Making ewes work for you
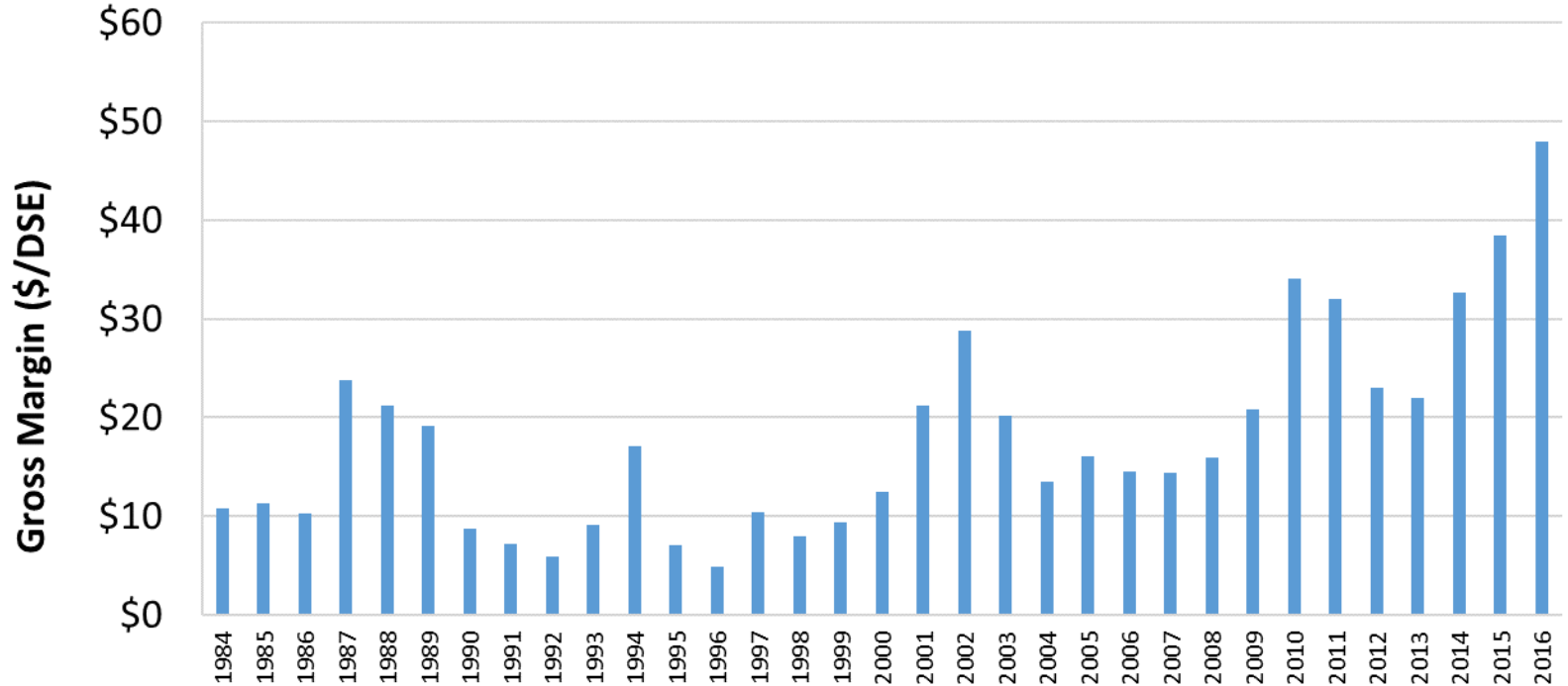
Sarah Blumer

A good time to have sheep!
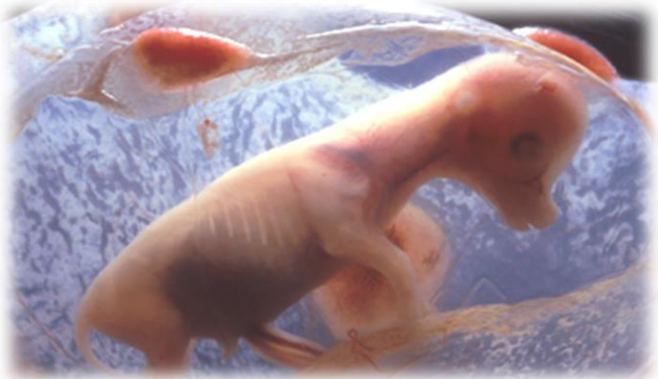
Top performers produce more lambs

