

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES IN DROUGHT FEEDING EWES AND LAMBS

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During drought the producer has several managerial options in regard to feeding ewes and lambs. Lambs may be fed with (mixed fed) or separately to their mothers or allowed access to creep feeders.

These three management strategies and a control group of 12 dry ewes (39 kg) were compared in a replicated experiment over eight weeks. Each treatment flock consisted of 24 Merino ewes (39 kg) with nine week old lambs (11 kg). All ewes and lambs were accustomed to grain feeding.

The ewes were allotted $400 \text{ g h}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ and the lambs $270 \text{ g h}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$ of a whole wheat ration supplemented with 1.3% NaCl and 1.5% CaCO_3 . These amounts were calculated on the metabolisable energy requirements for maintenance and were fed twice weekly in self feeders. Ewe and lamb live weights were recorded fortnightly and wool growth was measured for the period using the dyebanding method.

TABLE 1: The affect of lamb management on sheep production ($\text{g h}^{-1}\text{d}^{-1}$).

Attribute	Management Strategy				
	Creep Fed	Mixed Fed	Weaned	Dry Ewes	
Ewe Weight Change	-79.5 ^a	-11 ^b	-10 ^b	+3 ^b	**
Ewe Wool Growth	4.7 ^a	5.3 ^a	5.4 ^{ab}	6.7 ^b	*
Lamb Weight Change	61 ^a	12 ^b	15 ^b	-	*

a,b, - Means in the same line bearing different superscripts differ significantly at ** $P < 0.01$, * $P < 0.05$.

Creep feeding of lambs showed significant benefit in lamb live-weight gains ($P < 0.05$) but this strategy resulted in a greater live-weight loss in the ewe ($P < 0.01$). This suggested that the lambs successfully competed with their dams for feed. Other strategies had no effect on lamb or ewe liveweight. This indicates that mixed fed ewes may have eaten some of their ration to support the additional energy requirements of lactation which in turn fed the lambs.

The apparent drop in wool growth (although not significant) under the creep feeding regimen suggests that it may not be desirable. However because of the competitive effect illustrated, it may be worthwhile in drought situations to provide creep feeding facilities for lambs if their growth rate is of prime importance. The possible negative effect on ewe production when using this strategy-would need to be considered.

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