



# FACT SHEET

MAY 2017

## TIPS FOR MANAGING EWES WITH TRIPLETS

In this fact sheet, we focus on managing triplets, versus twins and singles.

Successfully-raised triplets mean more dollars produced per ewe.

**TABLE A:** Shows there can be financial advantages from weaning triplets.

E.g. Gross value of lambs weaned from twin or triplet-bearing ewe (assumes \$2.30/kg LW; twins weighing an average of 30 kg LW; and triplets 28 kg LW at weaning).

Table A:



## PRE-LAMBING

### MATING AND EARLY PREGNANCY

Good nutrition at mating, as well as lambing dates that coincide with milder weather and adequate feed, are particularly important when high triplet numbers are expected.

Triplet-bearing ewes should be identified at scanning for priority feeding and management. All ewes should be a minimum body condition score of 3.0 at scanning. Those below this target should be offered more feed through mid pregnancy, so they gain condition.

### LATE PREGNANCY

For four to six weeks before lambing, feed triplet-scanned ewes to maximise their intake of high-quality pasture. Ideal pasture is at least 1200 kg DM/ha (approx. 4 cm high) and has an ME of at least 11 MJ/kgDM (i.e. high in leaf content, with little dead material).



**The ideal – at least 4 cm quality pasture.** This allows a full ‘mouthful’ for ewes. The above photo shows a winter pasture with about 10% clover/herb content.

Rumen size does not differ between twin and triplet-bearing ewes. So, from a nutritional point of view, they do not need to be separated. However, if one group is to be given preferential treatment, it should be the ewes with triplets. Aim for condition scores of 3.0 or above. At birth, the ewe with triplets has about 18-20 kg of lambs, membranes and fluids on board. If ewes are not 20 kg heavier at lambing than mating, they have lost body reserves and lamb survival and growth rates may therefore be disappointing.

### SUPPLEMENTS

If feed is short, triplet-bearing ewes should be prioritised for supplementary feeding. Average or low-quality silage or hay is not recommended, because of its high bulk. Peas, grain or sheep nuts can be good options, with ewes slowly adjusted onto them. However, farmers need to consider costs versus returns.

In farm trials, feeding high-protein supplements to triplet ewes well fed on pasture yielded no benefit. It is usually energy rather than protein which is limiting.

Tightening feed levels in late pregnancy does not reduce birth difficulties or bearings. However, it will increase the risk of sleepy sickness. Underfeeding at this time is likely to result in smaller, less vigorous lambs and weaker mothering behaviour. Colostrum and milk intake will be reduced and lambs will be lighter at weaning.

The impact of feeding levels on lamb birthweight is shown in the following table. Romney ewes were fed at different rates in the last half of pregnancy and the birthweights of their twin and triplet lambs were measured. Low feeding levels (i.e. 2 cm) meant lower birthweights and often less vigorous lambs.

**Table B:** Birthweight lower at an 800 kg DM/ha feeding level (Experiment by Steve Morris and Paul Kenyon, Massey University).

Pasture mass (kg DM/ha)	800	1200	1600	2000
Sward height (cm)	2	4	6	8
Birthweight (kg)	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.3

## LAMBING ONWARDS

### FEED DURING LAMBING

Set-stocking too early may result in feed being consumed before lambing is finished, which will impact on milk production in lactation. If feed is restricted, supplementary feeding singles and giving the best pasture to triplets is a good option to increase performance. Ensuring the correct stocking rate is also important.

### LIMIT MIS-MOTHERING

Reduce stocking rates (e.g. <10 ewes/ha) and minimise disturbance. The longer the ewe stays on the birth site, the stronger the bond between ewe and lambs. Avoid paddocks with steep topography.

### SHELTER

At birth, triplet lamb body temperature is lower than twins and they lose heat faster due to their smaller size. Providing shelter can reduce thermal heat loss and improve survival.

### GET SOMEBODY ELSE TO DO IT?

Consider sending triplet-bearing ewes to lamb on a property with more favourable weather and feed conditions. The ewes return at weaning and lamb revenue is shared.

### FEEDING TO WEANING

As with pre-lamb feeding, ewes have difficulty eating enough for themselves and three lambs. Aim to maximise the ewe's intake of high-quality pasture.

Graze no lower than 4 cm (1200 kg DM/ha) of 11 MJ/kgDM. Alternative herbage (such as lucerne or clover/herb mixes) also improve lamb growth to weaning.

## ARTIFICIAL REARING

Based on Beef + Lamb New Zealand-funded research at Poukawa (Hawke's Bay) and Beef + Lamb New Zealand Innovation Farm trials.

### KEY RESULTS

- In highly-fecund flocks, about 25% of lambs are at risk from pre-birth to 12 weeks of age.
- During severe storms, losses, exposure and mis-mothering can add to that figure.
- At-risk lambs can be successfully reared on fortified cow colostrum and meal. The cow colostrum must be collected on the first day after calving and fed to lambs during the first day of their life.
- Total costs are around \$30 lamb (excluding labour). While triplet lambs are small and generally unsaleable at weaning, they can be finished to comparable weights on high-quality feed.
- B+LNZ Innovation Farm trials suggest there are intensive triplet rearing systems worth investigating in some farm systems. See references for more detail.

### B+LNZ RESEARCH ON TRIPLETS - REFERENCES

- Feeding supplements in late pregnancy (Paul Muir, On Farm Research; Paul Kenyon, Massey University)
- Physiological studies on triplet lambs (Paul Kenyon, Massey University)
- Mob size, stocking rate and intensity of shepherding. Factors influencing lamb survival (Paul Muir, On- Farm Research)
- The influence of difficult birth on the survival of multiple born lambs (Julie Everitt-Hincks, AgResearch)
- Survey of farmers' views on factors contributing to high lamb survival among multiple-born lambs (Terry Knight, AgResearch)
- Identification of ewes with a genetic propensity towards increased rates of twinning and fewer triplets (Peter Amer, Abacus Biotechnology)

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND MORE INFORMATION

For more detailed information, phone Beef + Lamb New Zealand on 0800 BEEFLAMB (0800 233 352). For more information on artificial rearing, visit our website [www.beeflambnz.com](http://www.beeflambnz.com)

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