HARPERS FEEDS
Focused on nutrition

feedtalk

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TARGET EWE NUTRITION THIS WINTER



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When winter arrives, the temptation is to think that keeping sheep fit is simply a case of keeping enough feed in front of them. There's a big difference between a full stomach and a well nourished sheep.

Winter is one of the most important periods in the sheep farming calendar. What happens at the feed trough now can influence lambing performance, lamb survival, ewe condition and productivity for months to come.

In late pregnancy, a ewe carrying twins has significantly higher energy requirements than one carrying a single lamb. Yet, as the lambs grow, they take up more room and reduce rumen space which limits a ewe's capacity to eat forage. Just when she needs more nutrition, she has less room for it!

This is why targeted concentrate feeding becomes particularly important in the final six weeks before lambing. Good-looking hay or silage does not necessarily mean good-quality forage. Two bales from different fields can look almost identical but have very different energy, protein and mineral values.

Forage analysis is one of the most valuable tools available to sheep farmers. Knowing the dry matter, metabolisable energy (ME), protein and mineral content allows rations to be balanced more accurately.

At Harpers Feeds, we offer a forage testing service to help customers understand exactly what is being fed to their sheep. By analysing forage nutrient content, we can help tailor concentrate feeding to complement the forage already available. This allows farmers to make informed feeding decisions, target nutritional requirements more accurately and avoid spending money on concentrates or supplements that may already be provided by the forage.



Energy and protein often get most of the attention, but minerals and trace elements are just as important.

Calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, iodine, cobalt, vitamin E and selenium all have important roles in sheep health, growth and reproduction. However, getting the balance right matters just as much as providing the minerals themselves.

Harpers 18% Super Ewe and 19% Intensive Ewe diets are fully mineralised and supply a range of protein and energy sources to help boost colostrum quality and quantity, lamb vigour and milk production.

Lambing may be the milestone everyone works towards, but the ewe's nutritional demands remain as high post-lambing as they do pre-lambing. In fact, a 75kg lowland ewe rearing twins requires around 34MJ ME/day at peak milk production (3-4 weeks post lambing). This equates to 1.1-1.6.kg of concentrates per day, depending on forage quality. If her diet does not provide enough energy, she will begin mobilising her own body reserves to support milk production, potentially losing excessive body condition in the process.

By using the Harpers Ewe Feed Ready Reckoner, farmers can prepare to support good milk production, maintain ewe condition and give lambs the best possible start.

Concentrate levels should be increased gradually, allowing the rumen time to adapt. Ideally, anything more then 0.5kg per head per day should be split into two feeds.

Don't forget water! It is easy to concentrate on what goes into the feed trough and overlook what comes out of the water trough. Sheep need a reliable supply of clean, fresh water throughout winter. Water intake is particularly important during lactation. As milk production increases, so does the ewe's demand for water. Restricted water intake can quickly affect feed intake and milk production.

After the prolonged drought this summer, and with many sheep farmers heavily affected by bluetongue, body condition scoring is one of the simplest tools available to sheep farmers. Regularly assessing ewe condition helps identify animals losing weight before problems become obvious.

Grouping ewes according to body condition, the number of lambs they are carrying and stage of pregnancy allows nutrition to be targeted where it is needed most. Giving the chance to introduce our Massey Harpers high energy sheep buckets if required.

Winter feeding is not just about getting sheep through the winter months. It is an investment in the next lambing season and giving the lambs the best possible start.

So, perhaps the question is not how much feed we are putting out, but whether we are providing the right nutrition, to the right sheep, at the right time.

Don't just feed for survival this winter. Feed for success next spring.

FARMING THOUGHTS

As another year draws to a close, many of you will be happy to see the back of it. We had a great spring, with excellent weather for lambing, calving and first and second cuts, but the dry, hot weather in June, July and August blew it all away.

The sheer heat and bluetongue played havoc in our trading area, with winter forage stocks eaten, milk and fertility losses in cattle and losses in sheep flocks. We'll discuss this further at our January sheep meeting and February dairy seminars, where Dr Mark Hall from Trouw Nutrition will be our guest speaker.

In October, we brought our first shipment of animal feed into Appledore docks to secure raw material closer to our mill. With increasing delays on the M5 and A30, this should help with logistics while maintaining our longstanding relationships with existing shippers.

