



## Books, Book Reviews, Extracts

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Sheep CRC Update seminars held in eight locations across Australia between February and May 2010 provided a valuable summary of progress achieved by the Sheep CRC and our Participants in our first three years of operation. The Sheep CRC publication '2010 Sheep Focus' captures key messages and results presented in the seminars in a form that provides an easy reference document. It should be cited as:

Sheep CRC/Andrew Thompson – *2010 Sheep Focus – Improving Reproduction*

# IMPROVING REPRODUCTION

## *Increasing lamb survival & lifetime production*



Photo: Sheep CRC

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**T**he Lifetime Ewe Management program aims to optimise production of both meat and wool from ewes and their progeny, with a key focus on reproduction and increased survival of lambs and weaners.

With declining flock numbers and high prices for sheep, it is even more critical to improve reproduction rates. This can be done by increasing conception rates, lamb survival and weaner survival.

The fundamental requirement is to ensure breeding ewes are in optimal condition (condition score 3) for joining and lambing. While a higher condition score will be more productive, it is not necessarily more profitable. Ewes in lower scores, particularly at lambing, generally lose both production and profit.

### **Key points for the breeding year are:**

Wean at about 12–14 weeks after the start of lambing: this is a good time to 'wet and dry' the ewes (feel udders and teats) to monitor individual reproductive performance (better performers are also likely to be skinnier; fat ewes most likely were dry or have lost their lambs).

Post-weaning: provide ewes with good nutrition to allow them to recover live weight and body condition lost over lactation in preparation for the next joining.

Pre-joining: check rams and carry out any management actions at least 7 weeks prior to joining, so as not to affect sperm production at joining. Feed rams as needed so that they are at least score 3 by joining to ensure they are ready to work.

Joining: ewes should be at score 3 and it is important to maintain their condition over the joining period. Join for 2 cycles (35 days) so that lambing, marking, weaning and later activities are more manageable.



Photo: Deb Maxwell

*ABOVE: Weaners may need supplementary feed to maintain growth*



Photo: Deb Maxwell

*ABOVE: Scan ewes at about 90 days after the start of joining*



Photo: Lifetime Wool Project

*LEFT: Assess ewes to ensure they are in condition score 3 for joining and lambing*

Weaners require special management to gain the benefits of more replacement sheep from which to select, increased wool returns and more surplus sale sheep. Being more susceptible to various health issues, weaners need effective parasite and disease management. Good quality feed ensuring at least 0.5kg growth/month is essential for survival and production (especially Merinos).

In southern areas where ewes are lambing onto green feed, they can be allowed to drop to a condition score of 2.5 by mid-pregnancy if there is good pasture in the last third of pregnancy to regain any lost condition by lambing. But where mid- to late-pregnancy usually coincides with lesser feed, their condition should not be allowed to drop from score 3, as it is too expensive to supplementary feed them back up for lambing.

***Pregnancy scanning is strongly recommended provided it is to determine twins and singles, not just wet or dry.***

Pregnancy scanning pays off by allowing the twin-bearing ewes to receive preferential feed and lambing paddocks. Also, ask scanners to identify the single-bearers that will lamb later. These often have the most lambing difficulties due to nutrition improving over the lambing period and it can sometimes be useful to restrict feed for these ewes.

Before lambing ensure that ewes are shorn or crutched. Give the ewes appropriate treatments including vaccinations and worm and fly treatments that will protect them through to early lactation. Also, have suitable low-worm lambing paddocks that provide shelter and seclusion, as well as good water and protection from predators.

Mark at no later than 2 weeks after lambing finishes. This is also a good time to identify and ear mark wrinkly lambs for later culling. Ensure that ewes have both a high quality and quantity of feed on offer to achieve high weaning weights, which will provide a base for good weaner growth and survival.



Photo: Deb Maxwell

*ABOVE: Ewes should be in condition score 3 at lambing*

**Find out about one of the Sheep CRC's workshops in your area:**

- **Lifetime Ewe Management**
- **Managing Scanned Ewes**

**More information**

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