

An unsound ram is worse than this ram being completely left out of a syndicate mating. The following RamCare will ensure the rams that are mated are sound for a 6-week mating and will work to at least 6 years of age.

At purchase

- 1.1. Rams that have been bred and selected for soundness will require less management. Make sure your ram breeder is focused on soundness as well as selection for production.
- 1.2. Ensure rams being purchased have been recently checked by a veterinarian for sound reproduction, sound conformation and are showing no sign of disease. Prior to taking delivery check again for soundness, in particular testicles as they can be injured fighting after the veterinary check.
- 1.3. Obtain the ram's and its flocks health status and management history from your ram breeder; vaccination, drench, fly and lice treatment, OJD status, foot rot status, brucellosis status supplementary feeding (now and over their lifetime) and feet trimming.
- 1.4. Transport rams so they can stand easily and will not get injured. Rams should have been off feed and water for between 4 and 12 hours when they start their journey. Good flooring is very important so they can grip and not be injured by a rough or loose surface.
- 1.5. On arriving home keep your new rams away from older rams to avoid any risk of injury from fighting. This is particularly important if you are within the 12 weeks prior to mating. It is also likely the new young rams will need a higher level of nutrition as they are still growing.
- 1.6. Quarantine drench your new rams with the most suitable drench or combination of drenches to 'clean out' resistant worms. Do this when they arrive home and leave them in a safe, secure yard or holding paddock to ensure resistant worms don't contaminate pasture before the drench has time to work. Two days is a suitable quarantine in the yard. The WormBoss website provides more information on quarantine drenching www.wormboss.com.au. Feed as much good quality hay as rams will eat. If lupins are to be fed in the future this is a good time to introduce rams that have had no experience with this grain. The yard should have good day long shade for all rams, a lot of "personal" space to eat, water and simply distance themselves from the other rams they are in the yard with. Good interaction between you and the rams during this time will make handling easier in the future.

Year round management

- 2.1 Maintain rams in a fat/condition score of 3 all year round except when leading up to mating. Over fat rams are more prone to breakdown due to excessive weight on limbs and are less mobile around the paddock. Keep rams fit.
- 2.2 Shearing rams 10 to 12 weeks prior to mating is recommended. Shearing within 8 weeks of mating can reduce semen quality during mating, particularly in hot weather, as the fleece protects the ram against high temperatures. Shear rams with as little stress as possible, including when traveling to and from their paddock and in the yards before and after shearing.
- 2.3 Shear rams twice a year.
- 2.4 At mating, if rams have not been shorn in the last 12 weeks, ring rams around the pizzle or remove the belly wool completely, especially if the belly wool is burry. Also, wig and crutch if necessary.
- 2.5 Ensure rams are drenched (with an effective drench) at strategic times.
- 2.6 Maintain immunity via an annual booster of 6 in 1 vaccination.

- 2.7 Keep ram's feet trimmed if necessary to reduce the risk of lameness or foot abscess. A ram with poor feet shape (and the lameness and arthritis that results) is less likely to seek out, mount ewes and ejaculate.
- 2.8 Trim horns if required. Short horns will reduce fighting and handling difficulties. Check scurs and trimmed horns as they can grow toward the head.
- 2.9 If mating during the fly season provide fly treatment on the head that will last the length of mating. Routine fly strike management is a must to reduce infertility and deaths.
- 2.10 Avoid handling of rams in such a way they are getting toward “tonguing” particularly in the 10 weeks before mating as this can reduced fertility during mating. Careful handling at shearing, crutching, foot trimming and when mustering are important. Don't move rams any distance in the heat of the day if it can be avoided.
- 2.11 Rams need to be fit for mating. While you need to avoid stress, particularly in the 10 weeks before mating, ensure the rams are getting good regular exercise.
- 2.12 Keep rams well away from ewes before being mated in the autumn and summer. Close contact at this time can result in a “ram effect” that reduces ewe cycling during mating.

Pre and post mating management

- 3.1 Carry out a pre-mating physical examination 12 to 14 weeks prior to mating (and also prior to ram selection) to ensure there are no problems with feet, teeth, prepuce and penis, testicles and scrotum. If testical size and tone is not good (28 cm or greater and firm and springy – not hard or flabby) feeding will need to start immediately.
- 3.2 Sound supplementary feeding of rams 10 weeks prior to mating can provide a marked improvement in semen quality and volume. Feed 0.4 kg (a cup) of lupins daily. For rams over 80 kg feed 0.5 kg per day. In addition, provide pasture or supplementary feed at a level suitable for a dry sheep at the ram's weight.
- 3.3 Each ram should be in condition score 3.5 to 4 during the 8 weeks prior to mating. If mating rams after a long period with no green feed at all, it may be necessary to supplement with vitamin A at 8 weeks prior to mating and just before mating.
- 3.4 Sound and well-prepared rams can be safely mated at 1.5% unless the geography, pasture availability, paddock size and high ambient temperatures require an increase in the ram percentage. The optimum mating period is for 2 cycles (five weeks). Teasers can be an advantage if mating between August and January. During this teaser period, keep rams well away from Merino ewes to be mated to ensure ewe fertility is not compromised.
- 3.5 If possible, do not mate old rams and young rams together because of possible domination of older rams. If possible mate older rams with maiden ewes and maiden rams with older ewes.
- 3.6 After mating, put rams in a good paddock to recover. If rams are below 3 score supplementary feeding may be necessary. Maintain rams in score 3 condition (improve prior to mating – see point 3.3). Once rams reach 3 score condition (along with other care discussed) they are ready to be mated in 10 weeks. Mating rams within the 8 weeks from the end of another mating is questionable (even if in the correct body condition) due to stress that may have occurred during the first mating.

Allan Casey
Advanced Breeding Services
0408 279 719
12 February 2018