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Ram Health

Introduction

Checking ram health and condition 10 weeks before mating gives time to make any management changes or treatments to ensure rams are in the best condition for tupping. It takes 8 weeks for spermatozoa to mature and any lameness or infections will affect sperm production. If rams are not working to their full potential, it could result in a reduced lamb crop and a longer lambing period, ultimately affecting farm profitability.

1. Feeding

- Aim for Body Condition Score (BCS) 3.5 – 4. Rams can lose up to 15% of their body weight during the mating period.
- Additional feed may be required 6 weeks pre-mating if rams are not at the correct BCS. This will increase energy, allow for testicular growth and semen production. Aim for 12.5MJ ME/kg DM and 180-200g CP/kg DM, avoid high levels of magnesium.

2. Teeth & feet

- Check teeth for under or over shot teeth, gaps and molar abscesses
- Check feet for any lameness issues as rams with poor mobility will not be as active and also check feet before purchasing rams to reduce brought in diseases such as Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis (CODD)

3. Testicle and penis health

- Check for abnormalities to the prepuce, such as ulcers, swellings, orf, discharge or blood.
- Check the penis for growths, adhesions, deviation or loss of urethral process at the tip.
- Check for scrotal hernias, appearing as a soft swelling above the testicles.
- Testicles should be firm but springy, equal, heavy, smooth, freely movable.
- Watch out for small testicles (one or both) or hard and enlarged testicles which suggests inflammation. The epididymis, located at the bottom of each testicle, should be equal in size and smooth.

4. Health checks

- Shearing rams can minimise summer heat stress
- Check the ram's vaccination status - eg Clostridia, Pasteurella, Louping ill
- Treat for parasites such as worms, fluke, lice, scab in good time
- Consult your vet about vitamin or trace element deficiencies.

5. Scrotal Circumference

Scrotal circumference is related to fertility – good size is important (see table below). Measure both together at the widest bit. Check for woolly scrotums, these can affect the ability of the scrotum to keep the testes cool.

Ideal Scrotal Circumference (cm)		
	Lowland Breeds	Hill Breeds
Mature ram	36 to 38cm	24 to 36cm
Shearling	32 to 34cm	30 to 32cm
Ram lamb	30cm	28cm

Key Points:

- Carry out pre-tupping MOT – 10 weeks prior to mating
- You want a FIT not a FAT Ram
- Antibiotics will not affect fertility
- You want a ram that moves well with two testicles and will find ewes
- Teeth must be good - check that teeth do the chewing
- Check brisket – to avoid sores from raddles
- Don't be afraid to clip scrotum – air needs to circulate
- Ideal condition score – between 3.5 - 4