



# How to check the ewe is fit for breeding

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## Timing

**1** Examine each ewe 10 weeks before the start of the breeding season so you have enough time to:

- 1) Build body condition.
- 2) Sort out health problems.
- 3) Select quality replacements.
- 4) Acclimatise replacements.



## Handling unit

**2** Culling correctly, quickly, safely & easily requires a handling unit with a collecting pen, forcing pen, drafting race & batch footbath. To examine each ewe correctly for udder, teeth & feet you must be able to observe her walking in a restricted area & handle her in a confined space & mark her. This must be followed by 2 or 3-way drafting of ewes into batches i.e. fat, thin, lame & culls. These batches will need rechecking & treatments like footbathing.



## Red tag for culls

**3** During the course of the year permanently identify ewes for culling with an ear tag i.e. ewes that created work or those unsuitable for breeding. You will not remember every ewe that had ring womb, lambing difficulties, poor mothering ability, prolapse or blind teats last spring. An easy to see tag like a red or purple ear tag is ideal. It's easy to see as a ewe comes down the race. This allows drafting for culling without ever having to handle the ewe.



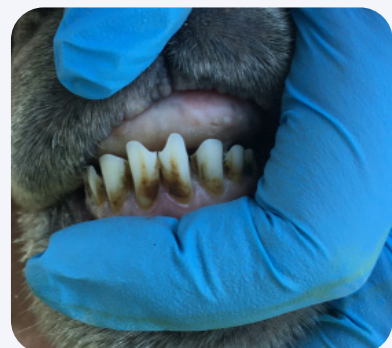
## Age by tag colour

**4** Use a coloured tag/disk to indicate the year of birth. This allows you to identify the age of the ewe without handling her. It makes it clear which ewes are 4 years or more so you can focus on checking their mouths. The likelihood of death is greater for ewes over 4 years. Age is an even bigger issue with more prolific flocks as litter size peaks at a age when many ewes are less able to cope. There should be very few ewes older than 5 years in a flock. Culling hard & earlier in life means less labour & higher value culls for sale.



## Incisors

**5** It's not always practical to check every ewes mouth. So target thinner ewes & those 4 years & older which can be picked out by tag colour. The incisors should close firmly onto the dental pad. You should not be able to feel the tops of the incisor teeth. Cull where the incisor teeth are drifting forward, becoming gappy, missing or long & thin. As ewes get older the % culled for teeth problems increases.



## 6 **Molars**

Check the molar teeth where ewes are thin for no obvious reason or where you suspect a problem. Green drool around the mouth is sometimes a sign of a molar problem. Where faulty molars are suspected feel along the jaw for lumps. Uneven molars prevent cudding. Ewes with molar problems will struggle to maintain body condition. Never place your fingers inside the mouth.



## 7 **Feet**

Check the feet for signs of lameness. Lameness can severely reduce body condition. Keep lame ewes as a separate group near the footbathing facilities for extra treatment. Footbath them every 2 weeks. A stand-in footbath is an essential part of lameness control. Cull those that do not respond to treatment. Keeping lame ewes maintains a pool of re-infectors for the rest of the flock. If CODD is a persistent problem seek veterinary advice.



## 8 **Udder**

Check every ewe's udder for mastitis, oversized teats & sagging udders. Check for lumpy or hard udders. Check each teat for "cording" - a firmness down the centre of the teat. To find this you must carefully feel each teat. Cording & less obvious mastitis are easier to find if you handle udders 2-3 weeks after weaning when udders are less filled out. Check udders a 2nd time 4-6 weeks before breeding to identify mastitis cases that developed or were not apparent at the 1st exam.



## 9 **Body condition**

The target condition body condition score at the start of the breeding season is 3.5-4. Ewes in bcs 2-2.5 need 10 weeks to gain 1 unit or 12kgs liveweight. On good grass she will gain 1kg of liveweight/week. Divide ewes into 2 groups. A fatter group with a bcs of 3.5+. Use these to clean out paddocks. Have a 2nd group of thinner ewes with a bcs below 3.5. Give these good grass or graze them after lambs. They must not be used to clean out paddocks. Cull ewes that are still very thin after 6 weeks of extra feeding. There must be an underlying problem.



## 10 **Reproductive problems**

Within reasonable levels barrenness is a chance event so the vast majority of ewes that are given a second chance will not repeat the offence. You cannot see problems like ringwomb, prolapses, poor mothers or very difficult lambers at culling. Cull ewes that prolapse. The chance of recurrence is high. A coloured ear tag is the only reliable means of picking out ewes with these problems around lambing time.

