



EWES: A GUIDE TO Pregnancy Toxaemia

Overview

Pregnancy toxaemia (also known as twin lamb disease, sleepy sickness, lambing sickness and pregnancy disease) is a disease mainly seen in twin-bearing ewes in late pregnancy.

Lifestyle farmers should be aware of this disease syndrome because if signs are not picked up early and treatment is delayed the chances of a successful outcome rapidly decrease.

The condition arises when pregnant ewes are underfed in the latter stages of gestation.

This can include:

1. Prolonged underfeeding (due to a lack of feed) or,
2. Sudden bouts of decreased intake due to either inclement weather or,
3. Health conditions restricting their ability to graze (eg Footrot, parasites, dental problems).

When animals are not supplied with enough energy in the form of glucose they begin to breakdown their own body fat to use as fuel.

In short, this begins a cascade of detrimental metabolic reactions that ultimately result in death of the ewe.

Casues & Symptoms

The first things you may notice as a ewe becomes affected by pregnancy toxaemia are:

- Separation from the flock
- Depression
- Loss of appetite
- "Wool pool" where the wool is easily plucked

Without treatment, they will progressively worsen with:

- Apparent blindness
- Aimless wandering
- Staggering
- Frothing at the mouth
- Champing of the jaws

Animals then become recumbent, 'star gaze' and eventually comatose before dying. Ewes showing nervous signs or those that are down have a poor prognosis even with treatment.

Management/ Prevention/ Treatment

Early treatment is vital, but it must be remembered that prevention is better than cure.

Ensure that your flock is not being underfed in the final stages of pregnancy. Talk to our vets about how much they require and how to go about getting extra feed into them if it is required.

If any of the early signs of pregnancy toxaemia are noticed, you can begin daily treatments with oral energy drenches such as Ketol, along with increasing their feed allocation.

When to call us

If ewes are showing advanced signs of disease, a visit from our vets will provide you with the best chance for a successful outcome. We have the ability to give dextrose into the vein, steroids and fluid therapy in more serious cases.



*Updated Aug 25