



Sheep CRC Practical Wisdom Notes

Document ID:	SheepCRC_25_7
Title:	Feeding grain and hay separately in lamb feedlots cheap and effective
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Key words:	sheep; feeding; feedlots

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It should be cited as:

Maree Bowen, DPIFQLD, Matthew Ryan & Brian McIntyre, DAFWA (2008) – *Feeding grain and hay separately in lamb feedlots cheap and effective*

FEEDING GRAIN AND HAY SEPARATELY IN LAMB FEEDLOTS CHEAP AND EFFECTIVE

Key points

- Feeding hay and grain separately is a cheap and effective method of lot feeding lambs compared to more expensive pelleted or total mixed rations.
- Feeding hay and grain separately requires that the lambs be introduced to the grain ration in a safe and effective manner.
- It is important to feed good quality roughage prior to and during the introduction of the grain.

Introduction

Keeping costs to a minimum is essential with the tight margins in lot feeding lambs. Feeding the hay and grain components of the ration separately is cheaper than and as effective as the more expensive pelleted or total mixed rations. The Sheep CRC has found that lambs fed hay and grain separately had similar growth rates, carcass weights and carcass traits to those fed pellets and better carcass weights to those fed a total mixed ration.



Figure 1 (right). Sheep eating from a hay feeder.

How do you safely introduce grain?

Safe and effective introduction to grain rations can be achieved in a number of ways. But the key appears to be feeding good quality roughage prior to and during introduction of the grain ration. The quality of the hay can be subsequently reduced in the final diet. Other steps include:



- gradual introduction of the grain in self feeders; or
- gradual increase in the grain component of the ration in a stepwise manner in open troughs over a two week period; or
- adding virginiamycin premix to the grain.

The nutrient content of grain and hay can vary considerably and hence the energy, protein and major mineral values of all major feed ingredients should be measured. The ration can then be formulated to meet the specific nutritional requirements of the class, weight and growth target of the sheep to be fed. Mineral and additional protein supplements may be required.

Figure 2 (left). Grain supplied in a separate trough.

What are other issues you should consider?

If the hay is fed separately, significant wastage can occur with some feeders. The Cowra Bale Feeder, developed with funding from the Sheep CRC, has proven to significantly reduce hay wastage. Details of the Cowra Bale Feeder are at www.sheepcrc.org.au/balefeeder.



The cost of feed and the equipment and labour required to mix and feed out rations can be significant. Feeding hay and grain separately is a cheap option requiring less equipment. As such, it is especially relevant in temporary low-cost feedlots, in droughts or when seasonal conditions are a little tight, to increase weights of light lambs so as to achieve critical carcase weights for improved marked returns.

Figure 3. A Cowra Bale Feeder.

What are the take home messages?

- Feeding hay and grain separately in a lamb feedlot is a low cost and effective method of lot feeding lambs.
- Grain must be safely and effectively introduced.
- Use a hay feeder, such as the Cowra Bale Feeder, developed with funding from the Sheep CRC to significantly reduce wastage.

Further information

The Sheep CRC web site contains a wealth of information to make your decision to feedlot lambs easier and better informed. The Feedlot Calculator is especially useful. It is available free at the Sheep CRC web site at <http://www.sheepcrc.org.au/management/nutrition-and-feeding/feedlot-calculator.php>.

Acknowledgments

The contribution of Dr. Maree Bowen of the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries, Queensland and Matthew Ryan and Brian McIntyre of the Department of Agriculture and Food, WA to this work is gratefully acknowledged.