Teaser (vasectomised) rams : a management advantage

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INTRODUCTION

Even though some breeds of sheep have more definite breeding and non-breeding seasons than others, all of them have periods of maximum and minimum breeding activity. Oestrus or breeding activity in the Merino ewe flock is generally at a minimum in the late winter and early spring. In the late spring-early summer it begins to rise and keeps rising until the autumn—declining again in late winter.

This is a definite cycle (thought to be governed by the length of daylight) which occurs every year. British breeds and crosses generally commence their breeding season later and have a more definite breeding and non-breeding season but the same principles apply.

It has been shown that during the period of transition from minimum to maximum breeding activity the presence of a ram in the ewe flock will stimulate oestrus or heat, i.e., the presence of the ram will speed up the transition. Usually this first oestrus is what is known as a "silent oestrus"—eggs being produced by the ewe, which doesn’t show normal symptoms of heat (willingness to take the ram, etc.). This accounts for the common pattern of autumn lambing—a few lambs for the first two to three weeks followed by the bulk of the drop and the unavoidable "tail." In fact, the rams during the first 2-3 weeks of mating have been mainly stimulating the ewes into an egg producing silent heat or oestrus, which is followed 17 days later by the fertile mating.

A “teaser” (vasectomised) ram is one that has been rendered infertile by the removal of a small piece of the cord which carries the sperm from the testicles. The cord, gristly and white and about \frac{1}{2} in. in diameter, is known as the vas-deferens and hence the operation of removing a piece of it is known as vasectomy. With the vas-deferens incomplete the ram cannot pass sperms and is infertile, although it still has all the normal male attributes. Hormones are still passed through the blood vessels and the ram still has normal mating desires.

These “teasers,” normal in every way except they cannot cause conceptions, can then be used for preliminary stimulation of the ewes during the transition period, causing a bulk of ewes to be showing fertile oestrus when the fertile rams are put in, resulting in a quick, concentrated lamb drop at the due date.

A drop such as this has many management advantages some of them as follows:

1. A concentrated drop means concentrated management in the vital early stages of the lamb’s life.
Better attention, better feeding programmes, better fox control and easier handling.

(2) For wheat-sheep farmers the bulk of lambing can be practically over before seeding which can and does clash with lambing.

(3) For fat lamb breeders an early concentrated drop means bigger drafts of lambs on the early markets.

(4) An even drop gives easier more accurate classing as 2-Tooths.

(5) More effective use of fertile rams.

(6) Facilitates earlier weaning if desired.

**MATING TRIAL. USING “TEASER” RAMS**

**Wongan Hills Research Station—1958**

Following upon our recommendations, many flock owners have used “teasers”—most of them with good results. To get accurate figures of the comparison between teased and unteased flocks a trial was commenced at the 1957-58 mating.

Two hundred 6-tooth and full mouth Merino ewes were divided at random into two-even groups.

Group 1.—Were mated with “teasers” on November 13th. Teasers were removed on November 27th.

Group 2.—Were not teased and were the control group.

Both groups were mated with 3 per cent. fertile Border Leicester rams on November 28th. These were removed on February 6th.

Until one month before lambing the groups were run together at this date they were divided into their original groups and placed in adjoining paddocks.

Lambing commenced on April 24th. Within the first three weeks Group 1 (teased group) had dropped 54 lambs and Group 2 (control group) 40. The pattern of the drop was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of Lambing</th>
<th>Group 1 (teased) Lambs Dropped</th>
<th>Group 2 (not teased) Lambs Dropped</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>27 (42)</td>
<td>9 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>12 (54)</td>
<td>23 (40)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lambing continued for a further 6 weeks and both groups finished with a similar marking percentage of over 80 per cent.

Lambs in each group were weighed at 3 and 6 months from the commencement of lambing. Both groups were run under the same pasture conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Average Weight of</th>
<th>Average Weight of</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1 (teased)</td>
<td>Group 2 (not teased)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 3 months 54 lb. 4 oz.</td>
<td>45 lb. 15 oz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At 6 months (ewes only) 82 lb. 8 oz.</td>
<td>75 lb. 2 oz.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These weights illustrate the advantage of using “teasers” in getting more lambs to market weights earlier in the season. Wool weights of the ewe lambs (shorn 9th September) were:—an average of 3 lb. 8 oz. in Group 1., and 1 lb. 3 oz. in Group 2.

This also illustrates that through their more concentrated earlier drop, the teaser group lambs, being more advanced in growth cut more wool up to shearing. This
would be advantageous if the lambs were sold off shears.

In the early part of mating the Border rams appeared loath to work and it is considered that had Merino rams been used there would have been more lambs and greater differences between the groups in the first 3 weeks of lambing. This was supported by records kept at Newdegate Demonstration Farm during 1959 lambing. “Teasers” were used with Merino ewes in the farm flock before they were mated with Merino rams. From a flock of 250 ewes 203 lambs were dropped in the first 18 days from the date lambing commenced—total drop was 212 lambs.

CONCLUSIONS

These figures and the experience of many farmers who have used “teasers” show that they are well worth while in all flocks that are mated in late spring-early summer (October-December). Teasers are of no advantage in an autumn mating.

To use “teasers” in any flock is simple and inexpensive. They are put in 14 days before the fertile rams at the rate of one per cent. After 14 days they are removed and for the rest of the year they can be kept in the ram paddock.

Merinos are the best to use. They are readily obtainable, vigorous and the fleece they grow pays for their keep. Young culls from a stud or a few ram lambs reserved from a commercial flock are a source of supply. Do not rely upon ear tags to identify teasers—tags can become lost! Definite identification such as shortened horns, long tails, etc., is a necessary safeguard.

The operation, best done when the ram is a two tooth, is not difficult to perform. Having been shown the technique farmers can usually do it themselves. A demonstration can be arranged by contacting your local Agricultural Adviser or the Officer-in-Charge, Sheep and Wool Section, Department of Agriculture, Perth.
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