

# Merino Matters



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## HELPING THE EWE THROUGH A TOUGH TIME

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THE pre-lambing and early lactation period imposes a significant nutritional challenge to the mob. A near doubling of energy requirement and a rapid increase in calcium demand around the time of lambing means ewes are at significant risk of nutritional diseases.

Metabolic diseases such as Pregnancy Toxaemia, calcium deficiency and magnesium deficiency can all cause deaths around lambing time. However, a more costly loss of production results from the hidden or sub-clinical effects in the rest of the mob.

### The Good

A properly designed and implemented supplementation system for late pregnant ewes can significantly reduce lambing difficulties, reduce ewe deaths and improve lamb marking percentages.

### The Bad

For most of the year it is important to supply calcium supplements to ensure ewes have good levels stored in the bones. However, once ewes are within a few weeks of lambing time, low levels of calcium in the diet actually help the ewe to "switch on" calcium release from the bone. For this reason, it is important to remove supplements containing high levels of calcium within three weeks of the start of lambing.

### The Way Forward

Appropriate supply of energy and protein plus correct mineral supplementation designed to assist rumen function and increase calcium release from the bone can improve marking percentages and reduce both the clinical and sub-clinical losses from metabolic diseases.

### My Top 5 Tips

1. Ensure energy and protein requirements of late pregnant ewes are adequately met.
2. Using starchy cereal grain supplementation has been shown to improve colostrum quality, which gives the lambs immune system a head start.
3. Do not use supplements containing urea, high calcium or salt levels during this period.
4. Use a mineral supplement specifically designed for the pre lambing period.
5. A pre lambing drench and vaccine is important to help both ewes and lambs through this high risk period for parasites and disease.

For further information and an individually tailored program – contact an ELMS specialist via your local Elders branch.

  
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