

EBLEX has just completed a series of [BRP+ events](#) with Trevor Cook, a farm consultant from New Zealand.

Trevor urged English beef and sheep producers to challenge themselves when thinking about their systems and drew on lessons learnt from NZ. The focus was on how production and profit can be increased by good grazing and feed management.

He explained his 'Key Points of Influence' (KPIs) in the production cycle of ewes. These are times in the year when it is critical to assess both stock and pasture – and to act if either the animals or grass are not in ideal condition.



Trevor Cook

For sheep there are six key dates:

Weaning	Body Condition Score (BCS) ewes once the lambs have been weaned and give the thinnest the best grass possible.
1 November	Check there is enough pasture cover to last until the grass starts growing again in spring. This is critical for systems based purely on grazed grass. If there is not enough, next year's grass production will be severely compromised and more additional feed will be required.
Six weeks before tupping	Ewes must be in good condition (above BCS 3) at tupping, but it takes time to put condition on. Checking six weeks before planned mating allows thin ewes to catch up by giving them preferential treatment.
10 days before tupping	Ewes at around BCS 3 will ovulate well and are more likely to conceive twins. These ten days are half of 20 'golden days' which also includes the first ten days the rams go in. Management of the ewes in this period has the biggest effect on the outcome of mating and the profitability of the business.
Pregnancy scanning (about 70 days)	Pregnancy scanning takes place far enough away from lambing that struggling ewes have time to regain condition, before the demands of lambing and lactation kick in.
35 days before lambing	In the last few weeks before lambing the foetus grows rapidly and the ewe's udder gets ready to produce milk. A strong, healthy lamb that is up and suckling within 15 minutes of being born has a 90-95% chance of still being alive 90 days later. The ewe's nutritional demands are high at this stage, although she physically eats less due to the growing lambs inside her. At this stage she requires the highest-quality grass available.

Given a choice, ewes will eat a diet 1ME higher than the average for any given field. So in rotational grazing systems, ewes with the greatest needs are moved daily to new paddocks, where they will cherry-pick the very best grasses with the highest nutritional content.

Keeping ewes healthy and in the right condition is key to increasing the number of lambs reared per hectare and increasing the profitability of the enterprise.

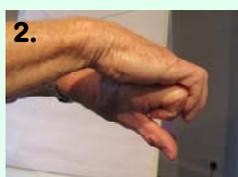
Easy guide to Body Condition Scoring (BCS)

All adult sheep decisions are driven by BCS. Feeling the shape of the end of the short ribs in the loin area gives a good indication of what BCS a ewe is.

Trevor uses his hand to show what each score should feel like:



1. Tips of the fingers feel like BCS 1



2. First knuckles feel like BCS 2.



3. Second knuckles feel like BCS 3



4. The wrist feels like BCS 4

A library of technical information for beef and sheep producers can be found at www.eblex.org.uk/returns