



David Thornton,  
Rumenco Technical Manager

David Thornton, Rumenco technical manager, explains how paying close attention to ram care now can have really significant and positive impacts on ram performance in the coming months.

"In the current economic climate, every piece of farm expenditure has to be carefully considered, and ideally evidence based. Therefore, you want the rams you sell to perform as well as they can for their new owners, not only to protect their investment, but to assure you of some repeat business at next year's ram sales.

"Careful management of ram health through nutrition, in the run up to the sale, is essential both to support fertility, and also to prepare rams to be able to maintain their body condition during the rigorous six weeks of tupping.

"Up to 15% of ram bodyweight can be lost during the breeding season, and if ram condition is poor at the offset of the breeding season, then fertility will be affected. However, rams should be fit, not fat!

"Sperm production typically takes six to eight weeks, so ensure ram preparations start early.

"In an ideal scenario, rams purchased at a sale will be quarantined for two to three weeks before being turned out with the ewes. However, it's highly likely that some rams may well go straight from the sale to work, and therefore the preparation you do before the sale is vital.

"Consider supporting the diet of rams at grass to ensure that they receive all the nutrients they require. A sufficient supply of energy is essential to support increased activity, protein to support semen quality and libido, zinc and selenium to support healthy sperm production, and vitamin B12 to support energy metabolism and post-tupping recovery."



Undertake routine vaccinations (clostridia, pasturella) and parasite control as part of the whole flock health plan.

Check for under-or over-shot teeth, gaps and molar abscesses. If teeth are lost or become too long the ram will not be able to eat sufficiently to maintain condition in the run up to, and during the intensive six-week tupping period.

Check locomotion, arthritis and hooves. If a ram is lame, their ability to serve ewes will be limited. Treat any lame rams following best practice protocols.

Measure and check firmness, and for any lumps or bumps – they should be as firm as a flexed bicep. Large firm testicles produce 80% more semen each day than medium sized, soft ones.

Ram body condition score (BCS) should be between 3.5 and 4 (depending on breed and type) at the start of tupping. 15% of bodyweight can be lost during the six weeks of tupping, and if ram condition is poor, performance will be affected.

## Supporting rams at grass



Making the best possible utilisation of available forage, and supporting tup condition without reliance on large amounts of concentrate is possible, says David Thornton.

"Producing rams that are able to work hard, be prolific, and have longevity is the aim of all ram breeders. Doing that from grass alone can be difficult.

"Grass palatability and quality decreases from approximately mid-July onwards, at the same time that nutritional demands from stock increases in the run up to the breeding season.

"Feeding large amounts of concentrates daily can be costly and also time consuming. Rumenco's Lifeline Ram Care bucket is a convenient way to provide the essential supplementary nutrients that are often deficient in grass at this time of year.

"Developed by SAC, as part of the Easicare™ system, Lifeline Ram Care balances existing forage, supplying rams with all the key minerals, vitamins and the required energy, plus a supply of fish oil, rich in omega-3 fatty acids which helps to support ram libido.

"It also supports rumen function which, in turn, supports lean growth, through the inclusion of XP, unique fermentation product containing multiple functional compounds working together to support animal health and performance.

"Carefully targeted nutritional supplementation can be cost effective, particularly when it aids better utilisation of the on-farm grazing and forages, at the same time as supporting ram health and performance," he adds.