- Higher stocking rate (+7%)

- **Higher weaning rate (+9%)**

- Higher lamb production/ha (+16%)

- Higher price for sale sheep (+10%)

2008-2012

78% of the variation in gross margin between farms attributed to differences in livestock trading profit

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Room for improvement – lamb survival

120 Foetuses → **87** Lambs marked

33 Lambs lost (28%)

Single survival - 85%
Twin survival - 60%

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Focusing on twin lamb survival also makes good economic sense

Value of increasing <u>scanning rate</u> by 10%	<u>$/ewe</u>
At 55% twin survival (+2.9 lambs/100 ewes)	$2.90
At 75% twin survival (+5.4 lambs/100 ewes)	$5.40

Value of increasing <u>twin lamb survival</u> by 10%	<u>$/ twin ewe</u>
An extra 20 lambs per 100 twin-ewes	$20.00

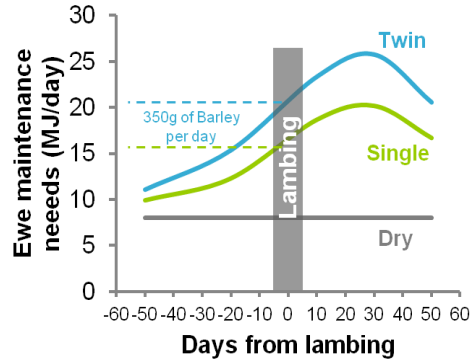# Four MUST do's for improving lamb survival
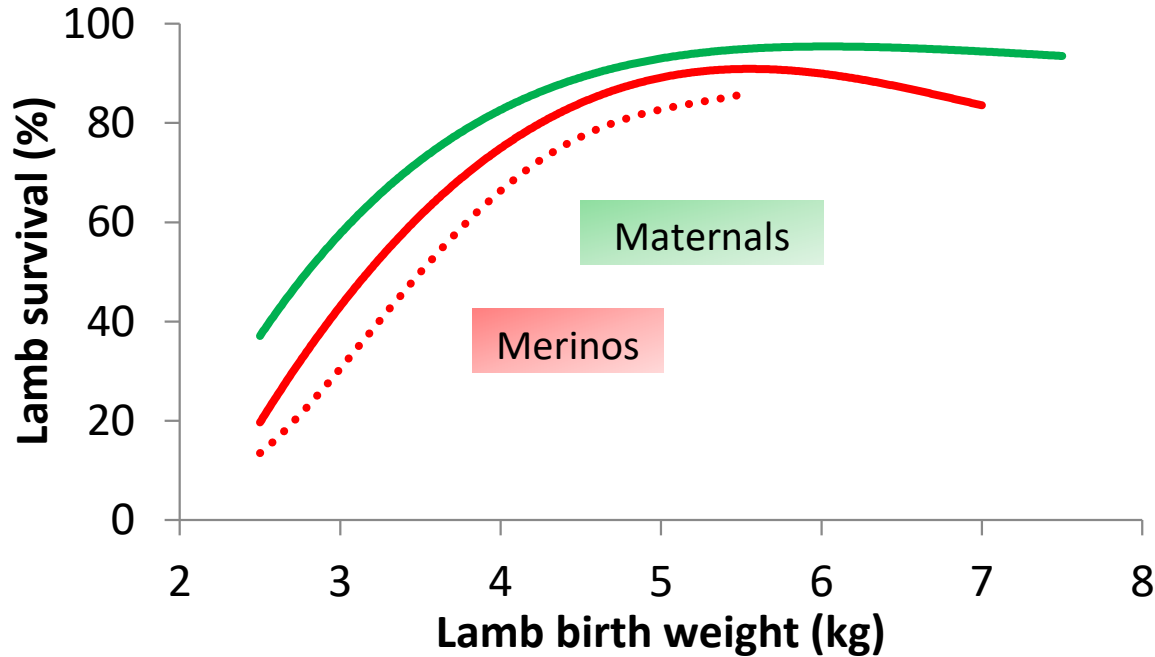
Condition score

Scan for multiples

Allocate feed based on energy requirements

Smaller mobs and shelter for lambing

Managing lamb birth weight to increase survival

Chart: Lamb survival (%) vs Lamb birth weight (kg), showing curves for Maternals (green) and Merinos (red).

