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## EC61-207 Ram Management

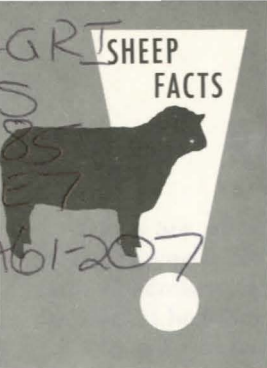
Ted H. Doane

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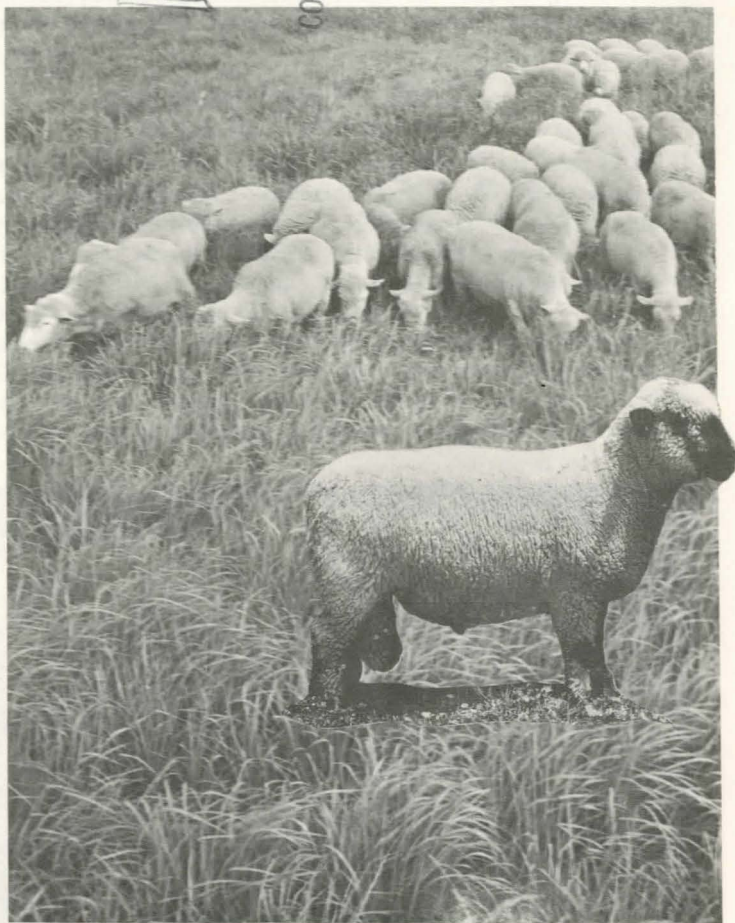
E.C. 61-207

# Ram Management

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# RAM MANAGEMENT

By Ted H. Doane<sup>1</sup>

Rams are often referred to as half the flock. Lambs acquire half of their genetic makeup from their sire and the other half from their dam. Therefore, a producer should select rams above the average of his flock if he wishes to improve the flock.

When a producer has selected his rams, their care and management becomes important in getting maximum fertility. Poor management may result in a poor lamb crop or even in no lamb crop at all.

This bulletin presents some timely tips in obtaining maximum fertility of rams during the breeding season through proper management and feeding.

## How Many Ewes Per Ram?

(A ram unit = 35 ewes)

**Aged rams** (2-5 years old) are usually capable of serving 35 to 45 ewes, whereas a **yearling ram's** potential is 25 to 35 ewes. The well developed **ram lamb** should not be expected to cover more than 10 to 15 ewes in his first season. When a ram reaches 6 years of age his productive life is limited. A ram may be potent until 8 to 10 years of age but he begins to decrease in fertility after 5 years.

It is suggested that a junior stud be purchased (possibly a ram lamb) to aid the older ram. This will give the breeder a chance to progeny test a young ram before using him heavily. As a general rule, a mature, sound ram in breeding condition is capable of serving 35 ewes (1 ram unit).



A sound, mature ram can adequately breed 35 ewes.

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Dept. of Animal Husbandry (Agricultural Extension).

## When To Turn Rams In With Ewes

The gestation period of ewes is 147 to 150 days. If you plan to start lambing January 1, then you must put your rams in by August 1. This table will help in your planning.

Ram Put In This Date (leave 6 weeks)	Lambs Born This Date
August 1	January 1 - February 15
September 1	February 1 - March 15
October 1	March 1 - April 15

### Management Prior to Breeding

(1) The first step in breeding management is to feed the ram a breeding ration. The ration should have adequate protein but not an excessively high energy content. Many producers use oats, bran, and alfalfa hay, while others use some corn, oats, and hay. A ram should be given about one-half pound of a concentrate ration per day starting 2 to 3 weeks before breeding season. One of the following breeding rations is suggested.

