



Better Returns
Programme

Measuring Shearling Ewe Weight



Pedigree Pointers 11

Signet
Signet Breeding Services

The importance of shearing ewe weight

The genes that influence lamb growth rate also influence mature size. Breeders have done a great job selecting sheep with superior breeding potential for lamb growth rate. This has increased flock output, but in some flocks ewe mature size has also increased.



The advantages and disadvantages of increasing ewe mature size

Advantages

- Lambs with superior growth rate
- Increased milking ability and prolificacy in some breeds (under adequate nutrition)
- Increased breeding ewe value
- Increased cull ewe value

Disadvantages

- Increased feed requirement
- Lower stocking density
- Poorer performance in harsh environments
- Increased housing requirements
- Heavier sheep to catch and handle

Breeding for efficiency

Output is important, but so too is biological and economic efficiency. Genetically larger ewes tend to have faster growing lambs, but they are also more expensive to feed and house. Many commercial flocks wish to optimise (not maximise) the size of their ewes.

Breeding lines exist which have superior genes for early lamb growth rate, but average mature size. These “curve bending” genetics are important for breeders that want to control mature size. They can only be identified if shearling ewe weights are recorded and analysed.



Is it important to assess ewe mature size in Terminal Sire Breeds?

Breeders frequently comment that the largest rams make the most money. Breeders can use Mature Size EBVs to increase size.

However, ram breeders may wish to restrict mature size for two reasons. Firstly, larger framed rams are potentially more difficult to maintain in good body condition on low input systems.

Secondly, larger framed breeding lines tend to be slower to mature and lay down fat. Restricting mature size may provide breeders with another way to ensure lambs have the right amount of finish at slaughter.

If you don't measure it you can't manage it

All Signet clients are encouraged to weigh shearling ewes pre-tupping.

Weights are analysed to produce a Mature Size EBV which assesses genetic potential for weight at maturity.



Recording shearling ewe weights

Breeders should submit the following information to Signet on paper or spreadsheet:

- ◆ Ewe identity
- ◆ Shearling ewe weight (kg)
- ◆ Weigh date – weight to be taken pre-tupping
- ◆ Management group
 - ◆ Ewes managed differently should be identified, particularly if they reared lambs as ewe lambs

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