Preferentially allocate feed to twins - Merinos
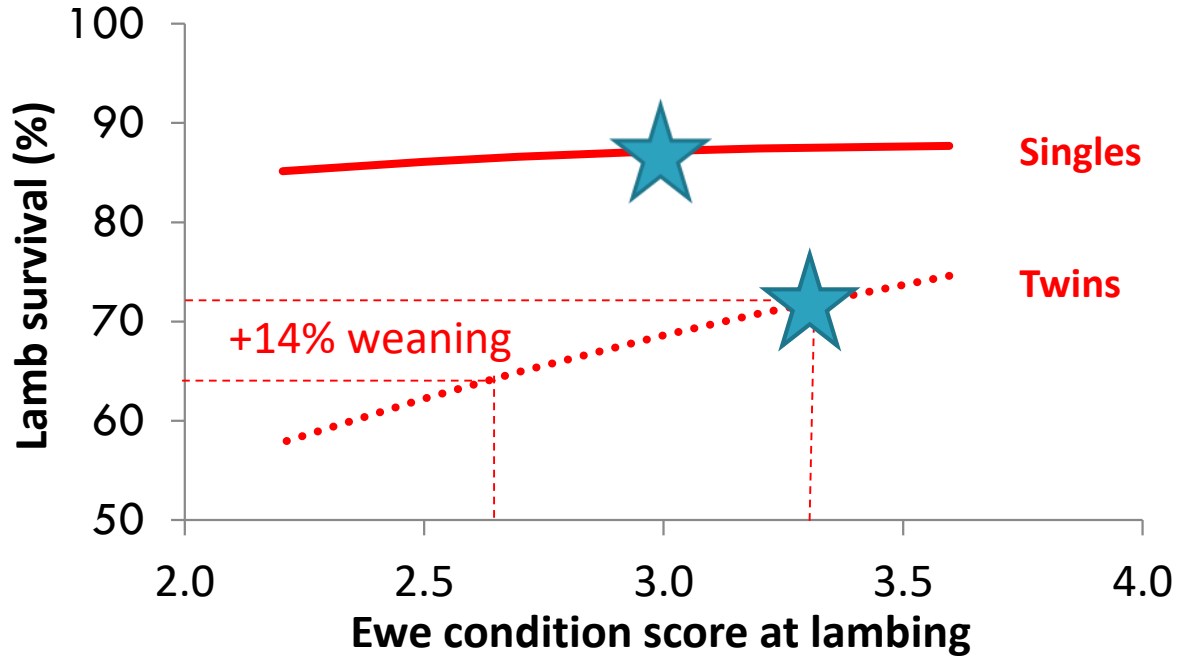
Preferentially allocate feed to twins – especially Maternals

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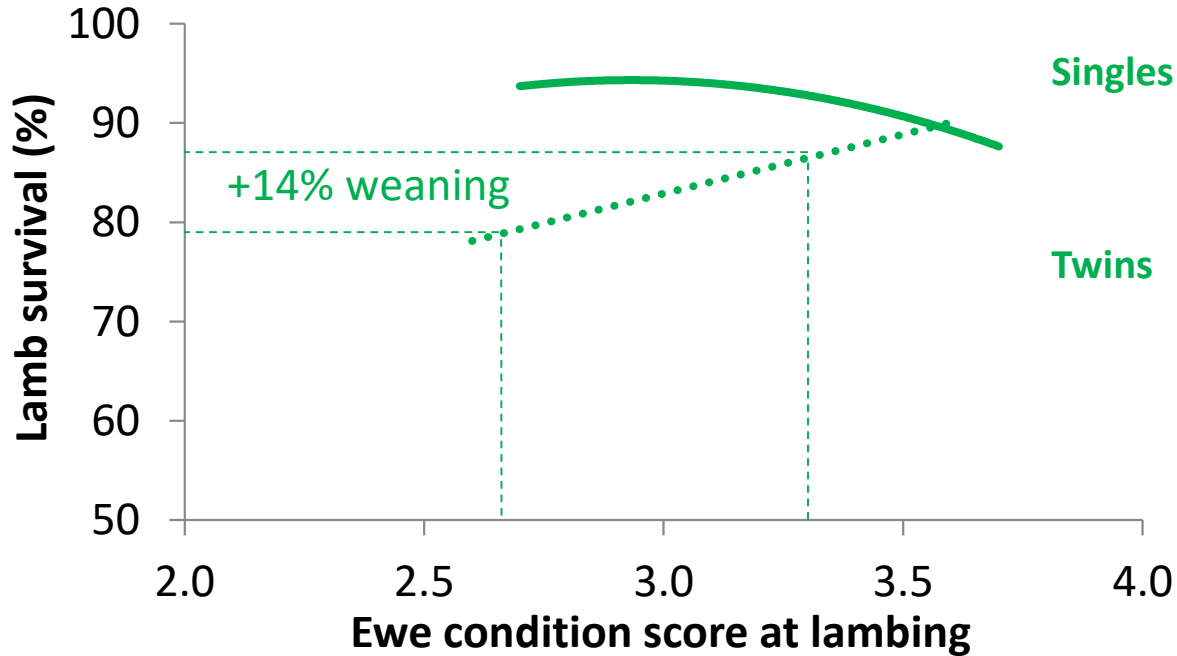
Key condition score targets

