

GUIDELINES FOR SHEEP ULTRASOUND PREGNANCY DIAGNOSIS

Since 2002 the Department of Agriculture has been able to offer a ewe Ultrasound Pregnancy Diagnosis Service (scanning) to farmers.

Why scan my ewes?

Scanning is widely used, world wide as a mainly management tool in the farming industry. It allows producers to pretty accurately predict lambing %, feed requirements and budgeting, forecast income from wool/lambs/meat (calves/veal/meat) and can be useful for informing farmers of animal health issues i.e. abortions, ram management.

Should I scan my ewes?

Before you decide to have your flock(s) scanned, have a really good hard think about why you want them done. If it's only to find out the possible lambing % then forget it, it's a waste of the scanners time and effort and puts your ewes through a lot of unnecessary stress. If, however, you want to know twins/singles/dry (TSD) or wet/dry (WD) with a view to maximising ewe/lamb survivability, pasture/paddock use and feed budgeting then it's invaluable.

Once scanned, the dries can be drafted off and run elsewhere, the singles should go on good quality/improved pasture and the twins should go on the best possible pastures plus, if they are valuable animals, budget for supplementary feeding when the weather deteriorates and the pasture loses quality.

What do I need to provide and do?

Once you have decided to have your ewes scanned, phone the DoA with your ram joining and removal dates, you will then be given a scanning date and time. Twenty-four hours before scanning commences, bring your ewes into the shed or yards so they can empty out. **This is crucial, as it is impossible to scan ewes with a full belly.**

If it were at all feasible, it would be extremely helpful if a day or couple of days before scanning, the rear half of the belly was shorn. In coarser and more open woolled sheep it is not so much of a problem but with fine woolled sheep, pushing the probe through the belly wool and trying to get a good skin contact is very difficult, very tiring and slows the whole operation down considerably.

The scanning crate will sit at then end of the race. If you do not have a permanent race or a race in the shed then rigging up a temporary one along the side of a pen will be fine.

Hint: For optimum flow-through of sheep, make sure the two panels/hurdles behind the crate are solid or covered in so the sheep cannot see the movements of the scanner.

A safe, well-earthed source of power is needed whether it is a mobile or the settlement generator. Extension cords may be needed; we supply one long one and various shorter ones.

A continuous close supply of hot and cold water is necessary. How much depends on your flock size, obviously the larger the mob the greater amount of water is used.

And last, but most certainly not least, is woman/man power. A minimum of two people is required but depending on how well or not the sheep are running, maybe three will be beneficial.

When do my ewes get scanned?

This is where your ram joining and removal dates are so important.

For wet/dry (WD) only, the ewes will be scanned 45+ days after **ram removal**. For twins/single/dry (TSD) the ewes will be scanned ideally at 80-85 days after **ram joining** and no later than 90 days.

When scanning ewes that have been in that current year's AI/ET programme, we will scan the ewes at 75 days after insemination/implantation. This is the optimum time to detect different lamb foetal size, which will show if the AI/ET was successful, or if the ewe is carrying a lamb from your sweeper ram.

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