Effect of an alternative rearing method on milk production & lamb growth

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BACKGROUND: Separating lambs from their dams, overnight at early stages of lactation, can increase milk yield without compromising health or welfare of the animals.

OBJECTIVE: To assess whether an alternative rearing method of lambs affects milk production of dairy ewes and growth of their lambs.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

40 Lacaune ewes (1st lactation period)

First 15 days after lambing

- Milked once/day
- Kept with their lambs all day

>15 days after lambing

- Group C (control)
  - 20 ewes, 22 lambs
  - Lambs at libidum access to feed & water
  - Both groups milked once daily
  - Milk yield (MY) recording
  - Daily clinical examination
  - Lambs weighted at start and weekly
  - Calculation of average daily gain (ADG)

- Group T (test)
  - 20 ewes, 22 lambs
  - Lambs separated for 12h (overnight)
  - Ewes reunited with their lambs after the morning milking

Duration 18 days

Same housing and feeding management

Comparisons between groups (t-test, Mann-Whitney test)

RESULTS:

Fig.1: Total milk yield

Fig.2: Average daily gain (ADG) of lambs

CONCLUSION:

When the main source of farmer’s income is milk, alternative lamb rearing may be a preferable option to optimise production of saleable milk instead of producing light lamb carcasses.