



Ministry of Agriculture and Food

FLUSHING THE EWE FLOCK: IS IT BENEFICIAL?

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The practice of increasing nutrient intake and body condition prior to and during breeding is called flushing. Its purpose is to **increase the rate of ovulation** and, hence, **lambing rate**.

The response to flushing is influenced by:

- age of the ewe (mature ewes show a greater response than yearlings)
- breed (prolific breeds are least responsive)
- body condition (thin ewes respond more than those in above-average condition)
- stage of the breeding season (greatest response is seen early and late in the breeding season).

Flushing is especially beneficial for thin ewes that have not recovered from previous lactational stress. There appears to be no response to flushing in ewes that are already in above-average condition.

It is best to flush ewes with condition scoring of 2–2.5 to increase their condition to 3–3.5. Ewes on a rising plane of nutrition drop more ova than ewes on a steady plane, i.e., condition scoring of 3 increased to 3.5. It takes about 6 weeks grazing on good pasture to improve the body condition of a ewe by 1 body score, and 3 weeks grazing on good pasture to improve a half condition score. The following table indicates the required length of time necessary to bring ewes in below-average condition up to the ideal breeding condition.

Ewe body score	Flushing period (weeks)
1.5	9
2.0	6
2.5	3
3.0	2

Flushing is generally accomplished by providing ewes with fresh pasture, supplemental harvested forage, or up to 1 lb. grain/ewe daily, depending on environmental stress (time of year), availability of forage, and body condition of the ewes. For ewes that are already in the desired body condition, special feeding usually begins around 2 weeks

prior to breeding, and continues at least 2–4 weeks into the breeding season. The reason for continuing the nutrition plan after breeding is to decrease embryonic death loss. The extra feed ensures the fertilized eggs have a much better chance of attaching to the uterus wall, rather than being reabsorbed due to lack of energy from the ewe.

Do not continue flushing too long after the breeding season, as an extended period of high feeding is unnecessarily costly, and provides no improvements in ewe performance and productivity over a maintenance level feeding program.

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