

SOUTH EAST COUNTRY VETS

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BASIC SHEEP MANAGEMENT

Regardless of whether you have two or two hundred head of sheep, it is important to keep on top of all things that are required to ensure their health and welfare are maintained.

BREEDING

Nutrition is very important and ewes should be in condition score 3-3.5/5 at joining and preferably around 12-18m of age depending on breed and production system. The gestation period for a ewe is approximately five months. During the first three months of pregnancy, feed requirements are similar to dry ewes. In the last two months however requirements will be 2-2.5 times that of a dry ewe so this needs to be considered and supplied.

LAMB MARKING

Lamb marking should be carried out at ~6wks of age. Procedures that need to be done include ear tagging, castrating, tail docking and vaccinations.

VACCINATIONS

Sheep owners can prevent losses from certain diseases by using a planned vaccination program. For those diseases that occur each year such as clostridial diseases, vaccinations are required routinely. Vaccination stimulates the body's defence to build immunity to a particular disease. Ultravac 5in1 vaccination against clostridial diseases is essential in all sheep.

1st dose: done at lamb marking or as soon as available
2nd dose: done 4-6wks later
Booster: 12m later then annually (prior to lambing for females)

Depending on your production system, vaccinating against Scabby Mouth, Ovine Johne's Disease or combining vaccinations with a worming injection may be required. Speak to your vet for further advice.

INTERNAL PARASITES - DRENCHING

Internal parasites are a major problem of Australian sheep, of all the endemic diseases; they cost the most, closely followed by lice and flies. Over recent years, resistance of worms to commonly used anthelmintics is widespread and often severe. Because of this, it is important to not rely on drug-based worm control alone but rather combine it with other more sustainable processes.

INTEGRATED WORM MANAGEMENT

The right drench at the right time

The first drench is usually given at weaning when the animals are placed onto a clean pasture, all newly introduced animals should be drenched. It is important to dose correctly for weight. Over winter drenching every 3-6m is usually done, however, in spring, summer and autumn; animals may require drenching every 6-8wks. If you don't think the drench you are using is working, speak to your veterinarian about doing a faecal Worm Egg Count to determine the effectiveness of the product on your property.

Grazing Management

Rotate your paddocks, so that ewes are lambing into the cleanest paddocks you have. Likewise, place weaners into a separate clean paddock to grow out. These animals are most susceptible to picking up worms so safer pastures are a must for them.

Nutrition

Good nutrition is important in ensuring that animals are healthy, well grown and have an effective immune system.

Stunted weaners and underweight pregnant ewes tend to have higher worm burdens than their healthy herd mates. Supplementation at times of growth or stress may be required.

Timed joining

By joining ewes for a short period of time, you can easily supplement ewes when required and then also treat weaners as a group rather than individually when it comes to feeding, vaccinating and drenching.

EXTERNAL PARASITES

Lice are small wingless insects that feed either by biting or sucking blood from the affected animal. They hatch and grow near the skin and base of the fleece and thrive in cooler climates. Signs of infestation include the animal rubbing or biting at the skin. If you notice this, treatment with a topical pour on or spray is required.

Flies tend to be a bigger problem in sheep that are not mulsed as they have hair that gets wet with urine and faeces creating the perfect environment for the fly lifecycle. Major fly activity occurs around the warmer moist months of the year. In severe cases, fly strike will cause discolouration of the wool and irritation. The affected sheep may lose weight, develop a fever and lose their appetite resulting in reduced production.



This information sheet is not intended as a substitute for a veterinary consultation.

It is recommended that a consultation be arranged with a veterinary practitioner if you have any concerns with your flock's health.