

Ram Preparation for Joining

Preparation of rams prior to joining is essential for achieving maximum conception rates and tight joining and lambing periods.

Delivery of adequate amounts of quality semen requires a ram to have the physical ability to locate, mount and serve all ewes in oestrus in a timely period. Rams with good musculoskeletal systems with well developed reproductive organs and a good joining environment will deliver more quality semen to more available females.

Achieving maximum conception rates also includes priming the immune system of the ram to minimise disease processes interfering with semen production and maturation, and the risk of transferring diseases to females during mating. This includes parasite burdens, fly strike and reproductive diseases.

Semen quality relies on adequate levels of starches, proteins, vitamins, trace elements and minerals in the diet for at least 8 weeks prior to joining. Particular attention has to be paid to ensure the supply of sufficient levels of vitamin A, zinc and B group vitamins.

Failure of delivery of quality semen will mean lower conception rates. Fewer lambs mean slower genetic gain, less stock to sell and ultimately a decrease in annual income from breeding enterprises.

Preparation of rams prior to joining is essential for achieving maximum conception rates.

Good ram preparation:

Good ram preparation includes a gross assessment of the primary delivery system including musculoskeletal structure and external palpation of reproductive organs. Rams in optimal body condition achieve higher conception rates than those too skinny or too fat.

Good ram preparation also includes a high and balanced nutrient intake of starches, protein, vitamin A, zinc and B group vitamins 8 weeks prior to joining to improve both libido and quality of semen.

Good ram preparation also includes having the correct ratios of males to females (1:70 for healthy adult rams, and 1:50 for rams joined to maiden ewes).

Good ram preparation also includes minimising physiological and nutritional stress. These impair utilisation of feed, damage cells and divert essential nutrients away from spermatogenesis. Physical stresses such as shearing need to be minimised in the 2 months leading up to joining, and parasite control (internal and external), achieved at least 6 weeks prior to joining.

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Protocol Checklist

8 weeks before joining:

- Shearing of rams complete (do not shear closer than 2 months pre-joining)
- Ram soundness examination (including external, internal and semen examination – the 4 T's: teeth, toes, tossle and testes)
- Trace element applications. Before giving injectable selenium or copper trace element supplements we recommend completing diagnostics on rams
- Start supplementing rams – **Contact your local ELMS Manager** for an appropriate ram supplement tailored for your property's pasture conditions
- Ensure vaccination programs are current for all rams. Maiden or new rams who have not started their program will need to receive their first 6 in 1 vaccine (eg. Glanvac® 6).

4 weeks before joining:

- Complete 6 in 1 vaccination program (eg. Glanvac® 6).
- Vitamin B₁₂, vitamin A, D and E injections, internal and external parasite management.

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