

Information Notes

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Total Supplementary Feeding Costs of Outwintered Ewes

With higher feed prices and reduced labour available on many hill and upland farms, the total cost of feeding ewes using different recommended feeding methods are of interest. Consider:

- A 1000 ewe hill flock is fed using 30 block sites 1 block(22.5kg)/30 ewes/week (110g/day)
- or with 6 six ball (200litre) Multifeeders for liquid feed allowing 250ml/ewe/day nominally
- or with a snacker feeding at 3 sites every day giving each ewe 280g/day of compound

Assume blocks are replaced weekly (time spent 6 hrs), liquid feed 2 x 1 week, (12 hrs) and concentrates fed daily (21hrs). Time spent feeding was costed in at £10/hr to include wages and fuel. The figures in the table (on the following page) are a guide only and may vary according to your own situation.

In terms of nutrient supplied, the blocks, liquid and concentrate provide around 12%, 21% and 21% respectively of a hill ewe's daily energy requirements (averaging 12 MJ/day). In total cost terms, of the three options the feedblock option is half as expensive but only supplies about half the nutritional requirement of the other two.. The actual choice of system will depend on farm circumstances. The snacker gives a high level of nutritional support to each ewe but much of the money spent is on labour. It is best suited to better, more accessible hills (by both shepherd and walkers) and where ewes have higher productivity levels (over 100% lambing). Some farmers are finding a switch to a Sheep Super Energy block close to lambing for singles and a move onto saved hill parks can free up time for lambing duties.

Liquid feeds supply more protein and are useful where large amounts of easily harvested low quality herbage is available eg. deferred grazing. Sheep in harder areas would need to be supplemented in late

pregnancy with up to 300-450 g of concentrate. However, where lambing occurs on lowland heathland or on the better hills and is delayed until grass growth has started then it is possible to winter ewes on liquid feeds or blocks alone, provided condition is checked to ensure welfare is not being compromised.

Gimmers are more likely to take feedblocks if fed as a group, as they tend to be shy feeders. In SAC trials giving gimmers access to Rumevite Sheep Super Energy feed blocks at 3.5 blocks per 100 gimmers per week until mid-January increased lambs at marking by 11% and lamb weaning weight by 1.7 kg.

Further work at SAC has shown that feedblock feeding **must** be integrated with shepherding in extensive flocks to produce acceptable levels of performance. For example, an extensive hill sheep management system without shepherding produced a weaning percentage of 51%. Introducing feed blocks and a shepherd increased this to 73%. Mating the ewes on rested enclosed improved grass with access to feed blocks and a shepherd at lambing gave a further increase to 85%. Where no shepherding was used in this latter system, weaning percentage was only 69%. These experiments show that a combination of shepherding and feed inputs is required. Relative to recent years feedblocks are currently a less expensive feeding method.

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**Total costs (feed, labour and depreciation over 5yr on feeders)
for a 1000 ewe hill flock over a 15 week feeding period**

Feed	Spec	Daily Intake	Frequency of feeding	Feed cost (£/t)	Cost of feeder	Labour cost/wk	Total cost ewe/week (p) for feed, dep. and labour/fuel
Blocks	High energy Block in container	110g	1 x week	365	540	60	$28.1+0.75+6.0$ =35p
Liquid	Sheep liquid in Multifeeder	250 ml	2 x week	226	1500	120	$50.75+2.0+12$ =65p
Conc. ex snacker	£1,250 Logic	280 g	7 X week	200 (bulk)	1250	210	$39.2+2.0+21$ =62p