



## Don't forget the rams!

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Lamb production forms a fundamental part of every sheep enterprise. While ewes are the key driver to a successful lambing program there is, as the saying goes, “no show without Punch”. By that I mean the rams are critical to setting up your successful lambing. More importantly if you have a self-replacing ewe flock the next three generations of rams you use will account for 85% of the gene pool in your flock. That makes these guys very important to your business and you need to make sure they are at the top of their game when they need to be. They need to be fit, healthy and in the best condition possible.



It takes seven weeks for sperm to develop from initiation through to full maturity. That means that you need to start preparing your rams at least eight weeks prior to joining. This should start with a basic health check. This should include their teeth and mouth, their feet and legs and of course those very important bits, their testes and penis.

Check their teeth and mouth. They need to work hard and will need to take in a lot of nutrition. A full set of teeth is needed for this.

You need to check for mouth and jaw faults as these are heritable. You don't want these faults passed on to your lambs, particularly your replacement ewes. You need to cull any ram with faults.

Feet and legs also need to be in excellent condition. Any foot or leg problems can impede a ram's ability to work. Any ram with indications of lameness needs to be removed. Check their feet and trim their hooves if required.

You will need to check their testes and penis. The testes must be firm, not spongy, and definitely no lumps. Check the penis and prepuce. There must be no abnormalities or swelling as this may impede the ram's ability to work. Remove any ram that has a problem.



Adequate pre joining nutrition is critical for a successful lambing. To maximise the production and quality of sperm you need to start managing nutrition from eight weeks prior to joining. Rams need to be in condition score 3 to 4 when they are introduced to ewes. Supplements will most likely be required. This will depend on the condition of your rams and the nutrition in their paddock over the eight weeks before joining. They may need up to 750 grams of lupins per day to achieve their target condition score.

The required joining rate is dependent upon experience of the rams and their expected work load. For mature, experienced rams a joining rate of 1% is adequate. For young, inexperienced rams 2% will be required. Where there is a special program, such as where ewes have been synchronised, a joining rate of 3% will be needed.