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Nutritionist

Weaning lambs with 'Kick Start'

As most producers are well aware, weaning is a stressful for lambs and their dams. The stresses that lambs in particular face are both emotional and nutritional.

Emotional Stress

Sheep in general have a very strong flocking instinct. From the point of view of lambing, lambs are accustomed to a very stable flock structure. Certainly, prior to weaning there are times when that stability is interrupted such as lamb marking. However, that interruption is short-lived. When we wean lambs, the interruption is permanent, therefore the emotional stress lambs endure is much more elevated.

Nutritional Stress

Nutritional stress is much more insidious, in that the effects are often not immediately apparent. Ewe's milk contains elevated levels of a number of nutrients that are essential for lamb growth and development. The sudden interruption of the supply of these nutrients often causes weaners to 'go backwards'.

While most weaners recover from these stresses and eventually 'move forward' the situation means we have a period of lost production when feed resources are being consumed for no gain in growth. It is important to note that for every day a lamb 'goes backwards', it take three days to return to its original point. With this in mind, if we have weaners 'go backwards' for 7 days, then it will be another 21 days before they are back at their initial weaning point and therefore they will have lost a months' worth of post weaning growth.

When considering nutritional stress, it is important to remember that lambs are not born as functioning

AT A GLANCE

- **Weaning places lambs under stress**
- **Good management, together with nutritional support can minimise stress**
- **1 day backwards takes 3 days to recover**
- **Weaners, managed correctly ensures their long term productivity.**

ruminants. Both the function and the structure of the rumen is developed as the lamb begins to consume solid food. Proper rumen development is essential as ruminants derive the bulk of their energy supply as byproducts from microbial degradation of ingested feeds. These byproducts are absorbed across the rumen wall and used to drive the animals' metabolic processes.

As well as energy production, important vitamins are produced in the rumen, from precursors consumed in the diet. In the developing rumen, the processes to produce these vitamins may be impaired leading to both clinical and sub clinical deficiencies.

For this reason we need to 'kick start' the rumen and ensure, in order to maximize energy and vitamin production, that rumen fermentation is both stable and thorough.

Weaning Management.

Short, 6" high mixed pasture and/or grazing cereals provide a good quality, easily digestible source of feed for weaners. However, on their own such feeds do not provide a complete nutritional package. Low dry matter as a result of high H₂O content often leads to unstable rumen fermentation resulting in scours and thus nutrient depletion. As well, such feeds are deficient in a range of key minerals such as Magnesium (Mg), Calcium (Ca) and Sodium (Na). The result is that such feeds fail to 'kick start' the rumen thus increasing nutritional stress.

Good quality hay should be provided to all weaners. Hay will slow the passage of feed down by increasing dry matter levels, which is essential

for both rumen stimulation and stabilization of the fermentation process

Weaners should also be provided with a grain supplement as an easily digestible source of carbohydrate (CHO) helps to balance out high protein/low energy levels found in lush feeds. As energy supply drives metabolic function, we need to make sure it is not limiting in a weaners diet, Field peas and barley provide a good source of slowly digestible CHO through slow, thorough fermentation. Oats are also useful however wheat must be avoided at all costs. The digestion of wheat starch is too rapid for weaners and often leads to issues with acidosis. In newly weaned lambs, acidosis **MUST** be avoided at all costs. Not only will it cause a major setback, if severe enough, the damage may be irreversible and the animals' productivity will be permanently affected.

Weaner Nutrition.

If we need to know what young sheep need for growth and development, we just need to look at the composition of ewes' milk.

Ewes' milk contains high levels of Ca & Mg. Ca is necessary for bone development and Ca & Mg together have a major role in smooth muscle function. Contraction and relaxation of the smooth muscle on the outside of the rumen is essential in order to mix the feeds contents within and such movements are dependent of adequate Ca & Mg levels.

Ewes' milk also contains high levels of Zinc (Zn) & Methionine. Zinc is necessary for both protein and CHO metabolism and has a role to play in both hoof health and the immune system. Methionine is essential for wool growth.

These are all needed for growth/production, yet are often lacking in highly digestible pastures.

Vitamins, including Vitamin A, essential for membrane integrity and Thiamine (B₁) for normal body metabolism, rather than their precursors, are also present in large quantities.

Fabstock 'Kick Start'

Fabstocks '***Kick Start***' fills that gap. '***Kick Start***' is designed to overcome the deficiencies that exist in typical weaning pasture, reduce weaning stress and therefore keep young weaners moving forward.

'***Kick Start***' contains balanced levels of Ca & Mg to ensure strong bone growth and effective smooth muscle function, which is necessary for developing rumens. Mg, together with Vitamin B₁, found in '***Kick Start***' are also important for managing emotional stresses in newly weaned lambs

'***Kick Start***' contains simple sugars for energy production and Methionine which is needed for energy utilization and wool growth. The Methionine in '***Kick Start***' is in a rumen protected form for increase absorption.

'***Kick Start***' contains Sulphur (S), necessary for protein synthesis and lipid metabolism, as well as Bovatec to aid in the prevention of coccidiosis. Additional minerals and vitamins including Vitamin A, essential for membrane integrity, mean '***Kick Start***' is the ideal solution to managing stress in weaners.

Fabstock's '***Kick Start***' provides a balanced nutritional package, is cost effective and delivers a real return on investment.

Summary

Managing weaners correctly can provide long term benefits to sheep producers. The disruption of flock structure creates both emotional and nutritional stress that can have a major impact on weaner growth. Fabstock's '***Kick Start***' together with sensible management can go a long way to alleviate these stresses and ensure maximum return.

For further information and assistance – please contact the author or your local Fabstock distributor.