

Production of Healthy Store lambs:

A liveweight of at least 25kg should be aimed for in the autumn after weaning. Lambs which have failed to achieve this, very often require a different and more costly finishing routine to bring them to a slaughter weight. Additional cost may be involved in these already poorer lambs from investigations and remedying underlying problems. It is important that these potential checks in the lamb's growth be anticipated and prevented.



Nutritional problems:

The nutrition of the lamb starts with the nutrition of the ewe. If the ewe does not have enough milk, then the young lamb may starve or be forced to eat grass and feed prematurely. This can lead to digestive problems and increased exposure to gut parasites, both of which can cause scours and ill thrift. As well checking the udder of the ewe prior to tugging, it is often useful to check the udder of any ewe with poor growing lambs for mastitis – either acute or chronic.

Mineral deficiencies are a common cause of ill thrift in lambs. The extent and nature of deficiencies varies greatly throughout the country and we will be able to advise you on the likely ones in your area. If deficiencies are suspected on your farm then this should be investigated by blood sampling some ewes and some lambs. If the opportunity arises then post mortem liver samples should be taken for analysis as very often they are a better indicator of mineral/vitamin status than blood samples.

Copper deficiency is a complicated problem, causing ill thrift and should be fully investigated after discussion with your vet. Do not supplement sheep with copper unless there is good evidence for it.

Cobalt deficiency fairly commonly causes ill thrift and lambs that just don't finish. It is exacerbated by concurrent parasite and scour problems and results in a variety of symptoms such as poor feed intake, scours, poor growth rates and a very white open fleece. Blood sampling will easily detect this.



Selenium deficiency can cause lambs which are weak on their legs, especially when being driven, or even sudden death. Again this can be detected by blood sampling.

Parasitic problems:

Parasitic gut roundworms such as Nematodirus can occur in severe outbreaks resulting in ill thrift, scours and death. The severity of these problems can depend on the previous worm history on the farm, wormer resistance, stocking densities and weather conditions. There are increasing numbers of cases occurring 'out of season', possibly due to milder climates, i.e. any time now.

Coccidiosis may be seen in outbreaks or a just a few cases, inside or outside. The severity of the symptoms varies from mild scour through to severe bloody scour and death. We can diagnose this problem and differentiate it from worms by taking faecal samples. Once this disease occurs in a field or in a shed, the organism is capable of surviving until the next year and this should be anticipated with preventative dosing. Lambs which survive are often left stunted with chronic digestive problems.



Liver fluke warnings are often given in the farming press based on weather conditions. Many of the fluke products on the market have quite long meat withdrawal periods and this should be borne in mind when lambs are approaching slaughter.

External parasites such as sheep scab can exist on its own or with lice and the two diseases should be differentiated in order that correct treatment can be applied. Hill flocks are often affected with ticks which are capable of spreading diseases such as Louping ill and tick pyaemia, which can result in significant lamb losses. Investigation is paramount to see where the best options for control are.

Pasteurellosis:

This is a bacterial infection which can lead to losses from pneumonia or sudden death in lambs under certain conditions of stress such as housing, weaning, poor weather and concurrent parasitism. Lambs which survive the pneumonia may be left as chronic poor doers and prone to secondary recurring pneumonias. There are several vaccines available which can help control this disease and we will be to advise on when to use them.



Pulpy Kidney & Tetanus:

These two diseases are caused by similar bacteria and tend to affect young lambs, with pulpy kidney often being a cause of sudden death in particularly well thriving lambs. The lambs are very rarely seen alive, but can be easily diagnosed at post-mortem. Tetanus incidence varies throughout the country, but is usually associated with contaminated wounds such as castration & docking. Both can be prevented by correct vaccination of the ewe prior to lambing and then by vaccinating the young lamb.

Lameness:

Whereas older sheep are more usually affected by footrot, lameness in lambs is often caused by scald, which is a bacterial infection of the skin between the toes. Usually there is some factor which causes irritation of the skin, such as grazing stubble fields, and this allows infection to enter. Any lameness problem will reduce the lamb's ability to feed and graze and in turn slow down its growth.