- Flock average CS 3+ at joining, but…..

- CS at lambing is far more important than CS at joining

- Flock average CS 3+ at lambing but twin ewes should ideally be 0.3 to 0.5 CS fatter than single bearing ewes

- CS targets apply even in poor seasons

How does this work at your place?

- **Knowledge** gap versus **implementation** gap

- CS ewes at weaning this year

- Knowledge, skills and confidence – BWFW and LTEM

  - Pasture and condition score assessment
  - Feed budgeting

- Support from local consultants and wool brokers/agents

Lifetime Ewe Management
more lambs, better wool, healthy ewes

Practice	Proportion of participants	
	Pre-LTEM	**Post-LTEM**
Condition score ewes	8	91
Pregnancy scan for multiples	29	67
Manage single/twins separately	22	64

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It is more than just nutrition…..

Scatter plot with linear trend line. X-axis: "Change in % of farmers differentially managing twins" (0% to 80%). Y-axis: "Change in weaning rate (%)" (0 to 15).
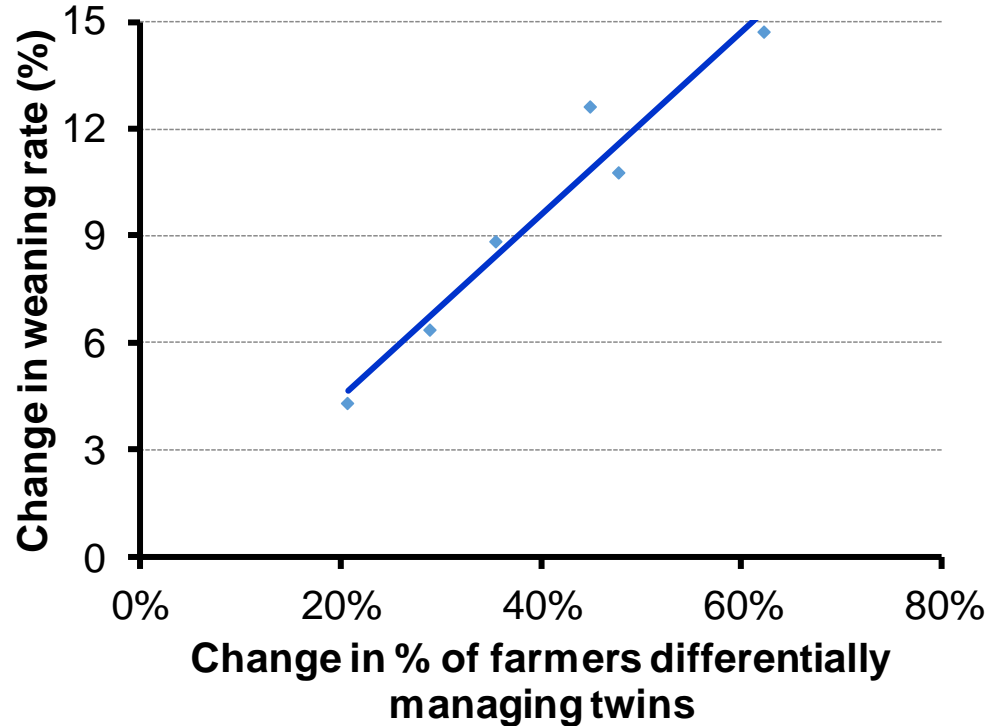
LTEM participants that adopted scanning for multiples & differential management increased whole farm weaning rate by 14%

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Pregnancy scanning

- Creates the motivation – '*If you don't scan you don't know*'

- Not worth scanning for wet/dry if less that 5% dries or for twins if less than 10-15% twins

- The value of scanning is related to improvement in twin lamb survival and increases with a poor season

- 35-42 days after rams out (73 c/ewe vs 49c/ewe for wet/dry)

- Don't be put off by a bad experience with scanner accuracy

How does this work at your place?

