

Nutrition News

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Achieving Optimal Lamb Growth

Successful lamb production begins at the end. Establishing your end market is a prime consideration in determining your production targets and feed planning. Who is buying your lambs and why, and when are they needed?

Birth to weaning

By the time a lamb is eight weeks old, about 50% of its nutritional requirements can be met by feed rather than milk. Eating around 4% of their body weight as dry matter each day, adequate feed must be available to fulfil growth targets. Target growth weights sit somewhere over 250g/day; up to 300-350g/day in singles. A growth rate below 200g/day is worth investigating, and it's important to assess the health condition of both the ewes and lambs, and the quality of the feed supply, so the right decisions about feed requirements and the time of weaning can be made.

Hypothermia and infectious disease are the major causes of loss in young lambs. Ensuring the right feed for optimum nutrition is critical for good health, which in turn impacts lamb growth. Healthy lambs grow quicker and generally sell more easily. Poor health is costly if lambs are using feed to combat ill-health rather than for growth. If you're seeing slower growth rates, you might decide to wean earlier and introduce creep feeding if not already doing so. A young lamb's digestive system is sensitive to nutritional changes though. It can take up to three weeks for the rumen to adapt to a new feed, so be mindful a growth check is sometimes seen at weaning when feed intakes are in transition. Research has shown benefits from introducing new feeds while lambs are still with their mothers.

The two primary nutritional factors impacting growth outcomes are protein and energy. Protein supports the lamb's growing frame preventing the production of small, overly fat animals while the diet's energy content contributes to achieving the target weight. As dry matter intakes become more dominant in providing nutrition through spring and early summer, grassland management is paramount.



Grassland Management

Grass is the most cost-effective feed supply for lambs after weaning but only if well managed in terms of quality and quantity. Monitoring grazing pastures and measuring silage clamps highlights how much other feed is required to supplement the diet, the emphasis being on supplementing and balancing rather than replacing. Grazing pasture height is a simple effective way of ensuring lambs are eating high quality grass; the leaf being the most nutritious part at over 11.5MJ ME/kg DM, compared to 10.5 MJ ME/kg DM in the stem. Aim for a sward height of 4-8cm to provide maximum quality in late spring/early summer.

Tips for feeding lambs successfully

- Establish your market requirements before planning production targets
- Consider the varying protein and energy requirements of lambs according to size
- Monitor the health condition of ewes and lambs for optimal growth rates
- Measure grass and silage quality to determine supplementary feed levels
- Ensure a constant supply of clean water

Whether produced on the farm or bought in, lambs can be batched according to their weight to facilitate more targeted and effective feeding. All lambs can thrive on good quality pasture, but this shouldn't be to the disadvantage of grassland reserves for flushing and over-wintering ewes. Larger lambs can often be finished off grass with supplementary concentrates, whereas those being kept for longer may need additional protein to enable them to build bigger frames before finishing. Supplementary feeds include forage, clover and chicory as well as concentrates for outdoor systems. More intensive indoor systems will use measured or ad lib concentrates in addition to silage.



One happy customer...

Charlie Clarke runs dual flocks of pedigree Texel and a commercial Suffolk and Texel cross on a grass-based system at Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan. The Mullaghrafferty pedigree Texels go out 7-10 days post-lambing. The commercial flock supplies the Easter trade, remaining indoors post-lambing. The lambs are given the Intensive Lamb Pellet until they're finished at around 12 weeks.

Charlie explained, "The Corby Rock products are giving results in terms of milk production and hitting weight targets. The lambs are finished earlier and fleshed out well."



Corby Rock Mill Lamb Feeds

Spec No.	Product	Description	Additives
493	Golden Lamb Crunch	Palatable crunch, including 3mm concentrated pellets, suitable for use as a complementary creep starter ration through to finish Not to be intensively fed	• Molasses for increased palatability • Vitamins B1 & B2 to assist metabolism • Actisaf live yeast for aiding fibre digestion and maintaining rumen health • Biotin to improve hoof hardness • Ammonium chloride to prevent urinary calculi
90	Intensive Lamb Pellet	Complementary pellet feed for intensively-fed lambs and ad-lib feeding systems	• Megalac – a protected fat to increase energy density • Ammonium chloride to prevent urinary calculi
93	Intensive Lamb Maize Pellet	Complementary high maize pellet feed for intensively-fed lambs and ad-lib feeding systems with reduced protein. Ideal where grass cover is good.	• Ammonium chloride to prevent urinary calculi
Crunch suitable from one month of age; pellets from two months. Available in:   			

For more information on lamb growth and our range of lamb feeds, contact your local Corby Rock Mill representative.

