

## **PREGNANCY TOXAEMIA IN EWES** (also known as twin lamb disease)

### **Description**

Pregnancy Toxaemia is an energy crisis disease of heavily pregnant ewes (or cattle, goats). It is a consequence of inadequate dietary intake to satisfy the huge energy demands of late pregnancy. Insufficient energy intake occurs due to:

- a) poor available feed
- b) ewe too fat/pregnant, restricting the physical room for feed i.e. simply cannot eat enough!
- c) Ewe goes off her feed for another reason – through a fence, indigestion, in shed for crutching, concurrent disease.

When faced with this insufficiency the body responds by rapidly breaking down body fat. Unfortunately, rapid fat breakdown produces ketones. Ketones are toxic, producing the characteristic weakness and “dopiness”. Fat is shifted to the liver to perform this process, resulting in a swollen yellow – brown liver.

### **Prevention**

Feed management – Aim to have ewes in correct body condition at joining which will then allow for maintenance feeding during pregnancy. Requirements of twin and triplet bearing ewes increase in the final trimester so ensure ewes have good access to feed. Our team can help you with feed budgeting to ensure pregnancy toxaemia is minimized on your farm.

Avoid late pregnancy stress – keep periods of yarding very short. Ideally do not handle ewes in the last 4 weeks pre-lambing. If having to handle ewes use low stress stock handling and do not hold in yards.

Scanning for twins and singles allows for correct feeding of ewes.

### **Treatment – drugs and drenches**

The treatment of pregnancy toxaemia is most effective if caught early. The treatment of chronic downer ewes is less than 50% effective.

#### **Energy replacement –**

- a) Glycerine based drenches e.g. Ketol- bypass the normal energy pathways and provide energy to the ewe – 125ml once daily.
- b) Injectable dextrose – Delivered as part of “4 in 1’s”, provides energy direct to the bloodstream. Approx 100ml twice daily. Warm prior to administration to increase absorption.

#### **Abort / induce the lambs – reduced the energy load (involves prescription drugs)**

Dexamethasone – Promotes the birth process and has a secondary effect of stopping the fat breakdown. Induction of birth in ewes is unpredictable, so sometimes this treatment fails and needs repeating. Removal of the foetal unit removes the energy demand associated with pregnancy.

C-section is another option for valuable animals. The success rate of C-section depends on how rapidly the condition is identified and treated.