- **Knowledge** gap versus **implementation** gap

- 35 day joining

- Pregnancy scan 35-42 days after rams out

- DAFWA Lambing planner!
  - https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/management-reproduction/lambing-planner

Mob size and stocking rate at lambing

- Mob size has a greater effect on lamb survival than stocking rate

- Similar responses across ewe breeds
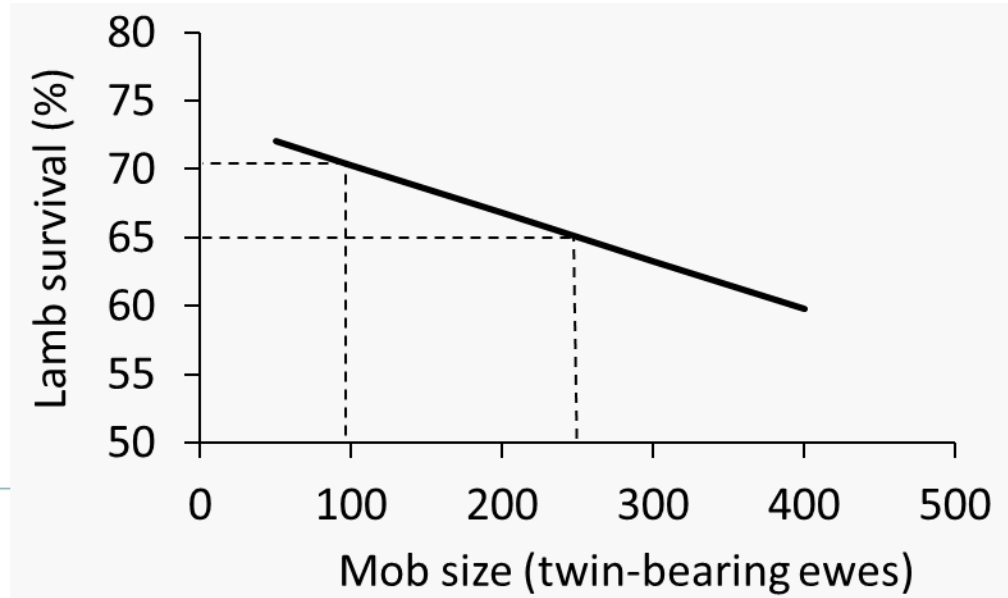
Bestwool Bestlamb

- **5% decrease in lamb survival (10% weaning rate) between 100 & 250 twin bearing ewes**

- **Equivalent effects on lamb survival as an extra 0.3 to 0.4 CS at lambing**

On-farm validation of mob size impacts

- 70 sites on commercial farms (only 21 completed)

		Survival of twin-born lambs	
Mob size (number of ewes)		High (231)	Low (92)
Stocking rate (ewes/ha)	High (7.8)	**71.5**	74.5
	Low (5.4)	73.4	**76.2**

- On-farm data from 300-400 producers

Shelter improves survival of multiple born lambs

Birth Type	Shelter	No shelter
Singles	82%	78%
Twins	87%	76%

Source: R. Behrendt et al. (unpublished data)

How does this work at your place?

- **Knowledge** gap versus **implementation** gap

- Electric fencing systems

- Prioritise ewe flocks

- Under utilised areas

  - Tree blocks, riparian zones

Lamb marking is your yield mapping day

- Record lamb marking results against each paddock – don't box-up mobs pre-marking if possible

- Identify lambs born as singles and twins

- Wet-dry ewes every year and cull non-performers if possible

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Take home messages

- To improve weaning rates focus on twin lamb survival
    - Additive small effects
    - Dependent on scanning for multiples and differential management

- Segregate ewes on CS at weaning, set CS targets for joining and feed!

