



## Sheep CRC Practical Wisdom Notes

---

<b>Document ID:</b>	SheepCRC_25_13
<b>Title:</b>	Successful pregnancy scanning
<b>Author:</b>	Sheep CRC
<b>Key words:</b>	sheep; pregnancy scanning;

---

**Attribution:** You may copy, distribute and otherwise freely deal with this publication for any purpose, provided that you acknowledge the Sheep CRC Ltd.

**Disclaimer:** The information contained in this publication is based on knowledge and understanding believed to be correct at the time of writing. However, because of advances in knowledge, users are reminded of the need to check currency of the information. Sheep CRC Ltd accepts no responsibility for any actions taken based on information contained in this document.

It should be cited as:

Sheep CRC (2014) – Practical Wisdom Note: *Successful pregnancy scanning*

## Successful pregnancy scanning

### Efficient and accurate scanning needs:

- Length of joining should be five weeks and no more than six weeks.
- Tease ewes where joining starts before mid-January to enable a concise joining.
- Keep rams out of flocks at other times.
- Stop supplements one or two days before scanning is to be done.
- Take ewes off feed and water the night before scanning.
- Ensure enough help is available on the day of scanning to keep the ewes moving.
- Good yards and panels are needed to allow subdivision of the scanned ewes.

### Introduction

The commercial availability of ultrasound scanning for pregnancy in ewes has been a major development for the sheep industry. It enables farmers to know the pregnancy status of their ewes about two months before they are expected to start lambing. Information on the pregnancy status of ewes enables farmers to:

- Identify and manage ewes separately according to pregnancy status.
- Identify and potentially cull dry ewes from flock.
- Identify early and late conceived single-bearing ewes.
- Calculate lamb losses between scanning and marking.

To make the most of the pregnancy diagnosis it is important for the observations to be very accurate.

### When do I scan?

By day 70 from rams in, pregnancy can be detected accurately. To accurately detect the number of foetuses present, scanning should ideally be around day 90 from rams in, although it can be done from day 80 through to day 100. While ewes with foetuses older than 100 days can still be pregnancy scanned, shading caused by bones developing makes it difficult to determine the number of foetuses present.

## How do I prepare for scanning?

In order for scanners to accurately determine pregnancy status it is important for the ewes to be presented to them at the optimum time. This is particularly important for the detection of multiple pregnancies. The optimum joining period is five weeks and no longer than six weeks. This length of joining allows two chances for the ewes to conceive as ewes display oestrus for 24 hours once each 17 days. If joining occurs before mid-January, it is important to effectively tease ewes (with testosterone treated wethers or vasectomised rams) for 14 days before the introduction of the rams. This will ensure that all ewes are cycling and a concise lambing period of around 35 days is achieved. Because of the need for a relatively short period for conception, it is important that stray rams not get with the ewes at other times. The longer the joining period, the more difficult it is for scanners to give accurate results.



Figure 1. Optimum joining and scanning times.

## Before the scanner arrives

The ewes should be taken off feed and water the night before they are to be scanned. The ewes also should not be given any supplements (e.g. grain, hay and silage) during the day before scanning. It is important that scanners can set up their gear in good yards that have been watered down to reduce dust while scanning. Also, it is important that scanners have enough help to allow for the efficient movement of the ewes so that they flow well through the yards and aren't squashed entering the scanners area.

The ewes should be able to be drafted promptly if they need to be split on pregnancy status and be tagged/marked to reflect their pregnancy status. Setting up a drafting gate at the exit of the scanning crate is a good option. Portable or temporary yards will need to be set up to handle this or at least there be labour available to mark ewes for drafting later.



Figure 2. Scanned ewe drafted out of the scanning crate.

## Should I scan for multiples?

Determining the responsiveness of your flock's reproduction rate to nutrition can be a useful exercise and gives useful information on the value of feeding extra at joining to lift poor reproduction rates.

To do this requires the ewes to be condition scored at joining and an individual record kept for each ewe (can be when rams come out). At scanning each ewe's pregnancy status is recorded against their joining condition/fat score. Those greater than score 3 or more should have a higher reproductive rate than those registering a score of <2.5. The difference between the two groups will give an idea of how nutrition affects the number of dry, single- or twin-bearing ewes for your flock.

Visit [www.sheepcrc.org.au](http://www.sheepcrc.org.au) for more details on reproductive response to increasing nutrition or to use the conception rate calculator or to obtain copies of the Lambing Planner.

Scanning for multiples becomes more valuable when reproductive rates are higher. If you regularly achieve >100% lambing, it is likely that you have more than 20% twins in utero and it is at this level that scanning for multiples is very cost effective. More than 20% twinning ewes may mean separate management is practical and feeding efficiencies can be achieved.

## More information

Visit <http://www.sheepcrc.org.au> for more information on pregnancy scanning and sheep reproduction.

## Acknowledgements

Mark Edwards, Dumbleyung, Aaron Robertson, Darkan Genstock, Kojonup are all thanked for sharing information about the needs for accurate scanning results.

## Further reading

- Farmnote 125. Teasing ewes for early breeding - Available from [www.agric.wa.gov.au](http://www.agric.wa.gov.au)
- Lamb Planner - Available from DAFWA, Albany, WA - 08 9892 8444 or [albany@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:albany@agric.wa.gov.au)
- Sheep Breeding - The ram effect - Available from DPIQ at [www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/sheep/8527.html](http://www2.dpi.qld.gov.au/sheep/8527.html)