Sheep – Housing

Housing Sheep around Lambing

Advantages of housing:
- Sheltered environment for the newborn lambs
- Protection against extreme weather conditions for ewes, lambs and shepherd
- Ewes can be sorted into different batches according to condition score, number of lambs being carried, state of teeth, lambing dates etc. Regular condition scoring can be used to adjust feeding of the ewes accordingly
- Ewes and lambs can be more carefully observed for signs of illness or lambing
- Housing prevents damage to the pasture by sheep poaching pasture during wet winter months and eating of young grass shoots in February and March.

Disadvantages of housing:
- Investment in well-designed buildings
- Cost of bedding material (and food)
- Disease risk; build up of pathogens during the lambing period and quick spread of disease by close contact between animals. This can be prevented and limited by good management and well-constructed buildings (cleanable, good drainage, well ventilated, spacious).

Building design:
- Convenient environment for the shepherd to work in
- Shelter from the prevailing wind, rain and snow
- Ready access to water (warm and cold) and electricity
- When ewes are housed in pens together, allow at least 1.2-1.4 sq. metres space per ewe, allow an extra 0.5-0.6 sq. metre for each lamb up to 12 weeks old
- Each ewe should have at least 0.45 metre (18 inch) trough space available
- Bedding: about 2 bales of straw are needed for each ewe for a 3 month housed period
- Solid walls to a height of 1.0-1.2m (3 ft 3 in - 4 ft) will keep draught away from the sheep
- Make sure there is enough light for during the early hours. Power plugs should be available for shearing or infra-red lamps.

Lambing pens:
- Provide one pen per 8 ewes
- Each pen needs to house one ewe and two lambs, therefore 2m x 1m minimum. Place pens on a dry, well drained site with easy access, dry bedding is vital in preventing infections
- Provide clean feed and water at least twice daily
- Clean, disinfect and provide new bedding between each occupation
- Adding a small amount of hydrated lime under the bedding can help to reduce infections.

Hospital area
- Provide electric light, power points and hot and cold water
- Ensure floors and walls are easy to clean and disinfect
- Provide one adopter pen and one isolation pen (2m x 1m) per 50 ewes
- Provide at least one lamb warmer box
- Organise an aftercare unit for weak lambs. Infra-red lamps overhead are useful for extra heat
- Provide small group pens for ewes to mother-up and get well established. This is important for ewes with weakly or fostered lambs or those whose lambs have had hypothermia
- Create small well sheltered paddocks adjacent to the lambing area to aid close observation before turning out sheep with problems.
Equipment for aiding a lambing:
- Lubricant
- Soap (wash hands and arms before and after lambing)
- Disposable paper towels or clean and washed towels
- Lambing cords and snare
- Respiratory stimulant drops.

Farmers first aid cupboard:
- Arm-length disposable gloves (for delivering dead lambs)
- Lamb stomach tube, with syringe or funnel
- Lamb feeding bottle
- Clean cubs (for milking a ewe if necessary)
- Frozen colostrum (in 200ml pots/packages) – preferably sheep colostrum, but goat or cow colostrum can be used as alternatives
- Commercial dried colostrum
- Antibiotic injection (e.g. long acting oxytetracycline or penicillin) for any problems
- Anti-inflammatory (for infections that bring pain, discomfort and fever), there are no licensed products for sheep, use a product as advised by your vet
- Antibiotic aerosol spray
- Antibiotic oral tablets or pump (watery mouth prevention)
- Ewe prolapse harness
- Tail docking equipment
- Eye cream (curled in eyelids or eye infections)
- Glucose injection (twin lamb disease, lamb hypothermia)
- Ketol (oral treatment for twin lamb disease)
- Markers
- Ear-tags and applicators
- Foot trimming equipment
- Disinfectant for footwear and equipment
- Torch and spare batteries
- Kettle to boil water, and jug to warm up milk or glucose for orphan lambs or lambs with hypothermia
- Calcium injection (hypocalcaemia, e.g. ewes not getting up after a stress situation)
- Navel lotion (iodine)
- Cotton wool
- Surgical spirit (clean udders before milking, disinfect needles etc.)
- Needles
- Syringes
- Drenching bottle
- Sharps container
- Thermometer
- Sharp knife

Other equipment:
- Castration equipment
- Infrared lights
- Notebook & pens

References: