in the North East concentrates were introduced in late pregnancy before ewes were housed for lambing.

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A plate meter is required for this approach, so a grass budget can be drawn up based on the grass cover available, the residuals required and the intake requirements of the ewes. Size of paddock can then be calculated. Table 3 shows required dry matter intakes for ewes pre and post-scanning (these will need to be adjusted based on grass quality and weather conditions).

It is necessary to have a plan for bad weather, including supplies of conserved forage and sacrifice pastures to limit the areas of poaching. This requirement for a reserve feed supply needs to be factored against the cost savings expected.

## **Grazing ability**

In order to graze efficiently, ewes will need good teeth and good feet. These should be checked routinely before tupping and any ewes with problems not introduced to the paddock grazing until they have been resolved. A proportion of ewes will fail to adapt to the system and will need alternative management. Over time, culling the ewes that don't cope and controlling lameness will produce a flock better suited to the system.

A second alternative ahead of lambing is total mixed ration (TMR) feeding. Providing a TMR can have advantages over a traditional forage-plus-concentrates system, including providing a constant, balanced supply of energy and protein to rumen microbes and avoiding the changes in rumen pH associated with feeding large meals of concentrate.

To some extent it reduces competition for feed at the trough, but it is still important to ensure there is enough space (20-30cm/ewe) to maximise dry matter intake even in heavily pregnant ewes. With a tight lambing flock, feeding a TMR allows the energy and protein levels of the diet to be adjusted through late pregnancy to meet increasing nutrient demands from decreasing intakes. In addition it should be possible to use cheaper, homegrown ingredients that will still meet both energy and protein requirements. Adas has completed a study that shows rapeseed meal, beans or wheat distiller's dark grains perform equally as well as soya as part of a TMR.

When feeding a TMR it is important to remember there are at least three diets on farm – the diet on paper worked out by the nutritionist, the diet as it is actually fed, and the diet the ewes eat which may be changed by sorting, heating in the trough or feeds not performing as analysed. At the end of the day the sheep will give you the best answer on how good the diet is, so regular condition scoring and blood samples pre-lambing avoid problems due to assumptions that what works on paper must work on farm.

## **Traditional systems**

Not to neglect the traditional approach of forage-plusconcentrates, simplicity and flexibility are the main advantages of this system. Concentrates and conserved forages can be fed when they are required to supplement grass. The danger of feeding concentrates is that too large a concentrate feed can lead to acidosis, so concentrates should be fed twice daily in late pregnancy. It is important that forages are analysed, as energy and protein content can vary significantly year to year, which changes the specification of the concentrate needed to balance it. The better a forage you can make the easier and cheaper it is to supplement it.

There are various forage crops which can also be an alternative to grazed grass over winter, including kale, fodder beet and turnips. All these crops increase the risk of bloat, especially if they are grazed when frosted, and can cause metabolic problems such as hypocalcaemia. Fodder beet and turnips can cause acidosis and kale has been associated with nitrate poisoning. In addition soil contamination increases the risk of clostridial disease, although that is less of a concern in vaccinated ewes. Where forage crops are used, a grass run back area or baled silage must be offered to minimise these risks. ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2015 TUESDAY, 3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER STARETON HALL, STONELEIGH PARK WARWICKSHIRE CV8 2LZ

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