



Lamb Action for Profit

Better Returns from Lambing Outdoors

Boost returns by lambing outdoors to save costs associated with labour, housing and feed, and to reduce lamb mortality while maintaining lambing percentage.

Labour is the largest input associated with sheep production, which means outdoor lambing can be a major component of **low input** sheep production as it reduces the labour requirement by 30%.

If the system is managed correctly and the weather is good, lamb mortality can be reduced as a good **ewe lamb bond** is established and disease build-up is reduced.

Targets

- Evaluate if **lambing outdoors** is appropriate for the business.
- Manage **grass** effectively to optimise ewe and lamb performance.
- Reduce the number of lambs lost between scanning and sale by 10-15%.

Management Guidelines

- Appreciate that for ewes to lamb in late April tugging needs to begin early November, so ewes should be flushed from the middle of October and the rams' **MOT** should take place in August.
- Evaluate the two outdoor **lambing systems**, Drift Lambing and Set Stocking, for suitability, which will depend on the field layout, availability of shelter/housing and **mothering ability** of ewes.
- Be aware that the ewes need to be fit (**BCS** of 3-3.5) at lambing time and **scanning** will identify ewes with singles to ensure they do not get overfed, which could lead to lambing problems.
- Ensure the lambing field(s) offer **shelter**, are well drained, are in close proximity to pens, and have been rested from grazing to ensure adequate feed supply and reduced **disease build-up**.
- Be prepared to house ewes in severe bad weather to prevent high **lamb mortality**, and be aware that hot weather can increase mis-mothering so more attention may be needed.
- Ensure regular inspection of the ewes at pasture (every 3-4 hours) and ewes having difficulty should be caught and lambed, and any weak lambs should receive **colostrum**.
- Appreciate that individual pens may still be needed for the first night, especially for twins and triplets, to aid bonding; and one pen (1.5m x 1.5m) per 8-10 ewes should be adequate.
- Aim to **ring or tail lambs** while they are in the individual pens, ensuring that the **bond** with the mother is established beforehand, and they are well recovered before they are let out to reduce **lamb losses**.
- Understand that feed costs will be reduced as the need to supplement with concentrates will be lowered by 80%, but this will require effective **grazing management** to ensure the grass supply matches demand.
- Make mothering ability a key selection criterion in breeding flock replacements, and use **EBVs** to identify superior rams for replacement breeding.
- Assess the flock risks of coccidiosis, nematodirus, **worms**, clostridial diseases and orf, and include effective measures to prevent them in a flock **health plan**.

More detailed advice, costings, calculators and further information supporting these guidelines are available free of charge to levy payers in a unique interactive Lamb Action for Profit resource at www.eblex.org.uk



Better Returns
Programme



ENGLISH BEEF &
LAMB EXECUTIVE

Lamb Action for Profit

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Performance Standards for Outdoor Lambing

Half-Bred x Terminal Sire on Grass-Based System	Average	Target	Your Flock
Lambing period	Late April/May	Late April/May	
Lamb crops per lifetime of ewe	4	4-5	
Ram flock life (no. seasons)	3	3-4	
Sheep per ram	40	50-60	
Lambing percentage (%)	150	180	
Mortality around birth (%)	3.0	<3.0	
Lamb deadweight at slaughter (kg)	19.0	19.0-21.0	
Concentrate use (kg per ewe)	15.0	<15.0	
Total grazing (ha per ewe)	0.11	0.09	

Source: Adapted from the Farm Management Handbook 2006/7, SAC

Drift Lambing

Advantages	Disadvantages
Less time travelling between fields – allowing one shepherd, with part time assistance in the lambing pens, to look after up to 600 ewes.	More handling of ewes as moved between fields or into individual pens.
Allows ewes to seek isolation and to lamb on chosen birth site. This results in a stronger ewe lamb bond	Only works with tame sheep that are willing to follow lambs, so the system is less suitable for flighty breeds.
Very high stocking rates can be used in the lambing pens and as the ewes are removed after they lamb the grass supply is maintained.	High stocking rates could result in soil and pasture damage in very bad weather.
Castration and tailing can be carried out, and the ewes and lambs can be thoroughly checked for health problems while in the individual pens.	Needs individual pens (one per 10 ewes), transport box (carries 4 ewes and lambs) and trailer.
Weak lambs can be housed and given extra feed in bad weather.	
Fostering of lambs can occur on the birth site, which is more likely to be successful.	
Ewes that are barren or have aborted can be identified as part of a strict culling policy.	

Set Stocked Lambing

Advantages	Disadvantages
Number of ewes that can be maintained per shepherd can be the highest as long as there is good weather, the ewes are young and fit, and have a low lambing percentage.	More time travelling between fields of sheep. 350 ewes per shepherd, without part time assistance.
Lower requirement for pens and transport of ewes and lambs but a transport box is still required.	Requires highly skilled personnel to catch a ewe with a dog or stick.
Suitable for ground that is too steep/rough for tractors and for farmers not comfortable with ATVs.	Possibility of disturbance of lambing ewes by activities.
More suitable where the lambing percentage is below 175% with ewes with good maternal ability.	Need sheltered fields.
	Due to set stocking, the grass may not be well maintained so good grazing management will be needed.
	All lambs will need to be handled later for tailing and castration using the Burdizzo method .
	It will be more difficult to identify ewes that are barren or have aborted, as they are not handled at lambing time.

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