#21 Feeding dairy ewes
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Literature on dairy sheep nutrition is complicated by use of differing units of measurement, breeds, feedstuffs, and management systems. Reported correlations between feed intake and milk yield range from 0.2-0.8. Maximum voluntary feed intake (VFI) is about 2.5 kgDM/d in a 75-kg East Friesian ewe. A lactating 70-kg ewe producing 2 litres/d requires about 25 MJME/day which can be supplied by good pasture (11.5-12.5 MJME/day). Fibrous diets with low energy content will limit VFI. Protein is not limiting in NZ pastures. In NZ, lactating sheep have been shown to produce well on good ryegrass white clover pasture, herb-clover mixes (chicory, plantain, red and white clover), lucerne, and Lotus corniculatus. Farmers should grow specialist crops according to what suits the local soils, climate, and management. Ewes should be fed such forage at luxury levels, leaving high residuals to maximise VFI, and supplementing with concentrate when necessary.