On behalf of everyone at Harpers Feeds and Massey Harpers, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Glen Johns
Sales Director
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GRAINS AND STRAIGHTS TRADING

As the year draws to an end, feed ingredient markets have been dominated by geopolitics, making prices extremely volatile and unpredictable.

At the end of February, conflict around the Strait of Hormuz pushed up oil and freight prices. July saw restrictions around the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait as tensions between Russia and Ukraine intensified. These disruptions continue to affect grain markets, with fund activity adding to price volatility.

CEREALS

With no sign of a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, grain markets remain unpredictable. Following reported damage to the Kerch Bridge in November, hopes of Black Sea exports resuming before the end of the year are fading. Importers are sourcing wheat elsewhere, but continued disruption could push prices higher.

In the UK, DEFRA's early supply and demand report estimates wheat production at 12.074 million tonnes, against 11.958 million tonnes last year. Stocks are approximately 500,000 tonnes lower, increasing the need for imports. Barley production is forecast at 5.614 million tonnes, down from 6.367 million tonnes. Barley is trading at a £16 per tonne discount to wheat, while grain maize prices have eased to similar levels to wheat in some areas. This will hopefully restrict wheat prices.

PROTEINS

Pre-Christmas soya remains at a premium as EU buyers build stocks ahead of EUDR requirements. In the previous two years, prices eased after Christmas as European stocks became adequate.

Despite reduced US yield estimates in the latest USDA report, global soya supplies remain healthy, with Brazil forecast to produce a record 186 million tonnes. Funds have sold some of their long positions, bringing forward prices lower. A stronger US dollar has added approximately £10 per tonne to soya prices.

Rape meal remains expensive, with restricted supplies before Christmas. Premiums for EUDR-compliant soya could make rape meal and sunflower more attractive in the new year.

FIBRES

The dry summer has also reduced sugar beet availability across the UK and Europe, putting pressure on alternatives including soya hulls, wheatfeed and wheat gluten.



Andrew Davies
Operations Director
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SHORT, MEDIUM OR LONG-TERM CATTLE

I have been studying a report on trial work done by Dr Jimmy Hislop at SRUC, looking at cattle performance on three systems.

Short, involved cattle being kept indoors and grown quickly to finish at 12 -14 months. Medium, managed cattle with one season at grass, then finished indoors at 18-20 months. Long-term, involved cattle spending two summers at grass and finished at 28-30 months.

The study looked at growth patterns and carcase quality, including eating quality. I have always believed that cattle finished at 18 months have the best feed conversion efficiency. This report goes further and confirms my beliefs.

I have condensed the findings into one chart, giving you the key figures for each method of production.

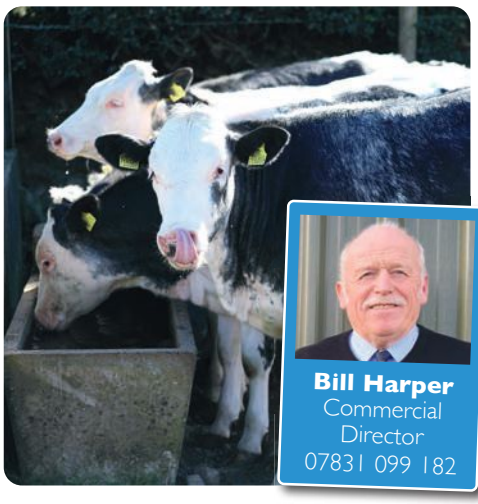
The meat shear test involves slicing meat across the grain and measuring the force needed to cut it, indicating the tenderness. I know we do not get paid for this, but we need consumers to have good experiences eating our steaks. One tough steak can put people off for a long time.

All Steers & heifers Limousin X	Short	Medium	Long
Daily Liveweight Gain (kg/day)	1.58	0.96	0.54
Muscle Depth (mm)	74	78	82
Slice shear force (kg)	10.8	10.4	11.9
Feeders margin in £ /head/ day	£3.72	£1.86	£0.91

There are two key points in the report. Firstly *"When expressed on a £/head/day basis, it is evident that a quadratic decline in FM/day exists as age at slaughter progresses."* Secondly, *"Commercial beef finishers should be advised to adopt efficient, short to medium duration finishing systems that will deliver higher eating quality beef to the human food chain whilst offering producers the greatest opportunity for commercial profit."* *

If you have cattle that are 350kg or over, please let us plan a finishing programme for them, to get them away in Spring 27. Keeping them another 12 months costs so much in maintenance, putting pressure on any potential margin. Let us help you maximise your beef system output.

