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MATING WEANERS DOES NOT AFFECT FUTURE EWE PERFORMANCE

By R. J. Suiter* and K. P. Croker†

Maiden ewes in Western Australia are usually mated in their second year because of supposed ill-effects of earlier mating on the ewe’s future production. Mating at a younger age however, providing there was no reduction in future performance, would provide for an extra lamb drop and thus increase the lifetime output of ewes.

Information from various sources indicated that weaners could be successfully mated providing their bodyweights were satisfactory. This trial was carried out to test the results of mating weaners under Western Australian conditions.

Method

In 1964, 200 Border Leicester x Merino crossbred ewe weaners at Avondale Research Station were divided into two equal flocks. One flock was first mated in January, 1965, when the ewes were seven to eight months old. The other was first mated in January, 1966, when its ewes were 19 to 20 months old. Both flocks were mated to Southdown rams.

From the completion of the 1965 mating, until the conclusion of the trial in 1969, both flocks were run together except for lambing periods, when they were separated to assist recording.

Results and discussion

The figure shows the lambing percentages obtained for each flock in each year of the trial.

In the last four years of the trial the fertility of both flocks was similar (Table 2).

There was no difference in wool production (Table 1), or ewe mortality (Table 2), between the two flocks. Table 2 also indicates no difference in performance between those early mated ewes which produced lambs and those which did not.

Conclusions

The experiment indicates that mating as weaners does not adversely affect the lifetime production of ewes. In fact, although the first lambing result was poor, mating as weaners increased overall ewe production.

TABLE 1.—AVERAGE WOOL PRODUCTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mated at 7-8 mths</th>
<th>Mated at 19-20 mths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n.a.—Not available.

TABLE 2.—AVERAGE EWE MORTALITIES AND LAMBING RESULTS 1966-69

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Lambs born</th>
<th>Ewe deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ewes mated at 7-8 months and lambing</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewes mated at 7-8 months and not lambing</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ewes mated at 19-20 months</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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