

Marking Time in Lambs

The first few months of a lamb's life are extremely stressful. Marking is one such event that puts a large amount of stress on the lamb. No matter what practice you undertake, whether it be knife, gas knife or rings, you will provoke a stress response.

In livestock, and most animal studies, stress is measured by analysing the amount of Cortisol in the blood. Extended periods of this stress hormone become antagonistic to growth and can cause an array of health problems. Minimisation is key to productivity due to the lag in growth (production) after marking, so it is in the producer's best interest to limit the amount of stress upon the animal.

Younger stock will exhibit less of restriction in growth; hence why lambs must be marked somewhere between 2 to 12 weeks, with 4 weeks being optimal. The youngest animal should be a minimum of 24 hours old to ensure that it and the ewe have bonded.



Vaccination

Vaccination should be undertaken at marking and it is highly recommended to use a 6 in 1 vaccine as this will cover cheesy gland. Other vaccinations such as EryVac is also important if you are creating open wounds (vaccinates against bacterial arthritis or swollen joints) or Gudair for Ovine Johne's Disease.

For those unsure of the benefits of B12, it is an essential vitamin formed in the presence of the element Cobalt in the rumen and is only bacterial in origin. Cobalt and consequently B12, deficiency have been shown to have direct correlation with higher perinatal lamb losses and reduced milk production in ewes. It is also a precursor to methionine which is needed for wool growth, a highly expensive product to make (energy wise), and lambs are trying to grow wool, bone and muscle simultaneously. B12 can only be stored in the liver for a limited amount of time, so the inclusion of B12 in vaccine is therefore beneficial both for pre-lambing and marking vaccination to reduce the demand for it.

Selenium is another vaccine additive that some deem unnecessary. Selenium is an antioxidant and works in much the same way as Vitamin E. It is an essential element needed for growth and is required especially by rams for sperm production. It has been shown to increase milk content in ewes when supplemented. It is particularly needed on country that is volcanic in origin and/or has had gypsum applied to it generously over time, because sulphur tends to block its absorption within the digestive system. Lack of it can cause white muscle disease (seen as stiff gaited lambs) particularly in young fast-growing stock on fast growing pastures usually clover dominant. The recommendation would be to include it in the diet orally. Injection subcutaneously (under the skin) is beneficial and does elevate the immune system somewhat. Most loose licks also contain selenium as sodium selenite. It is advantageous, but only in some environments (as explained above).

Marking

The biggest problem next to stress at marking is the long-term damage to the animal, should marking not be done correctly. The most damaging mistake currently seen locally is the marking of lamb's tails to high; which can lead to increased chance of anal prolapses and infections in the rear end of the animal. Lambs should be marked at the 3rd joint (figure 1) so that the anus and vulva are covered and hence avoid any problems. Prolapses do not present well in yards and one single decision in the lamb cradle can avoid this. If you hire a contractor for your marking, make sure to inform them.

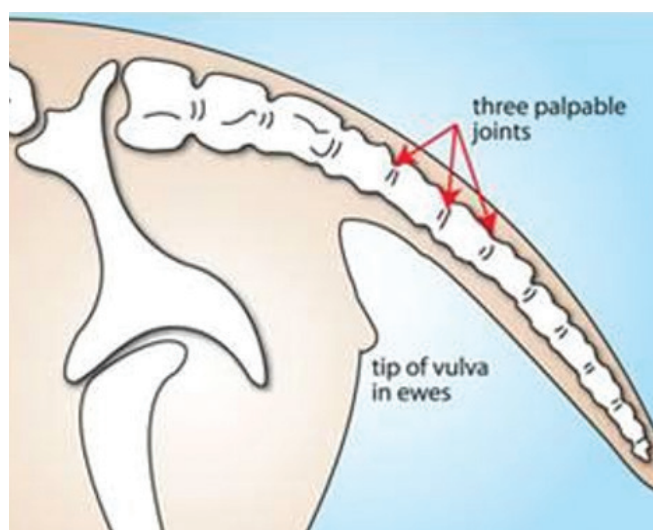


Figure 1

<https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/management-reproduction/best-practice-marking-lambs>

If you sever the tail or scrotum of the animal using a knife or gas knife there is a product that helps with the wound. Tri-solfen is an anaesthetic and antiseptic solution that is applied to open wounds at mulesing, disbudding/ dehorning and marking. It aids in eliminating the majority of the lag in growth after marking. Tri-solfen has both a short acting and long acting anaesthetic to be able to do this and the results are fantastic. Anything left over is also useful at shearing for any major cuts or abrasions.