



Animal Health & Welfare NI

## Sheep Health

### January Sheep Health

#### AHWNl Flock Health Focus: Be Smart This Winter for An Easier Spring: Scan Your Ewes Now

##### Scanning Timing

For later/spring lambing flocks, January is the ideal time to scan ewes. Animal Health and Welfare NI (AHWNI) is keen to remind sheep farmers that it's important to know your dates and to let your scanner know if there have been a range of ram introduction dates for different groups: the recommended time frame is 80-100 days post ram introduction, with the optimum scanning time being 80 days, and at least 45 days after ram removal. If scanned earlier, ewes may be inaccurately identified as barren, whereas later scanning can result in an inaccurate number of lambs scanned due to difficulty distinguishing between lambs given their size.

It is recommended that the ewes' feed is restricted for 8-10 hours prior to scanning: this will help to ensure that you receive accurate results, and it keeps your scanner happy! A full stomach takes up a lot of space and can therefore obscure the uterus and developing foetuses during a scan, as well as making it physically harder for the scanner to get the probe in the correct position. Easier scanning will result in greater accuracy; sufficient help, a steady flow and a full race can all lead to a smooth and quick scanning operation.

It's important to clearly mark ewes that are empty, or carrying singles, twins and triplets (or more), so that the ewes can be separated into different groups according to the number of lambs they are carrying.

##### Top 10 Scanning Benefits

Scanning will reduce the risk of any surprises come lambing time for a variety of reasons, such as the use of a subfertile/infertile ram, or an unexpected number of triplets. Knowing the total litter size means ewes can be grouped and fed accordingly, which can save you money.

The following are the top 10 benefits for scanning your ewes this season:

1. **Feed Smarter-** match feeding to litter size and stop wasting feed on ewes that don't require as high a nutrient load
2. **Improve Ewe Survivability-** feeding the appropriate nutrition to ewes carrying twins and triplets lowers the risk of metabolic diseases (e.g. twin lamb disease)
3. **Avoid Hard-to-Lamb Singles-** avoid overfeeding single ewes which will reduce lamb size, reducing lambing difficulty

4. **Cull Ewes that Aren't Earning Their Keep**- identify empty ewes early and avoid wasting money on them for feed or vaccines
5. **Improve Lamb Survivability**- know which ewes need extra attention and plan ahead for fostering lambs; correct feeding of the ewe will result in better quality colostrum and stronger lambs
6. **Plan Your Lambing Workload**- scanning shows anticipated lambing pressure at approximate dates, so you can manage staff, shed space, or sell on triplets to reduce workload if necessary
7. **Reduce Feed Costs**- ewes will be fed exactly what they need, as feed will be tailored according to the scanning result (litter size)
8. **Make Outdoor Lambing Easier**- for those outdoor lambing, high-risk ewes can be housed while other ewes can stay outside
9. **Spot Flock Issues Early**- a mismatch between scanning and actual numbers of lambs born/poor scanning rate can indicate gaps in management
10. **Check Ram Performance**- low scanning rates can highlight ram fertility issues and/or an inappropriate ram:ewe ratio

