North Canterbury VETERINARY CLINICS LTD.

Guidelines for the Trucking of Pregnant Ewes

Do's

I. Do precondition stock for transport by adding good quality hay or balage to their daily diet for at least two weeks prior to transport.

II. Do add magnesium oxide by dusting on their feed breaks or by mixing as a slurry onto their hay for at least two weeks prior to transport. Allow 6 to 10 grams mag oxide/ewe/day.

III. Do minimise time stock are yarded and on the truck except for appropriate rest stops for longer trips (> 6 hours).

IV. Do transport pregnant ewes' home before the high energy and calcium demands of late pregnancy escalate the risks of metabolic problems such as sleepy sickness and milk fever.

V. Do make sure that no ewes give birth in transit. Work on 145 days after ram joining to determine the planned start of lambing.

VI. Do provide water to ewes right up to loading onto the truck.

VII. Do move off lush pasture or greenfeed crops preferably at least 4 hours prior to loading however high quality balage and/or hay and other high energy supplement should still be offered right up until loading ewes onto truck.

VIII. Do consult your veterinarian for advice well in advance of trucking animals' home. Many factors are involved in planning to safeguard the health and welfare of these animals. These include: ewe body condition score, age of ewe, time to lambing, single or multiple bearing ewe, diet and feeding levels, mineral supplementation, distance to truck home.

IX. Do move ewes directly onto a paddock near the yards on arrival and provide high quality supplement (including some hay or balage) and access to water. Do not put these ewes directly onto ad-lib greenfeed or pasture with empty stomachs. Make sure the supplement types offered on return home are a similar feed to what was fed before departure. After several hours (about 4 hours as an approximate guide) quietly re-muster sheep to quarantine drench and return to their paddock as quickly as practical. Continue to feed on high quality (familiar) supplements with a moderate allowance of saved pasture or greenfeed for the initial 24 hours. Do gradually transition these sheep to new or unfamiliar feed types over an appropriate period of perhaps 5 to 10 days. Do be aware of specific animal health risks associated with

X. transition feeding. These include acidosis or grain overload, nitrate poisoning, metabolic disease, and bearings.

XI. Do treat any 'slow' ewes preferably before they 'go down' with calcium combo injections and oral energy solutions. Early treatment of affected animals is essential.

Guidelines to reduce the risk of metabolic disease during transport of pregnant ewes:

As a general guide:

If the travel time is less than 4 hours:

- Single bearing ewes should be transported no later than 2 weeks before lambing
- Multiple bearing ewes should be transported no later than 3 weeks before lambing

If the travel time is greater than 4 hours:

- Single bearing ewes should be transported no later than 3 weeks before lambing
- Multiple bearing ewes should be transported no later than 4 weeks before lambing

No ewes should give birth in transit.

Every situation is different with different risk factors, management constraints and feeding options to consider, so individual farmers should tailor and coordinate a practical transport plan that best fits their scenario. *On some farms the transport of pregnant ewes closer to lambing may be the best compromise in terms of managing feed requirements for these animals.*

For example, farmers may elect to transport ewes closer to lambing than recommended in the guidelines; accepting a greater risk of metabolic problems and ensuring steps are taken to mitigate these risks.

Planning is essential to <u>minimise losses and welfare issues</u> so please don't hesitate to call us to help plan the process.

Don'ts

I. Do not transport heavily pregnant ewes' long distances on the point of lambing. This could endanger the health and welfare of these sheep. The worst-case outcome could be stock losses and/or animal welfare issues.
II. Do not load pregnant ewes onto a truck directly off lush pasture or greenfeed crop. Do not unload pregnant ewes off a truck directly onto lush pasture or greenfeed.
III. Do not attempt to vaccinate ewes immediately prior to departure or on arrival. Vaccinations can sometimes cause a minor check in metabolism and could predispose sheep to metabolic problems. Clostridial vaccinations can be given several days after arriving home or 4 to 5 days prior to coming home. Be flexible with pre-lamb vaccination timing to reduce risks of sleepy sickness and milk fever problems.

IV. Do not drench ewes immediately prior to or immediately on arrival from transport. This would result in extra time off food and extra stress on the ewes. Some drenches can be dangerous when given to stressed and/or dehydrated animals.

Comment:

The above guidelines are just that and should not detract from applying common sense to handle specific challenges. It is difficult to provide definitive protocols where so many variables are involved so farm specific advice is recommended. Every effort should be made to ensure that the welfare of these ewes is not compromised, or compromised as little as possible during transportation home. Please feel free to contact your veterinarian at North Canterbury Vets to discuss your situation.