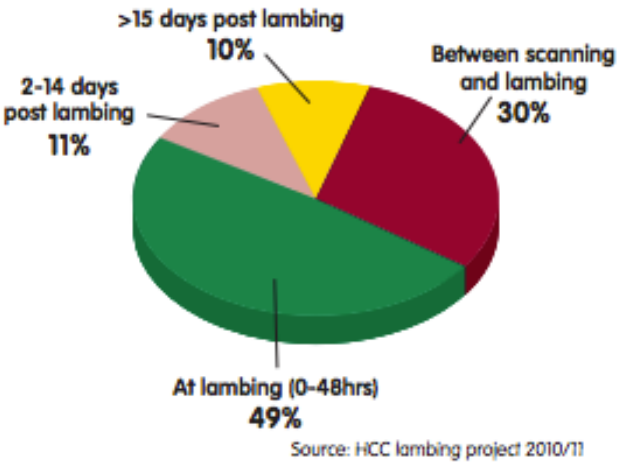
MARCHES VETS
FARM ANIMAL NEWSLETTER – JUNE 2017

Post Lambing Review

If you haven't already done so, try to find the time to sit down and review this year's lambing. Useful data includes:

1. scanning figures –
    - how many ewes were put to the tup, number barren and number in lamb
    - how many lambs were expected?
2. how many ewes and how many lambs were turned out after lambing? From 1 and 2, calculate the following
    - **how many lambs were lost from scanning to turning out**. If you have recorded all the losses, you can further break this down into lambs lost due to abortions, the ewe dying, born dead, died between birth and turn out, and lambs reared artificially.
    - **how many ewes that were in lamb weren't turned out with a lamb**. Break down into how many died, how many were scanned in lamb but didn't produce a lamb, how many had dead lambs or rejected their lambs.



This chart shows the results of a Welsh study into **when lamb losses occur** between scanning and sale as a finished lamb or store. You will see that almost 80% of all losses occurred between scanning and 2 days of age, and most ewe deaths occur during late pregnancy or around the time of lambing, too. So for many farms **reducing losses between scanning and turnout will have the most impact on productivity**. Once you have your figures, we can help you to analyse them and decide where changes in management might make the most impact.

Ewe Body Condition

Shearing time is a good opportunity to **assess ewe condition and to help decide when to wean lambs**. For ewes lambing in mid March, it will now be about 10 weeks from peak lambing and lambs can safely be weaned at any time. Ewes' milk will only be a small part of the lambs' diet by this time.

Many people wean their lambs at the same time every year. However, the decision on **when to wean lambs should be based on the condition of the ewes and how much good quality grazing is available** – things that will vary from year to year. Ewes, and especially those rearing twins, will generally lose condition in the first month to 6 weeks after lambing, but should regain condition in the second half of lactation. If ewes are very poor (BCS 2 or less) at 8 to 10 weeks after lambing, it's best to wean early, when the lambs are 10 to 12 weeks old. The ewes will probably not have been giving much milk anyway, and will need plenty of time to regain condition.

If the ewes are ok (BCS >2) , the **availability of good quality grazing** should the deciding factor. Lambs require green leaf, preferably with some clover in order to grow. If grass quality is falling and lambs are in competition with their mothers, the ewes will take the pick of the grazing and the lambs will either 'stand still' or lose condition. So, if short leafy grass is in short supply it's best to wean the lambs earlier. For those monitoring lamb growth rates, lambs should be weaned if dlwg drops below 200g/day and worms or trace element deficiency have been ruled out.
We're having a good grass growing season so far, so if your ewes are in good condition and you have plenty of short, leafy grass, then lambs will do best left with the ewes, with as many as possible being sold finished prior to weaning.

Weaning lambs and worms
Another consideration for weaning lambs is the availability of pasture with a **lower worm burden**. New leys or forage crops will have the lowest worm burden, then any pastures that haven't been grazed by sheep at all this year, then ground that was grazed by ewes and lambs in the spring and then shut up to mow. The highest worm challenge will be on ground that has been grazed by ewes and lambs during the spring and early summer, so try not to put lambs back on to this ground in the vulnerable period after weaning. Most farms will have **worm resistance** to at least one, and probably more of the 3 standard wormer groups. This means that worms are becoming more difficult to control and avoidance strategies by grazing management need to be used to reduce the reliance on wormers.
Worm egg counts are useful both to check if lambs actually need worming and to check wormer efficacy after worming. A worm egg count will identify poor efficacy much sooner than waiting until it is obvious that a wormer is ineffective.

Trace elements for cows at grass
Selenium is the most important trace element for cows that is likely to be deficient in grassland in this area. **Selenium deficiency can cause early embryonic death**, resulting in more barren cows or a more spread out calving pattern. Deficiency will also adversely affect bull fertility. The options for supplementation are boluses, loose minerals or mineral licks and pasture dressings. Whichever method you choose to use, we'd advise doing some blood tests to check that supplementation is effective. We generally only need to test 4 or 5 cows or heifers per group. Remember that mineral licks will also be palatable to badgers, so they should be raised up to prevent badger access and the risk of spreading TB.

Badgers drinking from water troughs is also a hazard.
On cattle only farms, troughs can be raised high enough to prevent badger access. Where sheep are using the troughs, too, this can be a problem. If a lamb can drink from a trough, a badger will be able to do so, too.