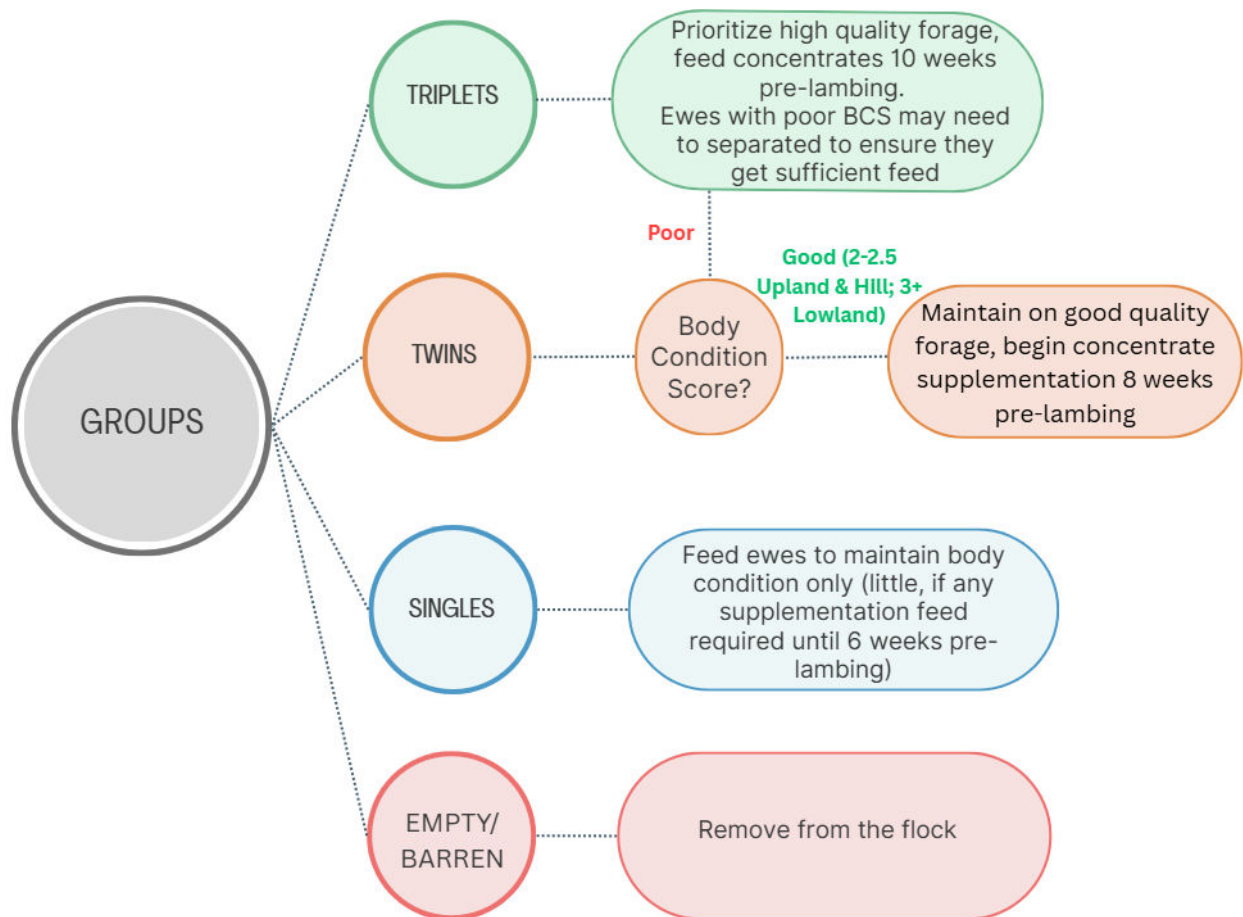
### What To Do With Your Scanning Results

There are several Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to look at once you receive your scanning results. Scanning % is the main figure to look at- this is the number of lambs scanned compared to the number of ewes scanned. The target will vary depending on your system:

| System    | Target Scanning % |
|-----------|-------------------|
| Lowland   | 170-200%          |
| Upland    | 120-170%          |
| Hill      | 100-120%          |
| Ewe Lambs | 100%              |

Barren percentage is also an important KPI; it shouldn't be more than 2% for mature ewes, while ewe lambs naturally may have a higher barren rate (up to 20%). Greater percentages warrant investigation. Many different factors contribute to this, in particular management or disease, which will be discussed further in the following piece.

Groups should be managed as follows:



A useful exercise is to keep a record of KPIs year on year and to benchmark your flock with other similar flocks. If there has been a change in management- e.g. a more prolific ram breed introduced, this can then be picked up on by comparing past years' scanning results.

### Book Your Scanning Now

If you've never scanned before, now is the perfect time to start. It's quick, straightforward, and extremely cost-effective for the amount of valuable information it provides. Scanning takes the guesswork out of lambing and gives you the tools to plan with confidence. And for those who already scan- are you truly making the most of the results? Discuss them with your private vet or agricultural adviser. Now's the time to use that information to its full potential, and take steps to improve next year's scanning results.