

# Sheep Production | Notes

## Key Information

- Short day breeder (come into heat in autumn as the day length decreases)
- Length of oestrus = 17 day cycle
- Duration of oestrus = 36 hours
- Length of gestation = 147 days or 5 months
- Can birth singles, twins or triplets
- Weight at birth = between 3 and 5kg

## Mountain Hill Vs Lowland Production

### Mountain Hill

- Extensive
- Low produce targets
- Rough grazing
- High mortality
- Breeds for harsh conditions
- Blackface mountain
- Wicklow Cheviot

### Lowland

- Intensive
- High produce targets
- Rotational grazing
- Low mortality
- Large, muscular breeds
- Suffolk
- Texel

## Breeding Strategy

- Purebred ewe x purebred ram for both mountain hill + lowland
- Mountain ewes = 1 lamb due to harsh conditions, poorer feed
- Used as replacements or sold for meat
- These ewes are sold to lowland farmers as they get older
- Called cast ewes, have good mothering ability
- Fertility has declined but high plane of nutrition helps
- Crossed with a prolific breed once sold to lowland production

- This uses hybrid vigour; offspring have hardiness, good mothers, good milk, prolificacy

## Ram Selection

“Ram is half the flock”

- Spreads his genes over greater proportion of offspring
- Looks after quality (growth rates, carcass quality, conformation)
- Ewe looks after litter size

Easter market

- Suffolk ram
- Fastest growth rates
- Conformation

Mid-season

- Texel ram
- Higher carcass quality
- Greater kill-out %
- Lose condition at mating
- Sound feet and legs
- Or Charolaise ram on first timers
- Smaller lambs

All rams are pedigree and performance tested

## Flushing

- High plane of nutrition
- Moved from low plane to high plane of nutrition
- Prior to mating
- Can be done by high stocking rate then 3 weeks before mating reduce the stocking rate
- Increases ovulation rates
- Increases conception rates
- Better implantation of embryo to uterine wall

- More regular oestrous cycles
- Continues 4 weeks after mating so embryos develop properly

## **Synchronised Breeding**

### Ram effect

- Sudden introduction
- Encourages ewes into oestrus and to start cycling
- Rams produce pheromones which stimulates oestrus
- Have to be separated 6 weeks before mating

### Sponging

- Prevent prolonged lambing season
- Progesterone soaked sponges inserted into the birth canal
- Removed after 12 days
- Ewes come into heat 2 days later
- Reduced lamb to ewe ratio from 1;40 to 1;10

## **Heat Detection**

- Calculate lambing dates
- Identify repeats
- Raddle with coloured crayon
- Colour changed every 17 days

## **Breeding Out Of Season**

- Aiming for early lambs for the Easter market
- Mated in early July
- Sponging is used
- Ewes are injected with PMSG

## Steaming Up

- Last 6 week of pregnancy
- As in these weeks 75% of foetal growth occurs
- Prevents twin lamb disease or pregnancy toxaemia
- Fed 100g of concentrates
- Increased to 500g for singles
- Increased to 750g for twins

## Scanning

- 80 days after mating
- Identifies barren ewes
- Determines singles or twins which determines feeding
- Ewes are separated into groups of those carrying singles or twins

## Lambing

- Ewes are vaccinated for clostridia diseases 4 weeks before lambing
- Treat ewes for footrot
- Takes place indoors
- Revive chilled lambs using infrared lamp
- If severe chill in lambs, inject with glucose
- Lambs stay with ewes for bonding

## Fostering

Cover lamb in birth fluids from host ewe

- Tie its feet
- Place in front of ewe
- Ewe will lick it clean thinking its own lamb therefore bonding

Fostering Crate

- Prevents ewe from hurting lamb
- Allows foster lamb to feed
- Ewe will accept the lamb

Introducing a dog

- Ewe will become protective

## Post Lambing

- High plane of nutrition to ensure good milk production
- Mineral lick to prevent milk fever and grass tetany
- Diet includes colostrum, milk, hay, concentrates and grass
- Rotationally grazed on good pasture
- Creep feeding
- Slaughter weight = 34-40kg
- Weaning in June and July
- Ewes are put onto bare pasture and dried off before flushing

## General Husbandry

Castration

- Takes place in the first few days using an elasticator or burdizzo

Dipping

- Prevents fly strike in summer, mange mite in winter

Dosing

- For stomach worms, liver fluke and other parasites

Docking

- Removal of tail, prevents build-up of faeces

Dagging

- Removal of wool around tail to prevent fly strike

Footbath

- Prevents footrot

- Consists of copper sulphate or formalin

Foot trimming and paring

- Prevents lameness

Shearing

- Occurs in June
- Prevents overheating

## **Wool**

- It is a protein fibre
- Grows from follicles on sheep's skin
- Have both hair and wool fibres
- Ratio of hair to wool fibres varies between breeds
- Merino sheep have the finest wool; wool: hair = 25:1
- Most Irish breeds; wool: hair = 8:1