

## **Spring & Summer Joining Challenge**

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Sheep producers from central Victoria and north through to Coonamble in NSW have reported poor conception rates from their traditional spring joining. Scanning contractors have also observed significant numbers of dry ewes and reported up to 50% dry ewes in some mobs from scanning this season.

The unusually wet summer and tropical conditions through the south eastern states are suspected of having a major contribution to these poor conception rates.

Fortunately, producers who have scanned have had enough information to decide whether to re-join dry ewes for a late winter lambing.

Late spring joining normally coincide with hot and dry conditions and southern flocks are well adapted to these, but this season there is widespread anecdotal information on the adverse effects of the unusual tropical conditions.

These combined conditions of heavy and sustained rainfall over a number of weeks, mosquito attack and heat are the main contributors to the poor joining in late spring.

Ram fertility at this time is naturally reduced due to increasing day length and coupled with unfavourable weather conditions the joining has been compromised.

Ewe fertility may also be affected with ewes spending extended periods of time standing in water or very wet paddocks, as well as experiencing the mosquito attack.

Although not confirmed it is suspected that some ewes and rams may have experienced fever type symptoms spread by mosquitoes which could contribute to lower fertility rates.

This being the case it is now up to producers to best manage ewes to optimise lamb survival this autumn and winter.

The information generated by pregnancy scanning allows for active management of the flock to increase the survival of new born lambs.

Lamb losses at or about the time of birth can be significantly reduced if the birth weight of new born single and twin lambs is managed by targeted nutrition of the ewe after scanning.

Therefore active management must be adopted by matching flock nutritional needs and applying fat or condition score targets to single and twin bearing mobs along with the scanning information of the flock. By targeted feeding and providing selected lambing paddocks, you will lift the chances of optimising the flock's reproductive performance.

Twin bearing ewes need at least 1200 kg green feed on offer from scanning to lambing, whereas single bearing ewes need no more than 800kg green feed on offer.

The reason for these differences is the need to lift twin lamb birth weight and to restrict that of single born lambs to avoid dystocia during the birth process.

Optimal lamb birth weight for Merinos is between 3.5 and 5.5 kg and for crossbred lambs 4.0 to 6.0 kg. Considering most of the lamb growth occurs in the last month before lambing, it is

imperative to provide adequate feed, either pasture or supplement to meet these birth targets.

Lambing paddock selection should not be over looked and twin lambing ewes need paddocks with plenty of shade and privacy as well as adequate feed and water. Shelter must reduce wind speed and can consist of tree shelter belts, large hay bales or high standing perennial pastures where ewe and lambs can get out of the wind.

Ideally the lambing paddock will be relatively predator free.

The current buoyant sheep prices and the demand for replacement ewes should be incentive enough to adopt at least some of these simple management steps to lift lamb survival and contribute to the back pocket.