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*Summary only*

COMBINED EFFECT OF DATE OF LAMBING AND  
STOCKING RATE ON EWE AND LAMB LIVEWEIGHT  
DURING LACTATION

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The combined effect of date of lambing and stocking rate on ewe and lamb liveweights during a 15-week lactation was tested using Romney ewes mated to Southdown rams.

Two stocking rates, 27.2 and 16.1 ewes/ha, and two dates of lambing, September 6 and October 2, were chosen. Ewes and lambs were set-stocked from parturition to weaning.

Stocking rate had a significant effect on both ewe liveweight and lamb growth rate during the experiment. Ewes stocked at 27.2 ewes/ha progressively lost weight and the mean growth rate of their lambs was 1.3 kg/week. Ewes stocked at 16.1 ewes/ha gained weight and their lambs' mean growth rate was 1.8 kg/week. At 16.1 ewes/ha there was no advantage in delaying the date of lambing. However, at 27.2 ewes/ha, the early lambing ewes (September 6) were placed in a period of restricted feed supply for the first five weeks of lactation and lost 4.5 kg of body weight in this period.

The late lambing ewes (October 2) gained 1.5 kg in the corresponding period. There was no significant difference in growth rates of lambs born early and those born-late. This indicates the ability of the ewe to insulate her lamb(s) from the effects of feed restriction during the first weeks of lactation. By weaning, at 15 weeks, there was no significant difference in ewe liveweights or lamb growth rates.

The early lambing date provides flexibility in management of a fat lamb enterprise. The lamb is at a more acceptable age for weaning when the decline in pasture production occurs from mid-November, in this experiment 11 weeks of age compared with 7 weeks of age. Against this must be weighed the condition of the ewe at parturition and her ability to insulate her lamb(s) during the first weeks of pregnancy. The late lambing date, while providing an early advantage, does suffer a distinct disadvantage for lamb growth from mid-November onwards, particularly if there is abnormal feed restriction in this period.

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