**AHDB Beef & Lamb (Project Number 72510) May 2026.*



Bill Harper
Commercial Director
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FIRST APPLEDORE SHIPMENT SUPPORTS LOCAL FEED SUPPLY

In October, we welcomed our first shipment of wheat gluten into Appledore, working closely with one of our shippers, Torridge District Council and Navantia UK.

The shipment marks a step forward in bringing raw materials closer to our mill at Holsworthy. Wheat gluten pellets are produced during the manufacture of wheat starch and gluten and comes from different origins across Europe. Appledore is a tidal port, which means there is only a 10 day window each month for large vessels to berth and discharge, as a certain amount of draught (depth of water) is needed. This means it is not entirely straightforward, especially with the unpredictability of the weather.

This shipment saw 3,300 tonnes arrive in Bideford Bay on Sunday 25th October. She was due to berth that night, but unfortunately, due to the recent storm, we had to wait until Monday evening. Discharge started at 6am on Tuesday morning, and we loaded 2,300 tonnes that day, with the majority taken to a UFAS accredited store on the outskirts of Bideford. Product is loaded directly from the ship into lorries using a crane with a 2.2-tonne grab bucket, capable of loading approximately 150 tonnes per hour. Discharge was fully completed at 3pm the following day (Wednesday) ready for her to set sail that evening.

By shipping into Appledore, we can ship and store product closer to our mill at Holsworthy, reducing the distance lorries need to travel by road. With the unpredictability of the weather and issues with the road network, this will help with our continuity of supply. We will also be able to utilise our own fleet of lorries more efficiently, collecting material from the store after delivering feed to farms in the Bideford and Barnstaple area.

We look forward to our next shipment.



FIVE TIPS AHEAD OF SPRING CALVING

Good calf management is about getting the basics right consistently, from nutrition and hygiene to ventilation, testing and observation.

Good health is a key priority for all calf units, but especially for block calving herds. Changes in weather, humidity and higher stocking densities can create ideal conditions for bacteria and disease. I recommend focusing on five key areas to give calves the best possible start.

MILK VOLUME

A calf's vulnerable period is from 7–14 days as they change over from their passive to active immunity. High-volume milk feeding is a priority to give the calf the best possible start.

More energy supports growth and health. An extra litre of milk replacer might cost around 39p, but that extra 39p is always cheaper than a treatment of medicine.

1

TEST BEFORE TREATING

Scours can lead to unnecessary treatment and delayed recovery if the cause is unknown. I recommend keeping a calf scour test kit available to help identify the cause before deciding on treatment.

It can become very demoralising as a calf rearer to have sick calves. Testing helps you make informed treatment decisions. Treating correctly will save money and the calf is likely to return to normal health much quicker.

2



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Feed Specialist
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VENTILATION

I'm not a fan of routinely leaving calf jackets on continuously. In an ideal world, if you were putting calf jackets on, you would put them on at night and take them off in the morning, but that is an unrealistic commitment.

It's important to ensure excess heat can escape. Clipping the calf's back, at two to three weeks plus of age, can help with this, particularly where ventilation is an issue. If they are sweating, then that is daily liveweight gain that you are missing out on.

3

RUTHLESS HYGIENE

Autumn humidity and wet weather can create conditions for respiratory disease. Milk residue, dirty feeding equipment and contaminated bedding also increase infection pressure.

Be absolutely ruthless with cleaning and disinfecting. Pens housing several calves may need emptying and cleaning rather than simply topping up with fresh bedding. Sand can also be useful bedding for cows' calving pens.

4

WATCH THE CALF

Observation costs nothing. Changes in feeding behaviour, activity and interaction can indicate early illness.

Rather than waiting until a calf is visibly sick, act when the behaviour starts to change. Taking a temperature promptly and acting quickly can help.

In the long run, it will save you money, reduce your medicine usage and create a better environment for both the farmers and the calves.

5

CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS

We are only closed on **Christmas Day, Boxing Day Bank Holiday,** and **New Year's Day Bank Holiday,** but our normal delivery days may be subject to change.

The **last order date before Christmas** is **Tuesday 15th December** and the **last order date before New Year** is **Tuesday 22nd December.**

Please help us help you by providing as much spread as possible during the holiday season. Thank you for your co-operation.

