

Most silages have more protein than the rumen bugs can handle so the only way to increase protein supply is to bypass the rumen. Hipro soya contains bypass protein (DUP) and when chemically protected as Ultrasoy/Sopralin has double the amount.

This allows ultra low supplementation levels. The rule of thumb for soya feeding to ewes in the last 3 weeks of pregnancy is to feed 100g/day per lamb carried. With Ultrasoy/Sopralin this is halved to 50 g/day. Allowing for a 30 day feeding period as lambing date is uncertain the total amount required is around 3kg for twins at a cost of around £1.50 -£2.00 per ewe compared with typical compound costs pre lambing of £5- £6. But the benefits don't end there.

Methods

Ed Rowell explains how 156 twin bearing Mule ewes (65 kg, CS 2.5) were housed and either fed 200g/day of Hipro soya or 100g/day of Ultrasoy from 4 weeks pre lambing last year along with their top quality mineralised silage.



Jennifer Brown, Kate Rowell, Chris McDonald and Ed Rowell at a QMS Hundleshope monitor farm meeting

Results

Lamb birthweights were 4.9kg and 4.6kg respectively, ewes milked well and blood tests for BOH were normal.

The Rowell's prefer their new feeding system as it involves less heaving of heavy bags of feed around and the saved time allowed more attention to lambs and welfare.

This year (2015 lambing) they again made to top quality silage and tested feeding 100g/d of Ultrasoy vs the same amount but distributed as 3 feeds a week (around 3kg /ewe in total pre lambing). This offers further potential savings in labour. With EBLEX support this was also tested on a Northumberland farm with success and similar outcomes between groups by 4 weeks post lambing (interim results)



Trial facilities at Hundleshope

Conclusions

By making high quality silage it is possible to reduce supplementary winter feed costs to around £2/ewe - around 3kg of Sopralin /ewe, the only other costs are for mineralising the silage and the cost of making better quality silage.

It costs less than £3/ha more to make top quality silage, the main constraint is motivation. Currently we underestimate the value of baled silage as a feed and how easy with modern equipment and accurate weather forecasts it is to make high quality material. Just cut early and target one bale per four ewes of ME 11+ silage for the last month.

Some farmers may have to invest in better silage feeding arrangements as ring feeders are generally not sufficient to ensure maximum silage intake. This investment is quickly paid back though annual savings in feed costs.



Recommendations

- **Make silage for late pregnancy feeding with a target of 11+**
- **Allow 1 big bale per 4 ewes**
- **Ensure ewes have sufficient access to silage to meet full appetite**
- **Cut costs and labour by feeding Ultrasoy/Sopralin @50g/lamb carried**
- **Potential for better health of ewes and lambs through effects of DUP on reducing worm egg counts and loss of immunity**
- **Note ewes need grass in front of them at turnout as no concentrates have been fed –have a supply of roots on the field or lamb later if grass growth may be delayed**

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