(a) Oats, 3 parts  
Wheat Bran, 1 part

(b) Corn, 3 parts  
Oats, 3 parts  
Protein Supplement, 1 part

Try to feed a 13% to 14% protein ration in addition to hay or pasture.

Many producers purchase their rams just prior to the breeding season. Highly-fitted rams are sometimes low in fertility or are poor breeders until they are in proper breeding condition. It is important to obtain breeding condition as soon as possible with a feed such as one of those suggested above.



(2) Keep rams cool. Shear the ram 2 to 3 weeks before breeding season begins, especially if (a) the ram is highly fitted and (b) if your breeding season is prior to September 1. High body temperature has a severe effect upon the number of live normal sperm produced. Cool quarters also will help give higher fertility. Try to keep the ram in a well ventilated building that does not get too hot.



(3) Trimming feet is another practice recommended prior to breeding. All feet should be checked and trimmed to avoid the possibility of the ram going lame during the breeding season.



To eliminate most lameness of rams, trim their feet prior to the breeding season.

### **Turning In Rams**

Since most Nebraskans attempt to lamb their ewes in January and February, it will be necessary to breed the ewes in warm weather. Plan your operation so as to keep rams fresh and active. It is suggested that the breeder follow one of the following plans:

(1) Turn rams with ewes from 6 PM to 7:30 AM. House them in cool quarters during the day. Research indicates there is a 15% increase in lamb crop by using this method as compared with leaving the rams in with the ewes 24 hours a day.

(2) Turn out one-half of the rams each night instead of all of them. This gives rams a full day's rest. Rotating rams has been a successful practice.

### **Marking Rams**

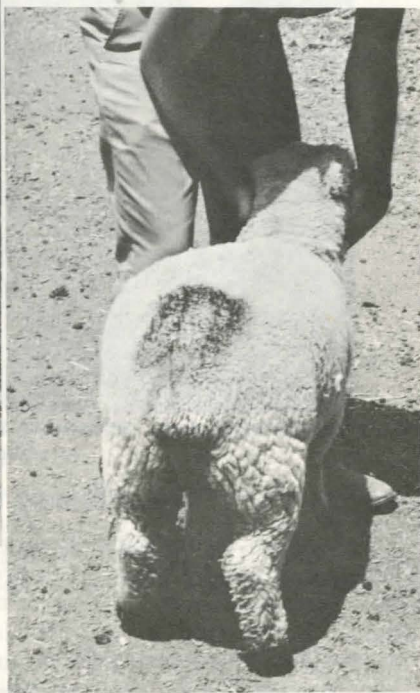
A good practice is to follow the activity of a ram by painting the brisket with wool paint each night before turning him into the breeding pen or using a marking harness during the breeding season.

As the ram serves the ewe he will mark her on the rump. By changing the color of paint (light to dark) every 16 to 17 days, the producer can determine, (1) which ewes are returning in heat, (2) what percentage of the ewes are settled, and (3) approximate lambing date of the ewes. The wool paint should be thinned with oil to keep it from drying too rapidly. Lamp black and oil also has been a good marking paint. Avoid using non-scourable paint.



A ram's activity can be checked by painting his brisket daily.

A marked ewe which has been served.



### After Breeding

The ram should be removed from the ewe flock after the breeding season and housed separately. This eliminates (1) scattered lamb crop, (2) rough treatment of the ewes by the ram, and (3) fat, sluggish ram.

Limit the feed of the ram after breeding season. A wintering ration of hay and silage to supplement the pasture is sufficient. The only time a person should supplement this ration is about 2 to 3 weeks before the breeding season and during the breeding season.

## **Summary**

- Select a ram that will improve your flock.
- A sound, mature ram will breed 35 ewes in a season.
- The gestation period of ewes is 147 to 150 days.
- Plan your lambing dates.
- Feed your ram a breeding ration, trim his feet, and keep him cool.
- Turn the ram with the ewes during the evenings.
- Use marking paint to determine the activity of your ram.

## **Other Sheep Bulletins**

EC 61-205—Feeding and Management of the Ewe

EC 61-206—Feeding and Care of Young Lambs under Farm Conditions

EC 60-712—Sheep Equipment Plans (\$1.00)

EC 61-1905—Prevent Worms to Increase Sheep Profits

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DEAN E. F. FROLIK  
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