

Merino Matters



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SHEEP NUTRITION – LAMBING EWES

Sheep Nutrition..... It's the main game when it comes to sheep management. A well fed sheep is a healthy sheep which lambs easily and resists parasites. Problems start happening to sheep when they get under pressure, either through management enforcing higher stocking rates or through the poor season.

It has been well documented that due to last year's short season the feed quality was extremely high with some stubbles measuring close to the energy levels of an average hay crop. One of the results of the high digestible pasture and stubbles is that they have been eaten which combined with low yields has led to very little dry matter being left on the ground at this time of year.

Historically, autumn lambing systems have relied on low stocking rates, fat ewes and abundance of stubble to get through lambing and lactation. This season as mentioned lacked the bulk but not the quality, however in many situations the feed is running out and many farmers are coming to grips with just how much feed a sheep needs to maintain itself during this period.

Lambing ewes require 2.5 to 3 times their dry requirements during this time.

So where does this leave the lambing ewe in terms of their requirements

- Let's use Lupins
- Lactating ewe Requirement: 20 ME
- Lupin Energy: 13.5 ME

How much is required = $20/13.5 = 1.48\text{kg}$ of lupins head a day or 10.36kg a week.

The reality is the ewe will struggle to eat this much especially if combined with hay/straw, which is also important for lactating ewes. Thus the ewe will and does lose condition during lambing. This is why it is so very important to have them in excellent condition coming into lambing.

Finally those of you who are using lick feeders for the first time, beware it is vital the ewes have had a good lead in period and are not over stocked. Monitor the mobs for shy feeders for if lambing and lactating ewes cannot access energy the implications are dire.



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