

Information Sheet

MANAGING THE EWE AT MATING

Pregnancy rate in the ewe is mainly determined by the condition of the ewe and the “quality” of nutrition she receives over the mating period.

The aim should be to have ewes in body condition score 3 to 3½ at mating and to allow access to the best possible grass throughout the mating period. Supplementary feeding can be useful in compensating for deficiencies in grazing or by further enhancing the “quality” of nutrition.

Mating is the first step in achieving successful lamb sales. Management throughout the remainder of the production cycle should ensure that any increase in potential lamb crop is actually realised.

EFFECT OF EWE CONDITION

Ewe condition at mating has been widely demonstrated to show that the higher the body condition score (3 compared to 2) the higher the number of lambs born per ewe.

In addition to this simple effect at mating, body condition also influences the response of the ewe to the level of nutrition. Ovulation rate increases broadly in line with ewe condition. The “quality” of nutrition at mating however only has a strong positive or negative effect upon ovulation rate in ewes over the mid range of condition scores. Management prior to mating should therefore be such as to avoid having ewes in extremes of condition as they will not respond to better grazing or supplementary feeding.

EFFECT OF BETTER NUTRITION:

(i) **Grazing**

The general rule to benefit fully from higher quality grazing is to supply the ewes with sward heights in excess of 4cms, with 6 to 8cms being ideal. It is better to use this grass at mating, than use the best of it in an pre-mating period provided that the ewes are in good condition when rams are put out. With sward heights of 8cm on re-seeded or improved pasture stocking rates of over 12 ewes/ha (5 ewes/acre) are appropriate and usually sustainable for two oestrus cycles.

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Supplementary Feeding

Improvements in subsequent lamb crops are generally noted as a result of flushing ewes during mating. These increases in potential lambing percentage range from 5 to 15%. They are due to two main effects, firstly an increase in the number of eggs shed and secondly, an increased chance of a successful early pregnancy of which many will be multiples.

The benefits of supplementation with concentrates at mating are:

- (i) more ewes lambing to the first oestrus cycle.
- (ii) fewer barren ewes.
- (iii) more lambs born.

Multiple births also increase as barrenness decreases. For many producers this is a benefit but it is important for there to be an economic return and to avoid welfare problems associated with high death rate in small weakly twin lambs and triplets.

Another potential role for concentrate feeding is to maintain “quality” of nutrition through the second cycle of mating, i.e. when most ewes are in the implantation and early pregnancy phase and when grass supplies and quality are much reduced.

Recommendations

- 1) Ensure ewes are in optimum condition for mating (condition score 3 to 3.5)
- 2) Make better quality grass available during mating period (ideal grass height 6 to 8cm).
- 3) Consider supplementary feeding where grass height is going to fall below 4cm and where body weight loss will be excessive.
- 4) Feed BOCM PAULS Ewbol Conditioning Rolls at 0.25kg (1/2 lb) per head per day, two weeks before and ideally up to 3 weeks after tugging.
- 5) Ensure that management and feeding during the remainder of pregnancy and at lambing is adequate to ensure that the extra lambs born perform satisfactorily.

TRIAL RESULTS

Work undertaken by MLURI (Macaulay Land Use Research Institute - formerly the HFRO) in the late 70's and early 80's clearly demonstrated that ewes in rising condition at tugging shed more eggs which could lead to a higher lambing percentage. It is, however, important that ewes already fit, i.e. condition score 3 - 3½, are not increased further.

More recently, BOCM PAULS conducted a trial to evaluate the response to feeding at this important time. The results confirmed the findings of MLURI.

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In other trials, no or very little response to feeding at tupping has been noted mainly due to ewes already being in good body condition. However, there is one other factor which can affect the response to feeding at this particular time - RAIN. Wet weather during the critical 3 week period after tupping can dramatically alter the results.

It was with the effect of weather in mind that BOCM PAULS conducted a trial to evaluate the response to feeding under commercial farm conditions.

Two hundred and fifty Greyface ewes were divided into 2 groups - Group A (no feeding) and Group B (200g BOCM PAULS Ewbol Conditioning Rolls per ewe per day fed from 17th October). Tups were introduced on 1st November and feeding ceased on 11th November.

The ewes were condition scored at the start of the trial and at scanning on 25th January.

All the ewes were re-introduced to feeding on the 1st February with 250g BOCM PAULS Ewbol 18 Rolls rising to 1kg at time of lambing on 1st April.

The results of this trial are as follows:

TABLE 1

TUPPING PATTERN AND CONDITION SCORE (CS)

	<u>1st Week</u>	<u>2nd Week</u>	<u>3rd Week</u>		<u>AV CS</u>
Fed	40	65	18	Start	3.02
				End	3.12
Non-Fed	27	47	49	Start	3.01
				End	3.10

TABLE 2

<u>FED EWES</u>	<u>Single</u>	<u>Twin</u>	<u>Triplet</u>	<u>Lambing %</u>
Scanning	15	97	10	191
Lambs Born	17	95	10	189
Lambs Marked	14	91	10	181

NON FED EWES

Scanning	24	92	7	183
Lambs Born	30	85	5	172



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Lambs Marked 27 81 2 156

It can be seen (Table 1) that condition score was maintained and that the ewes took the tups significantly better during the first 2 weeks in the “fed” group.

At Scanning (Table 2) the “fed” ewes had an 8% higher lambing percentage.

Foetal loss (Table 2) was considerably less in the “fed” ewes with 17% more lambs born. However, at Marking, the “fed” ewes had a 25% better lambing percentage.

The cost of feeding 200g BOCM PAULS Ewbol Conditioning Rolls/day over the tugging period is more than repaid by a 4 - 5% increase in lambing percentage.

It should also be noted that another advantage of feeding at this time of year is that ewes, and gimmers in particular, are trained to eat before being re-introduced to feeding later in the winter.