

2001/S02



Producer Research Support

Lamb Production on Grey Calcerous Soils

Elliston Lamb Producers



The project

The Elliston Lamb Producers group identified a need to review existing sheep management practices, make changes where necessary and optimise lamb production to meet market needs and increase producer revenues.

Objectives

- Increase the members' lambing percentages by 15%.
- Increase average live weight of lambs by 5 kg at 8 months of age (market age).

What was done

As a starting point, each group member provided records about existing sheep management and production levels, which were summarised in an excel spreadsheet.

Screening tests were performed on each member's sheep to identify mineral deficiencies or health issues. Blood was tested for copper, cobalt and selenium. Dung was tested for worm eggs. Young sheep were weighed.

An EDGENetwork "Wean More Lambs" workshop was held to discuss nutrition of young sheep and to improve weaning percentages.

What happened?

Cobalt was identified as the major mineral deficiency that required corrective treatment. Copper deficiency was not identified as an issue.

Members were found to have vastly different worm management practices, so a protocol to mitigate the risk of worm infestations was developed. A drench program and the use of an ML type drench, such as Ivermec, once every three years was recommended. Egg count tests should be done on weaners just before weaning. Purchased sheep should be quarantined and drenched with both an ML and combination drench, before being grazed with the rest of the mob.

The nutrition of young sheep was also found to be critical. Supplementing good dry feed with 1 kg of lupins a week was recommended to ensure that young sheep were properly nourished.

A direct relationship between the condition of ewes at mating, and lambing percentage was observed. A fat score of 3-4 for ewes at mating was encouraged. Separating ewes with a fat score of 2 at weaning, and supplementing their feed with lupins to increase their fat score to 3-3.5 by the time they mated was found to increase the likelihood of these ewes bearing twins.

Some group members purchased scales to monitor progress of both young sheep and preparation of ewes for mating.

Review of sheep management practices identified cobalt deficiency as a major issues in this area. Group members have consequently changed their mineral supplementation and drenching programs.

Supplementary feeding has also been used to manage the nutrition requirements of young sheep and to prepare ewes for mating.

Key points

- Group members have changed their mineral supplementation and drench programs.
- Cobalt was identified as the major mineral deficiency in this area.
- A drench program and the use of an ML type drench, such as Ivermec, once every three years was recommended to reduce worm infestation.

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- Producer Initiated Research and Development
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Contact Stephen Feighan - MLA Project Manager, Producer Delivery and Adoption.

Tel (02) 9463 9245 or
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Discussion

In some paddocks, lambs were shown to be severely deficient in cobalt by lamb marking, which could be affecting life time productivity of these sheep. Further investigation needs to be completed to determine both the long term impact of, and how to address, cobalt deficiency.

As a result of the project, group members have changed their mineral supplementation and drenching programs.

Supplementary feeding has also been used to manage the nutrition requirements of young sheep and to prepare ewes for mating.

Next Steps

While areas of focus have been identified and management practices altered, robust measurement of the benefits of these practices has not yet been completed.

Feed supplementation was determined to be useful, but the relative commercial benefits of using grain or fodder crops (standing oat/vetch crops or lucerne) requires further investigation.

Lambing percentages and growth rates of young sheep need to be monitored for the next few years to understand and capture potential for improvement.