

Thinking ahead to lambing time

By now folks will be well on the way to lambing again. Vet **Richard Knight** says the same problems come up time and again and many farmers need guidance



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The hope of a warm, sheep-friendly spring will be near the top of farmers' wish lists. The old perennial problems related to lambing come up time and again, with most shepherds doing a great job. A significant proportion of them need help, though. They need guidance and coaching through this period as they struggle through.

Get the basics right and the rest has a good chance of following through.

Sheep that are parasite-free, or are actively controlled, and with a good set of teeth have a good chance

of eating plenty and making the most of it.

Being parasite-free also includes sheep scab – any sheep with wool loss pre-lambing must be investigated as a matter of urgency as we have seen a few flocks have their lambing time wrecked by scab coming in under the radar.

Note that diagnosis requires a skin scrape and microscope examination to get it right – it is very important to get this correct, considering the lag time between injections and apparent response to treatment. This lag time is when folks can, understandably, get very nervous while waiting to see an improvement.

Next, good quality grazing or feeding is important. A little-known fact is that liver fluke metacercarial cysts can survive on hay for eight months – keep your eyes open to the unexpected.

LACK OF MINERALS

If ewes are in poor condition, this should be investigated. Mineral deficiencies, such as copper, cobalt and selenium should be determined as a matter of course, along with a metabolic profile of any flocks which are not up to standard.

The Dairy Herd Health and Productivity Service (DHHPS) based at Edinburgh University offers a great cost-effective service in this

regard, which can be done in conjunction with the usual veterinary surgeon. It also helps if the nutritionist is on board with this too – the stronger the team, the more likely it is to succeed.

A strong, well-nourished, fit sheep will produce plenty of colostrum for her well-grown lambs.

She will also respond better to her clostridial vaccine booster (possibly including *Pasteurella*) which she will need! Take the time to ensure that the vaccine protocols have been adhered to and that the vaccine has been stored and administered appropriately.

An attachment such as that made by Sterimatic on

the end of the gun will ensure clean administration and fewer vaccine failures.

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