

# Merino Matters



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## Early Weaning

**By Rick White B V Sc, Managing Director Livestock Central**

There is increasing interest in early weaning programs due to the current conditions with limited feed supply. It requires approximately 40 per cent less feed to maintain a ewe and lamb separately than to leave them together. This difference is due to the high energy demands of milk production, and the inefficiencies of lambs using milk as a protein and energy source. Successful early weaning management also delivers benefits to the breeding flock as a whole, with better return fertility due to the improved body condition of the ewes.

Producers are often wary of weaning lambs too early, because if not properly managed, it can lead to poor post weaning performance and increased disease rates. However, a well managed weaning program can set young animals up for the rest of their lives with greater feed conversion efficiency, increased post weaning growth rate and reduced impact from stress and diseases such as pink eye, respiratory disease, clostridial diseases and parasites.

Providing lambs have reached a bodyweight of 18kg liveweight they can be successfully weaned. Below this bodyweight, lambs are not physically able to eat enough pasture to meet their requirements, so can only be weaned if continued supplementation is possible.

Lambs are not born with functional rumens, so it is important that the ration fed to weaned lambs is designed to rapidly develop the rumen as well as meet the nutritional requirements for growth. This ration should include starch based cereal grains, a quality protein source such as lupins, roughage and a mineral, vitamin and trace element supplement designed for both rumen development and lamb growth.

Imprinting lambs to feeding behavior prior to weaning makes the post weaning uptake of supplementation much more successful. Supplement intake is more even in small mobs (300-400 if possible) of even weight range with plenty of trough space to prevent competition. Ensure that parasite control and other animal health measures are performed.

**For more information on Advanced Early weaning programs please contact Elders.**



Ph: 08 9384 6466

Fax: 08 9384 2606

Email: [smbawa@bigpond.com](mailto:smbawa@bigpond.com)

