

The Maidens Monitor (July-Sept 2024)

The Making Maidens Weight producer demonstration site (PDS) is exploring ways to improve lamb marking rates from maiden ewes in central west Queensland. Conception rates of maidens in the region are generally good, however, converting these foetuses to lambs remains a challenge. The demonstration properties are exploring condition scoring, weighing, supplementation, scanning and udder assessment of ewes to improve their marking percentage. As part of this, demonstration sites are collecting individual animal data with electronic identification (eID) in large-scale, commercial operations and highlighting how this data is useful for decision-making.

How are we using WhatsApp?

The Making Maidens Weight WhatsApp chat continues to be a great way for producers to engage with the PDS. This article explores the topics of discussion this quarter, including supplementary feeding between weaning and joining, data collection and analysis, current challenges, and upcoming local events.

Demonstration sites

Both demonstration sites have been busy managing weaning and body condition scoring (BCS) ewes. Assessing BCS at weaning enables producers to identify the proportion of the mob requiring preferential treatment (paddock allocation and/or supplementary feeding) and the gain in condition required in the lead up to joining. Lifting the BCS of lighter ewes prior to joining improves the number of foetuses scanned (Figure 1) as well as their resilience to environmental stress over the summer.

Beaconsfield received some useful winter rain, and those paddocks showing a pasture response were preferentially allocated to lighter condition ewes, who also received twice weekly cottonseed feeds. The heavier half of the mob were being run on country that missed out on winter rain (Image 1). The impact of these treatments will be evident in weight measurements before joining and at pregnancy scanning.

In this period, Dunblane was busy with weaning, shearing and body condition scoring the red (2022



Image 1: Beaconsfield ewes (>2.5 BCS) on loose lick in September (Image: Peter Thomas).

drop) and yellow (2021 drop) taggers, sending their data to Dr Gordon Refshauge (NSW DPIRD) for analysis. Wet and dry data was also collected, with observations that the ewes who raised a lamb were lighter in condition than dry ewes. Gordon's analysis over the past two years is supporting decision making to sell fat yellow tag

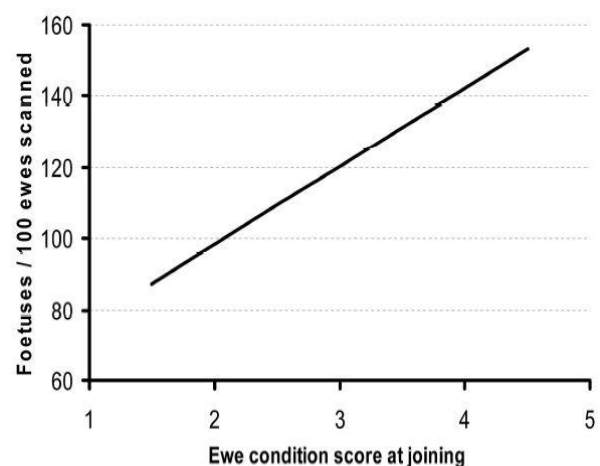


Figure 1: Ewe condition score at joining improve the number of foetuses/100 ewes scanned (Source: Lifetime Wool).

ewes that failed to rear a lamb two years in a row. Dunblane is trialling containment feeding of weaners, discussed later in this article.

If you'd like to read the most recent producer newsletter (October 2024) to learn more about what the demonstration flocks have been up to, please contact David Counsell on 0427 073 606 or davidjcounsell@bigpond.com.

Handy resources

- [Fit to Join Ute Guide](#) (MLA)
- [Sheep Condition Scoring App](#) (DPIRD)
- [Fat Score Ewes at Joining](#) (NSW DPIRD)

Topics of discussion in the chat

Challenges

- Discussions indicate that black tag lambs born in autumn this year have become small, woody weaners. Discussion about weaner management and feeding weaners to grow 100g/hd/day for 6 weeks stemmed from this observation.
- Cost of feed for those considering feeding weaners in western Queensland.
- Predators – wild dogs, dingoes and eagles were recorded as having an impact this period.

Containment feeding

Containment feeding is more common on farms in southern states with cheaper access to feed, however the practice may be an option for some in western Queensland for purposes such as drought lotting, weaning or feeding a small group of animals to a target weight. In the Whatsapp chat there is growing interest in feeding weaners to ensure good growth rates that will set them up to be productive adults. Dunblane is trialling containment feeding of black tag (2024 drop) weaners to set them up to conceive as maidens in 12 months' time (Image 2).

Significant discussion of rations, buffers and introduction of animals to feed occurred between Rob Inglis (Elders Livestock Production Coordinator), Gordon and producers. Vitamin injections and lick were highlighted as a priority for managing animal health in containment areas as well as targeted flystrike management while weaners are being brought onto high grain diets that may initially cause digestive issues if not properly transitioned to the new diet.



Image 2: Containment feeding set up at Dunblane for black tag weaners (Image: David Counsell).

NSW Local Land Services have developed a [useful information guide](#) that highlights a range of aspects to consider when developing a containment feeding area. If you are considering containment feeding in any capacity, please seek professional advice.

Pearls of wisdom

- Prepare ewes for mating by body condition scoring them at weaning and gauging where you need them to be at joining. Ewes in poorer condition are unlikely to conceive. If you are in the position of needing to offload animals over summer, selling ewes pregnancy tested in lamb is always an option.
- Pregnancy scan 80-100 days after the start of joining and assess the season with the number of ewes pregnant to then make a feed budget and data-supported decisions.
- If budgets are tight, prioritise ewe lambs. Feeding grain to support weaner growth is an investment not an expense that will pay off with reproductive performance in later years.
- If prices permit, consider faba beans in a ration as a great source of protein.
- Get feed tests done on any grains, cereals or hay being introduced to young stock.
- Compare feeds on a \$/MJ energy, rather than \$/tn, for a more accurate comparison of value.

Upcoming events

- Keep an eye out for our 2025 events on the [Leading Sheep website](#).