

Merino Matters



EWE HEALTH

Management of ewe condition during each step of the reproductive cycle affects the following:

- Conception success, reproductive rate, placental development, udder development and colostrum production of the ewe.
- Foetal growth of the lamb which influences birth weight and survival and wool follicle development, which affects wool production in the progeny.
- Ewe milk production, which influences lamb growth after birth.

Research used to create the Lifetimewool website www.lifetimewool.com.au, has been gathered from a large range of wool growing environments and Merino bloodlines. The website has a series of guidelines and tools that aim to increase productivity and profitability of the Merino sheep.

The basis of the research is that ewe nutrition can be managed by monitoring and meeting targets for a ewe condition score (CS) and feed on offer (FOO).

Condition Scoring (CS) is the manual assessment of the amount of soft tissue (fat and meat) over the short ribs and backbone on a scale of 1-5. This assessment is independent of body weight.

Feed on offer (FOO) is the amount of pasture available for sheep consumption expressed in kilograms of dry matter per hectare.

The research has determined the appropriate CS and Pasture targets for each of the 7 phases of the ewe's yearly cycle. These phases are: Joining, early and mid pregnancy, late pregnancy, lambing, lactation, weaning, post weaning and pre joining.

The interactions between pasture growth patterns, stocking rate, time of lambing and production are complex. Feed budgeting in the dry period is inherently difficult due to the variability of the quality of dry feed and the value of the subsequent portion that the sheep choose to eat.

It is important to remember too, that the energy requirements of sheep vary with the feed they are eating, the amount of grazing they are doing to find the feed, their current status of nutrition and whether they are dry, pregnant or lactating.



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