
Mating management

Introduction

Good mating records are important for accurate pedigrees on next spring's lambs. Please read this entire document to ensure all the relevant information is gathered.

Identifying your ram team

All the rams you use need to be correctly identified on the Sheep Ireland system. Uniquely identify them using the permanent LambPlus ID system. You will need to specify this for homebred rams as well as for rams from another stud that have been bought-in or used via AI.

Single sire mating

For each ram, record the LambPlus ID of all ewes he is mated to. Records should be kept of those ewes that are embryo transfer (ET) recipients. Recording the recipient(s) will ensure that the donor is known of each lamb. This will ensure that the lamb can be linked to its' genetic dam at birth (via the association of dam (or donor) with recipient on the mating list). AI inseminations should be recorded at mating. By submitting this mating list to Sheep Ireland, the database will automatically identify each lamb's sire when their dam's tag is recorded at lambing.

Ewe management

Management of recorded ewes need not be much different to commercial lambing ewes.

Many producers feed single-bearing and multiple-bearing ewes differently from lambing, perhaps providing additional feed or some meal for multiples and so on, as they would for commercial ewes.

To fill in the ewe group section accurately in this book, the key points are:

- You will need to identify the group ewes are in (if any) at lambing so that Sheep Ireland can correct for 'group effects' – e.g. better feed to twins during lactation. This is important when groups are fed separate for a long time – e.g. supplemented from lambing through to weaning. 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.
- Lambing groups should be as 'genetically random' as you can make them – i.e. by all means lamb singles separate from multiples, but have ewes that went to a mix of sires in each lambing group. If all ewes in group A are mated to sire 1, while all ewes in group B went to sire 2, Sheep Ireland will not be able to say how much of any difference in the performance of lambs born to these ewes is due to the group effect or to the sire effect.
- If there are no separate groups then you may leave this section blank, and we will assume all ewes were treated the same.
- It is best to try and keep management across different ewe groups the same.

Mating ewe lambs

If you mate ewe lambs, their mating and lambing details can be recorded just as you do for the older ewes. There are some key things to be aware of when recording ewe lamb mating and lambing information.

- As with older ewes, we need to identify the difference between ewe lambs that were not exposed to the ram and those that were mated but failed to conceive. Animals not mated need to be recorded as having unknown lambing performance, whereas those mated but not pregnant will be assigned as so (barren when given the opportunity to get pregnant). **This is an important difference.** For example, a lambing performance record of “.1121” for a five year old ewe is not the same as a lambing string “01121” when calculating genetic merit for number of lambs born for the ram that sired these females. The ewe fate codes at lambing will ensure that unmated ewes are identified.
- Some breeders mate ewe lambs but don't intend to keep their lambs as replacements. This can provide useful information on litter size for the daughters of sires and it is obtained one year earlier. You could assess this by pregnancy scanning or by collecting lambing information from mated ewe lambs.
- Sometimes, 2-year-old ewes that were mated first as a ewe lamb show slightly different performance than ewes that were not. Sheep Ireland can identify and correct for this, provided records on which animals actually lambing as a ewe lamb are available.