

Examination of the breeding ram

Your ram is half the solution to getting a high percentage of ewes in lamb quickly to give a tight lambing period and help get lambs away early. He may also have cost a lot of money in the hope of either improving the genetics of the flock or producing better lambs for sale. However, too often his ability to mate ewes and get them in lamb is taken for granted, often until it is too late and ewes are returning. A pre-breeding exam can rule out common problems and may indicate the need for collecting and testing a sample of semen to confirm fertility.



Need to know

There are very few completely sterile rams, however up to 30% of rams may be subfertile, meaning they get fewer ewes in lamb and take longer to do so. Furthermore a sub-fertile ram can badly affect your lambing percentage with knock on effects on lambs sold per ewe and in turn profits.

A subfertile ram can be hugely costly as he can affect the performance of all the ewes he runs with. Even if multiple rams are used in a group, an infertile dominant ram can stop the other fertile rams from working.

The fit and fertile ram can serve 80-100 ewes in 3 weeks, allowing a higher ratio of ewes to rams than is generally used.

A breeding examination of all rams 10 weeks before tupping gives time for problems to be corrected and replacements purchased if necessary.

Sperm production takes 6 weeks to recover after a problem, which is why it is important to test early

This examination can be carried out by your vet, who will also be able to collect and examine a semen sample if necessary.

A semen sample can give more information on amount of semen produced and if there are any abnormalities in the semen.

A ram that is both fertile and in good health for mating will:

- Last longer in the flock saving on replacement costs
- Get more ewes in lamb so fewer are lost as barren
- Get ewes in lamb faster giving a tighter lambing period
- Give you more lambs on the ground so a more profitable season

Up to 30% of rams are subfertile affecting the performance of the whole flock



Ram physical examination checklist

1. Starting at the head, check teeth to ensure he can eat well and maintain condition while serving.
2. Check for any wounds as pain and inflammation will affect semen quality.
3. Body condition scoring – rams should be score 3.5 at the start of tupping, too thin and they may not manage to serve all the ewes, too fat and they may have less libido and excess fat in the scrotum can decrease fertility.
4. Check feet for any sign of lameness as this is a common cause of problems.
5. Size varies with age, breed and time of year but as a guide should be over 34cm for ram lambs and 36cm for mature rams.

6. Check for any lumps or soft areas in the testicles – these may indicate infection or abscesses. The testicles should feel as firm as a tensed bicep.
7. Check the penis to make sure it moves freely in the prepuce and there are no signs of trauma.
8. Check brisket for sores.

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If any problems are found or suspected get your vet to check the ram. A semen sample can then be collected if necessary to check fertility.

The ram breeding examination

10 weeks pre tupping
Check key areas including:

- Teeth
- Toes
- Testicles – measure, check firmness and for any lumps
- Tone – body condition score 3.5-4

This is also a chance to give any treatments needed.

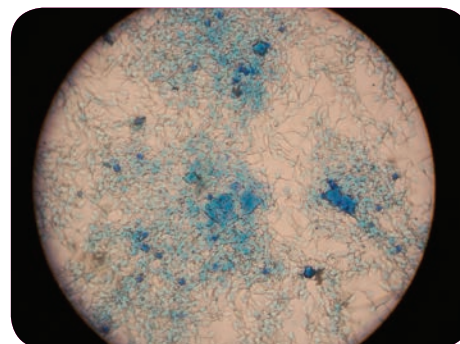
Electroejaculation can be used to collect a semen sample.



The sample is then examined under the microscope and scored for motility



Further examination of the sperm may include assessment of live and dead, and assessing the types of abnormality.



For further information contact your local XLVets practice:

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