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## HEALTH & NUTRITION



It is vital that in-lamb ewes have their mineral requirements met because they are providing for both themselves and their unborn lambs

# Relying on grass alone may see in-lamb ewes lose condition

**S**HEEP producers must plan very carefully to make sure they do all they can to maximise lambs born alive, lamb vitality and growth rates while making the very best of the forages, grass and feed already in store.

“Fortunately this winter we’re seeing reduced input costs compared to this time last year, which is being reflected in our winter sheep prices,” says Mark Gorst, feed specialist with Massey Feeds.

“The wet and mild autumn means there is plenty of grass about, but it will be low quality. So while it will be preferable to make the best use of grazing, it is vital to provide the correct supplementation to optimise productivity.”

Mark says that if too much is expected from grass, ewes may start to lose condition.

Ewes would ideally have a condition score of 3.0 or a little more in the last third of pregnancy. It can take six to eight weeks to lift one condition score (equivalent to around 9kg-10kg of bodyweight) and require an additional 500MJ of energy over that time!

Condition scoring ewes now will allow the flock to be broken down into manageable groups, with nutrition targeted to increase individual condition and performance.

Massey Ewecare Rolls or



Mark Gorst, feed specialist with Massey Feeds

Nuts are perfect for hill sheep on grass, Massey’s Specialist Sheep is aimed at larger ewes with good quality silage or grass available, while their Elite Ewe is formulated for large indoor ewes on quality hay or straw.

“They all provide high levels of energy and quality protein, including a good level of by-pass protein,” says Mark.

“Starting at 0.25kg/day six to eight weeks pre-lambing, or earlier if ewes are in low body condition, will allow enough time for the rumen to adapt to a new feed before it reduces in size as the lamb grows. The concentrate feed should be gradually increased to 0.8-1.0kg per ewe per day at lambing and through lactation.

“In the eight weeks before

lambing a ewe’s energy needs can increase by about 6-8MJ per day. With reduced rumen volume and lower forage intakes, it is essential to ensure quality, palatable feeds are offered to make up the shortfall and prevent condition losses.”

Mark stresses that mineral levels in grazing can be low so ewes will need supplementing as an in-lamb ewe has to provide for herself and the lamb. Several minerals are essential, including selenium, cobalt, iodine, calcium, zinc and vitamin E.

“Ensuring mineral requirements are met will help to improve colostrum quality, lamb survival and vigour and ensure both ewe and lamb have a robust immune system,” ends Mark.