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## Lambing

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### *Introduction*

Recording at lambing provides the opportunity to gather important and economically relevant performance information on both the ewe and the lamb(s). In addition recording at lambing ensures that lambs are linked to their sire and dam which is essential in the building of a robust pedigree.

### *Recording lambs*

A lot of important information can be recorded when a lamb is first handled. Make sure you keep full records for every lamb born:

- Each lamb is recorded against its genetic dam. You will only have to write the sire tag in at lambing if the sire is different from that recorded at mating.
- Each live lamb will have a unique LambPlus ID tag.
- Each lamb needs a birth date. Sheep Ireland adjusts performance measurements to remove the effect of differences in age - e.g. weaning weights are adjusted to accurately compare the growth of the first and the last lambs born. Writing in a date only once a week can penalise some lambs (born late in week) and benefit others (born early in week).
- Each lamb needs to have sex recorded, for performance adjustment and to separate the sexes for reporting purposes. Where lambs are born dead, or culled at birth, it is useful to record sex where this can be determined. **Sex codes are presented below.** For many later measurements, adjustments need to be made for sex as part of the genetic evaluation statistical process.
- Dead lambs need to be recorded but needn't be given a tag number. Sheep Ireland must know about dead lambs to determine birth rank for surviving lambs and for genetic evaluation of lamb survival as an economically important trait. The "lamb status code" should be recorded to identify the lambs that die. **Lamb status codes are presented below.** In this recording book dead lambs should have "DEAD" entered in the lamb tag section and a dead status assigned. **Best practice is to always identify dead lambs that a ewe has in your lambing records, even if the lamb is not tagged.**
- Culled lambs need to be recorded but needn't be given a tag number. The "lamb status code" should be recorded to identify the lambs that are culled at birth. **Lamb status codes are presented below.** In this recording book dead lambs should have "CULLED" entered in the lamb tag section and a culled status assigned.
- Each lamb should have birth weight recorded. This provides useful information which can be linked to lamb survival and lambing difficulty.

## Lamb Sex and Status Codes

### Lamb sex codes

Lamb sex code	Description
M	Male
F	Female

### Lamb status codes

Lamb status code	Description
A	Alive
D	Dead
C	Culled at birth

## Lamb Rearing Codes

Sheep Ireland uses codes for lambs that are reared by a means other than normally. When filling in the lamb rearing event section the following are important points.

- Some lambs need a ‘lamb rearing code’ to indicate that they are something other than healthy lambs reared by their birth dam e.g. fostered or bucket-reared.
- When lambs are fostered onto other ewes, this should be recorded, whether or not the foster mothers are stud ewes. Sheep Ireland needs to know about this to estimate merit for survival and for weaning weight.
- When a lamb is fostered on, record it against the dam that is the birth mother, and write the tag of the foster mother in the Dam ID column alongside the lamb. You will be able to enter the foster mother on your recording sheets/ website.
- If the lamb is an ET lamb, record it against the dam that is the genetic mother, and write the tag of the surrogate mother in the Dam ID column alongside the lamb. You will be able to enter the surrogate mother on your recording sheets/ website.
- For lambs with no ‘lamb rearing code’ it will be assumed that they are raised by their dam normally.

### Lamb rearing codes

Lamb rearing code	Description
FO	Fostered
BR	Bucket reared
ET	ET progeny
DE	Defect

The DE lamb rearing code should be used to define lambs that are reared with a defect e.g. cryptorchid (a cryptorchid is an animal in which one or both testes have failed to descend into the scrotum).

## ***Lambing difficulty***

Scoring lambing ewes for difficulty is useful in collecting data to evaluate rams for lambing ease. This is a key trait to score, as difficult lambing events are relatively common, and reducing the labour cost associated with poor performance in this trait should be a focus.

Sheep Ireland uses a scoring system on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (no lambing or voluntary assistance) to 4 (prolonged intervention). During lambing any ewe that requires assistance of any sort should be recorded as doing so, with those that require none also assigned a status. As with dag scoring, **the key is to be consistent when scoring a group of sheep and for these sheep to have been run under similar conditions.** The level of lambing difficulty can be defined based on the level on intervention required at lambing, and can be categorised into the following 4 discrete groups:

1. No assistance
2. Voluntary intervention for convenience (easily pulled)
3. Moderate assistance required, no adverse impact on ewe or lamb (reverse presentation/ leg back)
4. Significant difficulty requiring prolonged intervention by farmer and/or vet, and/or noticeable subsequent impact on ewe and/or lamb performance

## ***Ewe management (groups)***

Management of recorded ewes need not be much different to commercial lambing ewes. Many producers feed single-bearing and multiple-bearing ewes differently from lambing, perhaps providing additional feed or some meal for multiples and so on, as they would for commercial ewes. To fill in ewe group accurately at lambing, the key points are:

- You will need to identify the group ewes are in (if any) at lambing so that Sheep Ireland can correct for 'group effects' – e.g. better feed to twins during lactation. This is important when groups are fed separate for a long time – e.g. supplemented from lambing through to weaning. The grouping of animal involves assigning ewes to a group from group 1 upwards (depending on the number of groups). It is as simple as ensuring the ewes in the same group get the same group number, not the group number itself.
- Lambing groups should be as 'genetically random' as you can make them – i.e. by all means lamb singles separate from multiples, but have ewes that went to a mix of sires in each lambing group. If all ewes in group A are mated to sire 1, while all ewes in group B went to sire 2, Sheep Ireland will not be able to say how much of any difference in the performance of lambs born to these ewes is due to the group effect or to the sire effect.
- If there are no separate groups then you may leave this blank, and we will assume all ewes were treated the same.
- It is best to try and keep management across different ewe groups the same.

## **You or the technician**

Lambing records, including lambing difficulty scoring should be carried out by you as a breeder.