- Multiple workshops and learning programs available targeting reproduction and local support

Workshops and learning programs

- Bred Well Fed Well

- Lifetime Ewe Management

- Realising Performance Potential

- Profitable Grazing Systems
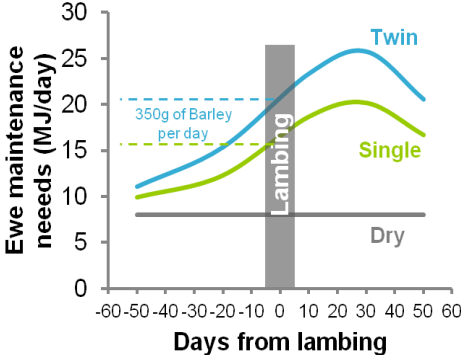
Four MUST do's for improving lamb survival

Condition score

Scan for multiples

Allocate feed based on energy requirements

**Smaller mobs and shelter for lambing**

What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Feed ewes supplements if needed during lactation – minimise adverse carryover impacts into 2018

- Don't delay weaning - imprint feed and wean at 13 weeks from rams in

- Aim to wean at 40% of mature weight

    - Draft out the 'tail'
    - Preferentially feed to get to 40% as quickly as possible

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'At risk' weaners are the highest priority to feed
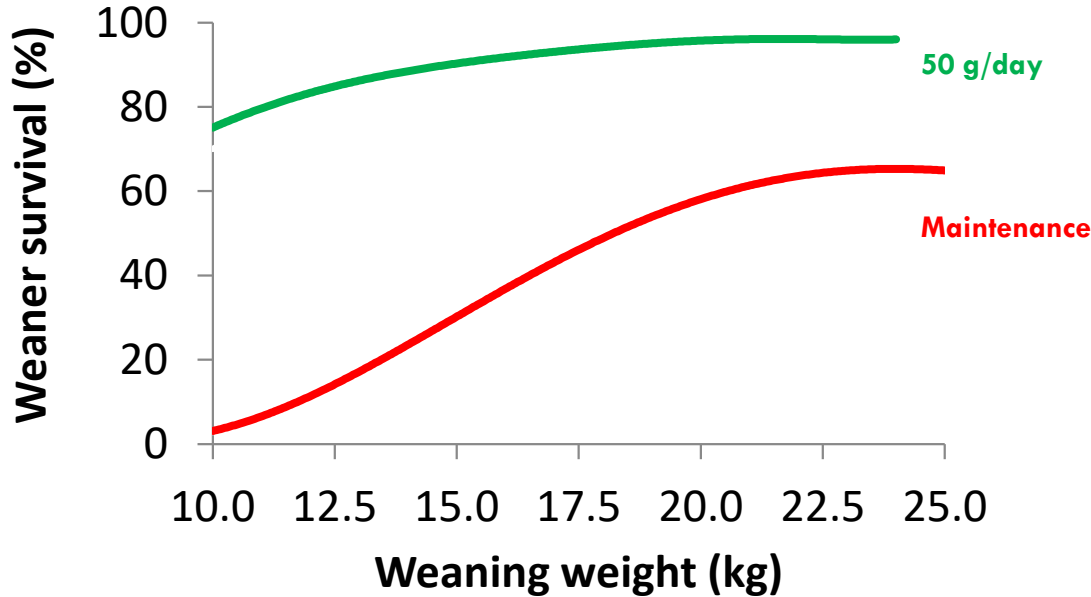
Targets

Feed to gain 1 to 1.5 kg/month

Big down side and little upside

Supplement weaners and use paddock feed for ewes

Monitor liveweight and adjust feeding

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What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Sell low priority stock

  - Wether weaners

  - Older ewes; 6 yr olds [ewe mortality doubles between 6 and 7 years old]

  - Adult ewes that will be too skinny to mate in 2018 (CS 2.3)

  - Adult ewes that failed to rear in 2017

What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Separating ewes on condition score at weaning and allocating feed appropriately is a high value strategy this year

- Confinement feeding where possible
  - Cost feed per unit energy on farm (c/MJ)
  - Saves 1-2 MJ/day (100 g lupins/day)
  - Less wastage
  - Labour efficient
  - Protecting your paddocks

What are the priorities given limited spring feed?

- Condition score targets

  - If kept, adult ewes that are likely to be too thin to mate (CS < 2.3) in 2018 – feed to CS 2.7+

  - Maidens and skinny ewes (CS 2.5) especially if they had twins in 2017 – feed to CS 2.7+

  - Adult ewes in CS 3 – feed to maintain

Cull non-performers – adult ewes

Performance this year	Weaning rate (%) next year
Dry at scanning	51
Failed to rear any lambs	72
Single born and reared	97
Twin born and reared at least one lamb	105