

Merino Matters



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Feeding ewes and lambing

WIDESPREAD rains across the agricultural region have been a welcomed sight.

Feed will grow quickly in warmer soils and lead to increased pasture growth rates. Areas that received opening rains in late April are achieving up to 20kg/ha/day while the majority of the Wheatbelt is quoted as 0-5 kg/ha/day by Pastures From Space.

However, early season rain events are a double edged sword for sheep nutrition.

Dry feed has very little value and sheep ignore it while chasing anything green. Additionally, sheep consume very little dry feed when it is wet and without adequate supplementation the stock will lose condition rapidly.

For ewes close to lambing, this creates a high risk of pregnancy toxemia.

There is green feed about but much of it is volunteer crop from the grain left on the ground during the disrupted harvest in 2011.

Dry sown grazing crops will be available in a few weeks once the pinch and twist test does not pull out plants.

Clover dominant pastures will not generate much feed in the immediate future and will require deferment to help with achieving good pasture bulk.

Until pasture Feed On Offer reaches 500kg/ha or cereals have good accessibility, ewes will require feeding.

Medium framed, single bearing, Merino ewes lambing in mid-late May now have an energy requirement of 13 MJ/day.

If supplement is their major energy source, they will need the equivalent of 1.2kg of barley, 1kg of lupins or 1kg of good quality pellets hd/day to maintain condition.

Another 5 MJ/day will be required during lactation but as green feed availability increases the amount of supplementation can be decreased.

Ewes with twins, different frame sizes and other times of lambing will have varying energy requirements.

More information on Feed On Offer, Pasture Growth Rates and Feed Budgeting can be found at the More Sheep website www.moresheep.org.au or contact Jonathan England, DAFWA Narrogin on 08 9881 0208 or 0438 958 617.



Ph: 08 9384 6466
Fax: 08 9384 2606
Email: smbawa@bigpond.com

