

Lambing in organic systems

The lambing period is the most important period in a shepherd's calendar. With all the time taken scanning/feeding the flock and preparing the lambing shed you want the lambing period to go without too many problems. Some deaths amongst ewes and lambs during lambing are always inevitable. The following information is an update on good husbandry practises, a memory jogger on identifying early symptoms and treating the symptoms, whilst compiling with the Organic standards. These notes are for guidance only and are in no way advice on animal husbandry. If you are in doubt, speak to your vet and get in touch with the SOPA office for guidance and clarification.

Pre-lambing preparations

The ewe

During late pregnancy the ewe is more prone to infections since her immune system is under stress and her resistance is lowered. It is important to have your ewes lambing in the ideal condition score (CS) which is 2.75 -3.25, and have them grouped per CS i.e. so that poorer/twins/triplet ewes are fed appropriately.



The most common metabolic disease is **Twin Lamb Disease** (TLD) which is an imbalance in the ewe's metabolic energy this could be due to inadequate quantity of feed or poor feed quality. TLD usually occurs antenatally.

Treatment needs to be given immediately.

SUSCEPTIBLE ANIMALS	SYMPTOMS
Ewes carrying more than one lamb	Standing back from the rest and not coming to feed
Shy feeders that won't come in to feed	Wobbly/unsteady on her feet
Young sheep which get bullied by older ewes	Appearing vacant and 'stargaze'.
Ewes already in poor condition or over fat	Her vision could be affected

Where possible separate the ewe, ensuring she is within sight and sound of other ewes.

Tempt her to eat to regain her appetite.

At this stage you may have to submit to conventional medicines or call your vet.

Keep an eye on her, for when she starts to lamb she may need assistance, as she will be very weak.

TLD can be mistaken for **Hypocalcaemia (Milk Fever)**, as the symptoms are the same.

Hypocalcaemia is a lower-than-normal amount of calcium in the blood.

Generally, hypocalcaemia will occur post-parturition.

Make sure that heavily pregnant ewes are not stressed or deprived of feed for long periods.

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The Ewe continued

Vaginal Prolapses are most common 2-4 weeks before lambing, and again can be due to having your ewes in the wrong CS for lambing i.e. too fat or too thin. Other causes include; large amounts of feed given at any one time. i.e. 2 -3 feeds a day is better than 1, ewes having more than 2 lambs and the fact that housed ewes have little exercise.

Signs – looks like a small pink football appearing from under the tail, this is the lining of the vagina.

Treatment – this football needs to be replaced back inside the ewe. The methods that can be used are:

The plastic prolapse retainer (known as coat hangers or spoons)

The harness

Stitching the vulva is quite effective; preferably stitched by a vet.

Remember to remove the prolapse retainers when the ewe starts lambing.

Abortion Most flocks have the occasional abortion. It is important to try and identify the infection causing abortion in the flock, as it is potentially infectious to other sheep and to people and particularly pregnant women.

Action Plan

Isolate the aborting ewe

Mark the ewe so she can be identified later

Collect the dead lambs and any placenta (handle with plastic gloves), either take samples for the vet and dispose of legally.

Destroy all infected material and bedding where the ewe aborted.

If any lambs are alive, mark them so they are not kept for replacements.

The Ewe Post Lambing

Mastitis is an inflammation of the udder caused by the infection with various types of bacteria, and can occur during the ewe's lactation. Once the ewe has lambed, check the udder for any swelling or heat and strip out the ewe in case of any blockages, this will also help the lamb accessing colostrum.

Milk Fever (Hypocalcaemia) immediately administer Calcium Borogluconate. Isolate animal into clean, quiet area for nursing to recovery.

Ringling and castration with rubber rings should not be used on lambs under the age of 24 hrs or over the age of 2 weeks.

* *See Guidance Note on using Colostrum.*

If you discover a disease outbreak please seek advice from your veterinary surgeon and administer treatment as soon as possible.

Remember, the use of **prophylactic antibiotics is not permitted.**

However, if animal welfare is at risk, please liaise with SOPA and your veterinary surgeon to remedy the problem as efficiently as possible.

Your Livestock Management Plan should be a useful tool in looking at dealing with known diseases over a period of time.

The SOPA Office Number is 0131 335 6606 (enter this in your mobile phone)

Lambing equipment

Keep equipment clean and to-hand

Towels

Lambing ropes

Lubricant

Respiratory stimulants

Stomach tubes

Iodine Navel Treatment

Calcium Borogluconate (for treatment of TLD and hypocalcaemia)

Long acting penicillin (for difficult & assisted lambing)

Thermometers

Rubber castration rings and applicator (#)

Bottles & Teats

Lamb Jackets

Supply of Colostrum(*)