

Check each ram 10 weeks before breeding starts

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On many farms, rams are tucked away and forgotten about until the breeding season starts. Ram management should be a year round affair that includes a detailed examination of each ram 10 weeks before the breeding season starts. This examination — 10 weeks before mating starts — gives you time to:

- ➔ Build-up body condition.
- ➔ Sort out health problems.
- ➔ Purchase quality replacements.
- ➔ Acclimatise replacements.

➔ BODY CONDITION

The target body condition for rams at the start of the breeding season is four.

Within every batch of rams you will have variations in body condition. It will take roughly eight weeks to put on one unit of body condition onto a thin ram. Thinner rams will need to be on 6cm to 8cm of good quality pasture or meal fed to improve condition. One unit of body condition score is about 13% of liveweight. Avoid over-fat rams they tend to be lazy and prefer to lie down.

➔ EYES

Eyes must be clear and alert. Apart from affecting a ram's own sight, infections like pink-eye can easily infect your flock. Where pink-eye is suspected in one eye, treat both eyes with a tetracycline or cloxacillin-based eye ointment. Treatment may also involve an injection of a long acting (LA) tetracycline antibiotic. It might be wise to treat all rams in the group

with a LA antibiotic where one individual is infected.

Signs of pink eye include excessive tears, blinking and damage to the eye surface. Never buy from a flock where pink eye is suspected. Unaffected rams can act as carriers. Avoid rams that suffer from entropion or turned-in eye lids. This condition is inherited. Symptoms include turned-in eye lid, watery eyes, excessive blinking, scared or cloudy cornea. Consult your vet before administering antibiotic treatments.

➔ FEET

Turn-over each ram and check each foot for signs of lameness. Check between the claws for scald. Also, stand back and observe that each ram walks correctly. Allow yourself two to three weeks to cure footrot in a ram. This may involve a LA antibiotic injection, foot-trimming and foot-bathing in week one, followed by two more footbathing sessions five days apart. Check for arthritis, particularly in older rams.

➔ BRISKET SORES

A sore brisket before mating is often caused by excessive lying due to lameness. The deeper the sore, the harder it is to cure. Brisket sores must be spotted and treated early. Early signs include excessive lying and reddening of the brisket.

Treatment may involve a LA antibiotic injection, spraying the site with an antibiotic aerosol and perhaps even placing a child's nappy over the affected area to draw-out the infection!

The affected ram should have a clean, dry surface to lie on. If lameness is involved, cure it. Sores that ap-

pear during mating could be due to a badly fitted harness or harness studs.

➔ TEETH - INCISORS

Incisors are the teeth at the front of the mouth. Run your thumb over the incisors. Ideally, you should not be able to feel the tops of the incisor teeth because they should be closing firmly on the dental pad. Overshot incisors tend to drift forward leaving gaps between the teeth. This increases the likelihood of teeth loosening and falling out.

Some suggest that very slightly undershot incisors are not all bad as this allows some room for drift forward. Green drool around the lips is sometimes a symptom of a badly undershot lower jaw.

➔ TEETH - MOLARS

Molars are the teeth at the side of the mouth. Good molars are essential for grinding fibrous foods before digestion. Molar problems will result in a ram losing condition. Feel along the outside of the jaw. It should be smooth.

Where there is a problem with the molars, it often starts with the third molar of the lower jaw as you count from the back. This is because the first permanent tooth to erupt is this molar at three to five months old. Sometimes a molar tooth falls out leaving a gap. The opposite tooth grows into this gap because it has nothing to wear against. Eventually, a long sharp cheek tooth develops discouraging cud-ding. Green drool at the side of the mouth or lumps of fodder stuck between the molars and cheek may indicate a molar problem.



Rams must be in condition score four before breeding.

➔ PENIS AND TESTICLES

Check the penis and sheath for signs of excessive staining, blood or infections like orf. Also, check for injuries which could be caused by shearing, briars or thorns. There is a simple technique that can be used to extend the penis from the sheath to examine it for infection and injury. The ram should have two evenly sized descended testicles. They should be free from lumps. The testicles should have the springiness of the biceps in your arm. They should move freely

within the scrotum. Restriction in testicle movement within the scrotum may indicate injury or infection. At the bottom of the testicle is the epididymis. Each epididymis should be free from lumps and have a rubbery feel. The scrotum skin should have a clean infection-free appearance.

➔ ACCLIMATISE

Checking your rams 10 weeks before breeding will give you a clear idea how many replacement rams will be needed. Buy young rams

at least eight weeks before breeding starts. Unfortunately, many rams are purchased a few weeks before breeding starts.

Many such rams melt away because their diet is suddenly changed and they are abruptly introduced to work.

Find out what diet the ram was on pre-sale. Reduce concentrate levels slowly over a three-week period. Young rams need to grow so complete removal of meal may not be wise, especially if grass quality is poor or if weather is wet.

Table 1: Working out dates for 10 week pre-mating check

10 weeks pre- mating	Mating	Lambing
5 July	13 Sept	7 Feb
12 July	20 Sept	14 Feb
19 July	27 Sept	21 Feb
26 July	4 Oct	28 Feb
2 Aug	11 Oct	7 Mar
9 Aug	18 Oct	14 Mar
16 Aug	25 Oct	21 Mar
23 Aug	1 Nov	28 Mar
30 Aug	8 Nov	4 Apr

Table 2: Telling a rams age by his teeth

Permanent incisors	Eruption age
First pair	1 - 1.5 years
Second pair	1.5 - 2 years
Third pair	2 - 3 years
Fourth pair	3 - 4 years



Brisket must be free from sores.



Feet must be in good shape and pared, where required, for the breeding season.