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News release

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*For immediate use*

**Monitor Farm programme project highlights ewe BCS issue this autumn**

Sheep producers are being urged to check their ewes’ Body Condition Score (BCS) now and to take action to ensure they are at BCS 3-3.5 before tupping, or 2.5 in a hill flock.

The advice comes from Ali Haggerty, a vet with Stewartry Veterinary Centre, who warns that the difficult spring and summer could impact both next year’s lambing and subsequent lamb performance if ewes are too thin.

At a recent meeting at the Dumfries Monitor Farm, she advised farmers to condition score ewes now if they hadn’t already done so, and to think about how much condition they would need to gain to achieve target BCS before tupping.

“Increasing BCS by one score – so, say, from BCS 2 to 3 – is equivalent to about 10-12% of the ewe’s mature bodyweight. So, for a 70kg ewe, that’s 7-8.4kg. How many days do you have before tupping to achieve that BCS?”

Ali said: “Ewes can gain 0.5 BCS in around four weeks from good quality grazing. At Barnbackle, lambs have been weaned in early July, but there is a focus now on increasing ewe BCS before lambing. We’re looking to achieve greater than 80% of the flock to be at the desired BCS at tupping.”

The need to achieve target BCS before tupping is being driven by findings from an ongoing project at Barnbackle. Richard McCornick and his family, who run the 200ha (500-acre) beef and sheep unit are expanding their flock, so there is a particular focus on improving performance.

The project is looking at factors affecting colostrum quality and lamb survival. At lambing this year colostrum was sampled pre-suckling and tested for antibody concentration and bacterial contamination. A cohort of lambs were then blood sampled 48 hours after colostrum ingestion to assess passive immunity. As part of the project, all ewes have been condition scored at key times.

The collaborative project between Monitor Farm Scotland, Livestock Health Scotland and run by The Stewartry Veterinary Centre and University of Glasgow, involves a holistic approach, said vet and researcher Ali, who is Barnbackle’s vet. The ultimate aim of the project is simple; to increase lamb neonatal survival rates, leading to more lambs for sale, she said.

While Ali cautioned that the study is only a snapshot in time on one farm, she said there are some key areas of focus.

“Low maternal BCS at lambing led to poorer quality colostrum being produced. It is also associated with lighter lambs, which had reduced survivability, body temperature regulation and ability to get up and sucking. These ewes also had reduced mothering ability and bonding with their lambs, especially outside. In this case study, we found a positive association between colostrum antibody and lamb serum antibody. Every unit increase in colostrum quality increased lamb antibody levels, boosting immunity and reducing disease and mortality.”

With grass growth being variable in many areas this spring and summer, condition scoring and taking action now is vital. “In a season like this, many ewes will not have recovered from lambing as well as usual, so it is critical to think about what you are putting in front of ewes now, so you are not impacting the next crop; don’t perpetuate a vicious cycle of poor performance.”

**Project collaborators**

Barnbackle is one of nine Monitor Farms across Scotland taking part in the Monitor Farm programme run by Quality Meat Scotland and AHDB and funded by Scottish Government. This aims to help farms reach full economic, social, and environmental sustainability by optimising production. Over the four-year project, other farmers and experts will be brought together to help the businesses assess farm performance, explore opportunities, and develop solutions to their challenges.

Livestock Health Scotland (LHS) is a ‘not for profit’ producer-led organisation focused on building the health and welfare status of Scottish livestock. It aims to work in partnership with livestock producers and farm vets to achieve this, and also aims to be a bridge between researchers, systems experts and those operating at farm business level, creating a pathway for innovation.

LHS’s activities include: Maintaining active two-way communication with producers and farm vets; providing information and technical guidance in collaboration with expert groups; supporting smarter disease management strategies at farm and national level, through biosecurity, health screening, vaccine programmes and responsible use of medicines, and; providing a pathway for innovation, data capture and adoption of best practice.

**Ends**

**Notes to editors:**

About Monitor Farm Scotland:

· The Monitor Farm Scotland programme is managed by Quality Meat Scotland with support from AHDB.

· The programme is fully funded by the Scottish Government Knowledge Transfer Innovation Fund.

· The nine farms chosen to take part in this four-year programme reflect the diverse tapestry of livestock and mixed farming across Scotland.

· The aim of the programme is to help to farms reach full economic, social, and environmental sustainability by optimising production.

· The programme is farmer led and farmer driven with support from specialists and experts to assess farm performance, explore opportunities, and develop solutions to the challenges faced.

· Each Monitor Farm will be steered by a management group of 10 to 12 farming businesses with support from the local community group.

· The learnings and the example set by Monitor farms aims to benefit farmers across the whole of Scotland.

· The programme is managed by an in-house delivery team, who are funded through the programme and managed by QMS.

· For more information visit: https://www.monitorfarms.co.uk/

About QMS:

Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) is the public body which helps Scotland’s £2.8 billion red meat sector maximise its positive role in our wealth, health and environment. This includes supporting productivity and profitability, sustainability and integrity, as well as around 50,000 jobs across the red meat supply chain including in some of our most rural areas.

90% of Scotland’s cattle, sheep and pig livestock farmed for red meat are part of our internationally recognised and approved [assurance schemes](https://qmscotland.co.uk/integrity-assurance/quality-assurance), under the Scotch Beef UK geographical indicator (UKGI), Scotch Lamb UKGI and Specially Selected Pork brands. They give people at home and overseas the legal guarantee that the meat they buy has come from animals that have spent their whole lives being raised to the highest of standards.

The suite of assurance schemes extends across the supply chain including feeds, haulage, auction-market and processing. Together the six livestock and non-livestock schemes make sure Scotland’s red meat is among the worlds-best for quality, animal welfare standards, production and traceability.

We are evidence-informed and work closely with partners across the supply chain to [track developments](https://qmscotland.co.uk/markets-prices) in the beef, pork and lamb markets, sharing latest market prices, market developments and commentary with industry.

QMS also:

* runs major marketing and advertising campaigns to promote the brands and drive demand
* supports product development and innovation for profitable supply chains
* works on projects which support environmentally friendly practice for a sustainable sector that plays a key part in protecting our planet
* educates young and aspiring people across classrooms, sports clubs and communities in Scotland on the health benefits of red meat and career opportunity in the sector
* Please note that the use of the word ‘Scotch’ in the Scotch Beef and Scotch Lamb brands is correct and should not be substituted for an alternative such as Scots or Scottish. The history of the use of the word Scotch in this way traces back to the 18th century.

**Useful info**

* [QMS 5-year Strategy to 2028](https://heyzine.com/flip-book/4ee0786293.html)
* [Red Meat Industry Profile 2024](https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/quality-meat-scotland/documents/Publications/QMS-RMIP-2024.pdf) – for key statistics across the red meat supply chain
* [QMS website](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk/)
* QMS social media - [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/QualityMeatScotland) / [Twitter](https://x.com/qmscotland) / [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/quality-meat-scotland/posts/?feedView=all)
* [QMS Podcast](https://qmscotland.co.uk/news-media/qms-podcast)