Rams

- Rams must be functionally effective: in other words they must have healthy reproductive organs and strong, healthy legs.

- Test rams for fertility. If only a few rams are used, it is especially important that they should be fertile.

- Rams must be skilled at mating.

- Use young rams with old ewes and old rams with young ewes.

- Rams must be healthy at breeding time. Some disease conditions such as fever (also bluetongue injections) could cause temporary infertility.

- The maximum age at which rams can be used for mating is 7 to 8 years. Old rams cannot follow ewes for long distances.

- Ensure that the rams are in a good condition at breeding time. They must not be overfat because then they become lazy.
When animals have to walk long distances during the breeding season, rams must be bought in good time so that they can adapt to the environment.

Do not release expensive, newly bought rams in areas where there are large numbers of poisonous plants.

**Ewes**

- Ewes must be functionally efficient. A healthy udder with two normal, healthy teats is essential. Examine the teats regularly in areas where ticks occur.
- Ewes with hard udders (as a result of inflammation or blue udder), and those with abnormally thick teats must be culled.
- Ewes must not be too old when they are mated. They must be culled after 5 to 6 lambing seasons (7 to 8 years). Their teeth become bad and they cannot walk long distances to find grazing.
- Ewes must neither be too fat nor too thin.
- If young ewes are too thin, they do not come into oestrus.
- Ewes must be healthy. Disease conditions such as fever immediately after mating could cause resorption of the foetus and abortion.
- Young ewes should be mated for the first time at 18 months.

**Breeding season**

- Mate the ewes so that they lamb when grazing is plentiful. Lambs will then have a better chance of survival. It also prevents the buying of expensive feed and the lambs are ready for the market at an early age.
- Limit the breeding season to 6 weeks to include two oestrus cycles. When the mating season is too long, flock management (dipping, vaccination and dosing) is more difficult.

**Pregnancy period**

- Avoid underfeeding and stress. Animals should not be driven for long distances during the first 3 weeks of pregnancy. This could cause resorption of the foetus.
Provide sufficient feed to ewes during late pregnancy (last 6–8 weeks) to ensure that strong lambs are born, which have the prospects of a good life expectation.

**Lambing time**

- Lambs should suckle as soon after birth as possible to take in colostrum. Colostrum ensures that they build up natural immunity against diseases.
- Provide proper shelter against wind and rain.
- Ewes with lambs should not be allowed to become too thin, because the lambs will not get enough milk.
- When the ewe has a lot of milk, the lamb grows quickly and can be weaned sooner. This gives the ewe a chance to reach an acceptable mass before the start of the next breeding season.
- If a ewe loses too much condition during lambing time, she will not conceive easily during the breeding season.

Contact the Animal Production Division of the Department of Agriculture: Western Cape for further information.

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