

Dag scoring

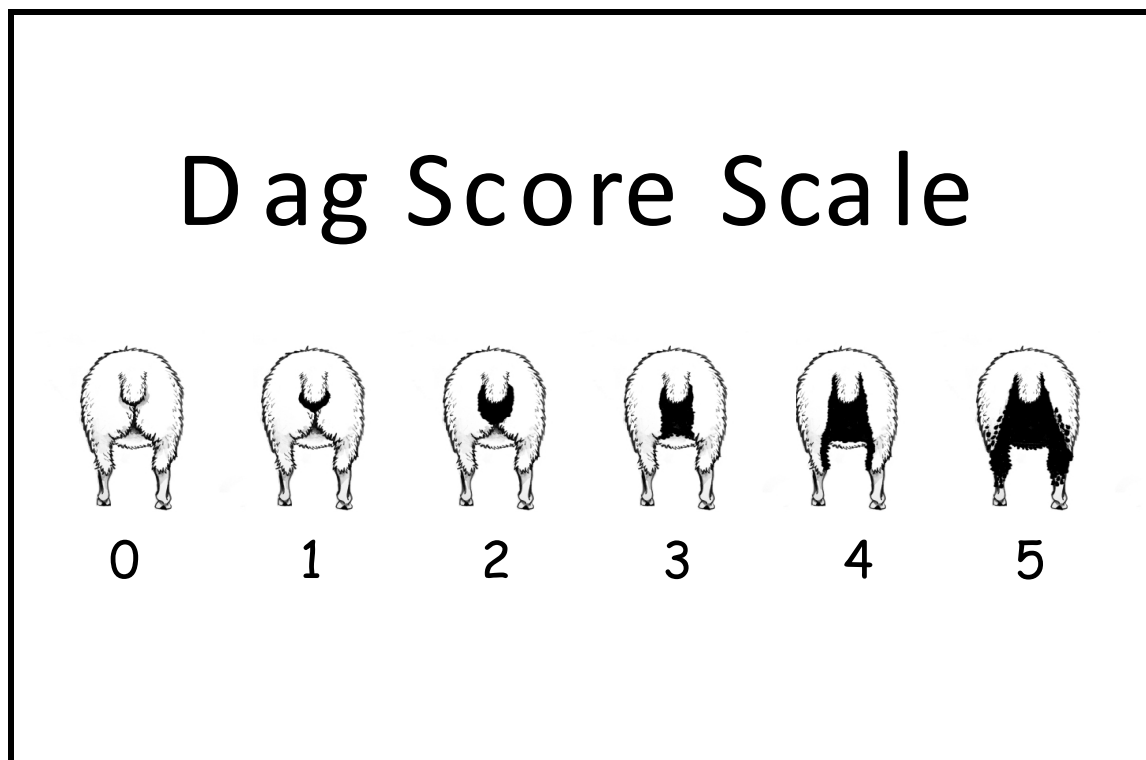
Introduction

Faecal material can build up around a lambs' hindquarter for a number of reasons, and can result in both increased risk of fly strike and increased costs associated with removal of this faecal material. By scoring the "dagginess" of lambs we can aim to assess rams for their performance in this cost increasing trait.

The Dag Score scale

Sheep Ireland uses a scoring system displayed in the diagram below. This shows a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (no dags) to 5 (very daggy). However, smaller scales can be used e.g. a 4-point scale from 0 to 3 is suitable. **The key is to be consistent when scoring a group of sheep and for these sheep to have been run under similar conditions.** The dag score scale given below just shows the degree or extent of faecal contamination of the fleece. This should not be confused with urine stain in ewe lambs and hoggets.

Using the diagram below is recommended when gaining experience in scoring, and the best way to achieve consistency is practice! Do not be unduly worried about variation in the way the scores are applied between years or between flocks. During the genetic evaluation Sheep Ireland will remove the effects of differences between years and flocks.



Contemporary group

Sheep Ireland does need to know if there have been systematic differences between groups of animals that are dag scored within a year. These may be due to different management (feeding groups) or a different operator scoring them for daginess. These treatment differences can be accounted for by assigning animals to different groups. You can think of them as “groups” on the basis of whether they were run together, or not, during the period when dags developed, on whether some sheep were crutched or drenched while some were not, and on the basis of who performed the dag score. As with lambing group, the grouping of animal involves assigning ewes to a group from group 1 upwards (depending on the number of groups). It is as simple as ensuring the ewes in the same group get the same group number, not the group number itself.

The effect of drenching

Animals can scour for many reasons other than internal parasites. There is no need to avoid drenching in order to seriously challenge sheep to scour. However, in order to get the best discrimination for genetic merit for dag score, we should aim to get 30-40% of sheep with a dag score greater than zero. Any less will make it harder to discriminate the sheep less prone to dags from those more prone to dags. You can crutch and drench sheep after scoring them.

When to collect data

Sheep Ireland can use two scores of daginess to predict genetic merit for dag score. You do not have to record both but the accuracy is lower if you record only one. The first score is collected soon after weaning (DAG4 – at 4 months), and the second in the autumn (DAG8 – at 8 months). Dagging and/or crutching can be carried out in between these times but if two scores are to be taken it is recommended that all animals be treated the same (i.e. all dagged) between scoring events.

You or the technician

Dag scores will need to be recorded by you as a breeder.