



ANIMAL PRODUCTION SERVICES UPDATE

PREPARING FOR JOINING

Good nutrition is essential for optimum reproductive performance. Joining is the first stage of the breeding cycle. It determines when and how long your calving/lambing interval will be. It is also a factor in the reproductive responsiveness of your breeding females for the next year.

One of the major key profit drivers on farm is the percentage of viable lambs or calves produced each year. To key to improve your reproductive performance, is to ensure your stock are in optimum body condition score by joining. With good management you'll be rewarded by improvements in lambing or calving percentage.

Causes of low reproductive rates:

- **Poor condition or over-fatness**
 - Cows and ewes in poor condition (condition score 2 or less) may take longer to conceive (if at all).
 - Over-fat males can have reduced fertility due to the fat surrounding testes interfering with cooling. They also tend to be unfit due to lack of exercise.
 - Similarly, over-fat heifers, cows and ewes may have problems conceiving and possibly have problems with dystocia at parturition.
- **Scrotal circumference**
 - The development of sperm takes 49 days in rams and 60 days in bulls. Ensure your rams and bulls are in good health when semen is produced.
 - Young rams (2yo) should have a minimum scrotal size circumference of 32cm and mature rams 34cm
 - Young bulls (2yo *Bos Taurus* breeds) should have a minimum scrotal circumference of 34cm and mature bulls 36cm.

Risky Situations:

- **Excessive heat**
 - Hot climatic conditions can disrupt sperm production and result in non-viable sperm.
 - Excessive heat is also caused by disease, infection or acidosis (grain poisoning).
- **Reduced length of time to next joining**
 - Long lambing/calving intervals will result in a longer time until weaning. This reduces the recovery time of the ewe or cow for the next mating.
 - Wean lambs at 14 weeks and wean calves before cow condition score falls to 2.5.

Nutrition:

- Start after weaning! Energy requirements are significantly reduced when milk production ceases.
- Actively growing green feed will supply good energy. However on mature, dry standing feed, stock will need to be supplementary feed (e.g. silage, balanced grain mix or protein supplements) to build condition score mature.
- It is easier and more cost effective to maintain condition score than to try and regain it later. Aim to reach the following condition scores by joining.

Ewes +2.7

Rams 3.5 - 4

Cows +2.5

Bulls - 3

- **Minerals: Manganese, Copper & Zinc**
 - A range of macro minerals and trace elements are important for fertility and for rebuilding reserves.
 - Deficiencies of manganese (not magnesium) may result in depressed or delayed oestrus, and possibly slower growth in testicular size.
 - Deficiencies of copper (particularly in cows) can result in infertility.
 - Zinc is required for sperm production.

Management:

- **Inspection – 4T's (Teeth, Toes, Testes, Tossle)**
 - To be conducted on rams 2 months prior to joining and on bulls 3 months prior to joining.
- **Maidens ewes & heifers**
 - Join as separate mob to older ewes and cows.
 - Use experienced rams and bulls with maidens.
- **Breeding season (sheep)**
 - Breeding season varies between breeds of sheep. Merinos are less susceptible to day length effects, compared to Border Leicesters/British breeds.
 - Following the summer solstice (as days begin to shorten) oestrus activity in ewes increases.
 - Peak cycling 'season' is March-May.

If joining out of season consider:

- **Ram Effect using Teasers**
 - Keep ewes away from any rams (greater than 1km) for at least 4 weeks before introduction.
 - Remove teasers at joining to prevent fighting.
 - Teasers are useful for a compact lambing.
- Treating ewes with **Regulin** (melatonin implant) or **Ovastim** (polyandroalbumin injection)
 - Speak to Landmark staff for further information.

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