



BELTEX SHEEP SOCIETY



FEEDING FOR SHOWS AND SALES

Feeding for showing is very different from feeding sheep to be sold into a commercial situation. The show sheep is fed on concentrates way beyond maintenance and growth for both energy and protein requirements. This leads to fat deposition with a condition score of 3.24 plus. The implications of this fat deposition need to be considered and from this an understanding of why sale sheep should condition score ideally at 3 with a max of 3.5.

The market drives concentrate usage as buyers tend to pay more for bigger fatter sheep but this excessive condition has serious health implications. A high level of concentrates reduces rumen pH which inhibits the microbes which break down rumen fibre. This induces soft oily intramuscular (marbling) fat deposits within smaller less compressed muscle groups surrounded by connective tissue of reduced strength. This weaker muscle structure predisposes to the so called 'melting' effect.

Skeletal strength is also reduced leading to possible wobbler syndrome (unsteadiness) and joint and limb deviations.

In rams fat is deposited in the scrotum leading to increased scrotal temperature which in turn reduces testosterone production. The increase in scrotal temperature is compounded by longer lying times in fatter animals. The end product is a ram with reduced libido (due to reduced testosterone) with sub fertility due to low sperm activity with associated reduced sperm survival following freezing and thawing.

Overweight sheep have a greater susceptibility to respiratory problems such as laryngeal infections and pneumonia with possible secondary problems such as liver abscesses.

Overfeeding young females results in excessive fat deposition in mammary glands causing lifelong reduced milk production.

So accepting that some concentrates are required to present animals for sale here are some feeding guidelines:

1. Concentrate feeding should commence once the spring grass quality reduces and graded in over 3 to 4 weeks for roughly a 60 day period prior to sale time.
2. Have a 60:40 % forage to concentrate ratio to avoid sub acute rumen acidosis.
3. Feed concentrates (levels of 14% protein for shearlings and 18% for lambs) not exceeding 0.5 kg/ feed which can be mixed with soaked sugarbeet shreds to bulk diet. Feed smaller feeds often to attain required condition score.
4. Feed stalky forage ad lib to encourage saliva flow which buffers acidosis and stimulates rumen motility.
5. Exercise is vital for efficient food conversion, genuine muscle development and bone and ligament soundness in and around joints.
6. 24 hour access to clean water.
7. Plenty of trough space and move troughs frequently. Feed in small batches of approx. 20 to avoid bullying and enable regular condition scoring of thinner sheep.
8. Mineral buckets available at all times.

Vitamins and minerals play an important role in growth rate and skeletal strength. Zinc, cobalt, vit E and selenium should all be supplemented during the growth phase prior to sales. Vit E is important in sperm production and can be given by injection or orally in fish oil extracts.

Finally don't forget fluke and worm control.

Sensible production produces productive sheep with good fertility and longevity which reflects well on both producer and breed. Good luck all.