Everyone at Harpers Feeds and Massey Harpers wishes all our customers a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

UNLOCKING EPIGENETIC EXPRESSION:
HOW FEEDING MORE MILK SHAPES A CALF'S RESILIENT FUTURE

For decades, calf nutrition programmes were designed to achieve modest growth while encouraging early starter intake and controlling rearing costs.



Today, a growing body of research suggests that enhanced milk feeding during the pre-weaning period does far more than improve daily liveweight gain.

Providing more nutrients during the first weeks of life can support organ development, immune function and long-term performance. Research suggests that nutrition during this critical developmental window may influence how a calf's genetic potential is expressed later in life.

Scientists use the term "epigenetics" to describe how environmental factors, including nutrition, can influence the way genes are expressed without changing the underlying DNA code. In simple terms, a calf's genes may determine what she can achieve, but early-life nutrition helps determine how much of that potential is realised.

Research by Dr. Geoffrey Dahl and colleagues at the University of Florida demonstrated that calves receiving higher planes of nutrition before weaning subsequently produced significantly more milk in their first lactation than calves fed lower amounts of milk replacer (Shamay et al., 2005). Similarly, Soberon et al. (2012) reported that every additional kilogram of pre-weaning average daily gain was associated with approximately 850 kg more milk in first lactation, highlighting the long-term impact of early-life nutrition.

Enhanced milk feeding not only supports greater growth rates but also provides nutrients for the development of key tissues and organs. During the pre-weaning period, calves are developing their immune system, digestive tract and mammary tissue while learning to cope with disease, environmental change and weaning stress.

Adequate nutrition helps provide the resources needed for growth and resilience.

From an epigenetic perspective, adequate energy and amino acid supply helps regulate DNA methylation and other molecular mechanisms that influence gene expression. While calf-specific epigenetic research is still emerging, evidence from livestock and human developmental biology shows that nutrition during early life can have lifelong consequences for health and productivity (Bach, 2012).

The practical message is clear: feeding more milk is not simply about growing bigger calves. It is about creating the nutritional environment that enables calves to unlock their genetic potential. Investing in higher milk allowances during the pre-weaning period may deliver benefits that extend beyond weaning, influencing future resilience, productivity and profitability.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The milk feeding strategy used during the first 8 weeks of life can influence far more than growth rate.

MAXIMISING FEED EFFICIENCY IS ESSENTIAL TO GETTING THE MOST OUT OF AVAILABLE FORAGE

While often considered simply a source of sugar, molasses blends play a much broader role in livestock nutrition.

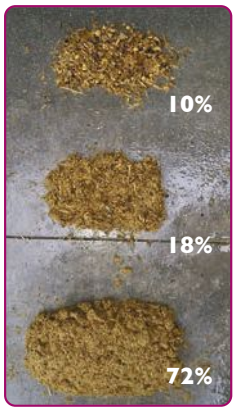
The highly available sugars provide an immediate energy source for rumen microbes, helping them break down fibre more efficiently and unlock more value from the forage.

Fibre has the slowest rate of energy release but can make up over 50% of the diet. This energy can be accessed if rumen microbes are given the opportunity and 'fuel'. Stimulating rumen microbial activity can improve fibre digestion and increase the total energy that can be extracted from the fibre.

Farm trials found that adding a molasses-based liquid feed to a ration, increasing sugar levels from 3% to 6%, resulted in a 17% increase in total ration digestibility. This means more energy is extracted from the fibre, delivering greater nutritional value from the ration being fed, which is key to ensuring efficient and resilient production systems.

ED&F Man molasses-based liquid feeds are blended to a specification, delivering the consistency and reliability needed on farm and offer a range of products to suit specific on farm needs for dairy, beef and sheep production systems.

BEFORE
using Liquid Sugars



AFTER
using Liquid Sugars



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

EVENT	DATE	LOCATION
Thursday 3rd December	Massey Harpers' 9th Birthday	Massey Harpers, EX22 6FU 9-4pm
Saturday 12th December	Wadebridge Rugby Game - To book, call 01409 254 300	Wadebridge RFC, PL27 6AQ
Saturday 9th January 2027	Bideford Rugby Game - To book, call 01409 254 300	Bideford Rugby Club, EX39 2QS (In conjunction with Torch Vets)
Wednesday 13th January 2027	Harpers Sheep Meeting - To book, call 01409 254 300	Riverside Caravan Park, South Molton, 6.30pm

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