



Nutrias

The science of animal nutrition



Considerations for meal feeding Hill Lambs

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Considerations for meal feeding Hill Lambs

When to introduce?

The key issue here is transitioning the lamb's reliance on milk to being capable of digesting meal and forage maintaining weight gain from a young age. The single best thing to kickstart this process is meal feeding. Introduction of meal to lambs as early as possible ensures thrive is maximised at the most efficient stage, slaughter weights are reached sooner, and fat covers will be better if a lamb is thriving faster. Lambs like cattle move through fat classes quicker with higher DLWG's.

How much to feed?

Familiarity and consistency are crucial for young ruminants to maintain a consistent interest and intake in compound feed. Feeding free access (ad-lib) is the best way to ensure lambs don't get irregular intakes of meal and result in scouring but also finish the fastest. Allow a gradual transition of 7-10 days onto the new diet and up to ad-lib. Remember ad-lib refers to a constant supply of fresh meal with plenty of feed space!

How do I maximise thrive / fat covers?

Once a lamb has become familiar with meal they will develop a rumen which is absolutely essential for digestion of nutrients. By allowing the lamb to develop this whilst still suckling the mother is the ideal way to ensure the lamb's daily live weight gain does not crash at weaning. Digestible meal high in energy (Maize / Barley / Wheat) will then be digested efficiently by the lambs and laid down as carcass gain. Providing favourable conditions for intake will then be essential for maximising intakes i.e. clean troughs, feed space, consistent feed, access to fresh forage, clean plentiful water.

Should I use a starter and transition on to a finisher?

It is perfectly acceptable to use a higher protein supplement (i.e. Nutrias Intensive lamb) to start lambs off on meal feeding. However, it very much depends on stage of growth and intended carcass weight. If your lambs have a decent frame and your concern is fat cover then a lower protein supplement is advised. Feeding excessive protein at the finishing stage will reduce fat cover and increase the size of your lamb. Careful consideration needs to be given when changing lambs over onto a different supplement and this should be phased through 7-10 days with gradual displacement of starter feed for finishing diet.

What are the common pit falls?

1. Meal adaption: I have already highlighted the importance of transitioning your lambs onto meal early for rumen development. That will help eradicate several thrive /adaption issues when it comes to the intensive finishing stage.

2. Water: This is often overlooked by many farmers. The dry matter and richness of the diet is dramatically increasing when ad-lib meal feeding is practiced. Water is essential for promoting intake, diluting rumen acid load and preventing urinary calculi. Meal hoppers should be placed near water points to promote water intakes. Water should be checked daily to avoid problems.

3. Forage: A question I often get asked by lamb finishers is 'Can I get away without feeding any forage?' The answer is no. A Lamb like a cow needs structural fibre to ensure normal rumen function. If meal feeding is a priority to finish lambs faster, you should always consider something like straw to provide a big impact on the rumen in small amounts. Forage intakes also help in aiding the prevention of urinary calculi. Those farmers looking to use high quality silage need to analyse to ensure performance is achieved.

4. Minerals: For intensive feeding it is important that the lambs are given vitamins and minerals especially if indoors away from green forage. An intensive lamb mineral with salts to help prevent urinary calculi in male lambs is advised. Cobalt supplementation may need to be carried out with lambs who are not introduced to meals at a young age and are weaned.

5. Protein: Over feeding protein will result in over grown lambs with heavy carcasses but poor fat cover. Lower protein concentrates should be used for the finishing stage (14-16%).

6. Animal Health: Dung sampling is an essential part of responsible dosing and obtaining the maximum daily live weight from your lambs. It must be standard practice going forward. Lameness will be a widespread issue especially indoors, preventative measures (foot bathing) and routine foot care is advised. Avoid trimming in pens as lameness can spread. Clean dry bedding with good ventilation will help reduce burden. A lame lamb won't visit the trough as often!

7. Housing / Space: When it comes to the finishing period especially indoors the objective is to maximise intake. Lambs need to be incentivised to eat more therefore any deterrents should be avoided (e.g. troughs placed too high off ground, sharp edges, wet feeding areas, draughts). Lambs should be able to eat, drink and lie down when they want therefore lambs / pen needs to be considered by lamb behaviour.

8. Drafting: Regular drafting / weighing lambs will reduce the burden in finishing pens and removes the social dominant lambs from 'hogging' the meal access. This will bring your lesser lambs along faster and will ensure you are not sending lambs away overweight.



Addressing scour?

There are two types of scours we need to be aware of. A nutritional scour and a worm burden scour. Sometimes a lamb can have a combination of both and neither dry up overnight. Nutritional scours generally happen when there is a change in diet. This can be the introduction of meal to rapidly in large amounts when the lambs aren't eating much forage. This can occur if lambs don't have much forage and are given meal irregularly and the problem just gets bigger until the rumen is corrected. Meal feeding must be introduced gradually, built up slowly but the lambs must have adequate water and forage.

Another high incidence of nutritional scour is when the lambs are turned out to after grass. This type of grass has two main impacts on the lamb. One a very lush, low fibre grass that tends to be lower in dry matter so its passage rate through the lamb is much quicker. Secondly, often this grass is heavily fertilised and contains excessive oil and protein for the rumen to handle and results in the lambs scouring.

Stress can trigger bacterial scour (e.g. Ecoli, Salmonella) out breaks in lambs making management and good husbandry essential in its reduction. While dirty bedding and poor access to clean forage can increase the risk of Coccidiosis.

An effective animal health programme will help remove doubts around a worm burden then you need to look at the forage quantity and quality and meal management.

NOTE TO REMEMBER: The faster a lamb thrives the more carcass fat they will have for age. Therefore, starting supplementation young means more lambs will have that flesh when you need them at potentially less meal consumption per head.

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Lamb Feeds

Starter Feed Nutrias Intensive lamb	Finishing Feed Nutrias Lamb Max Score
18% soya based crude protein pellet	15% Cereal driven formulation
Ideal for starting lambs	Designed for rapid fat cover
Will develop a frame on lambs	Contains intake booster for fast adaption
For fat cover use Nutrias Lamb Max Score	Suitable starter if target is fat cover on light carcass



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Note: All lamb feeds contain preventatives to reduce the risk of urinary calculi in male lambs

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