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THE EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO TEASER RAMS ON LAMBING PERFORMANCE OF HAMPSHIRE AND COLUMBIA EWES

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Summary

The effect of exposure to teaser rams on Hampshire and Columbia ewes bred in September was evaluated in 1985-86 and 1986-87. Ewes previously isolated from rams were divided into teased and nonteased groups 2 weeks prior to introduction of intact rams. Teased ewes were exposed to sterilized rams, while nonteased ewes were isolated from rams during the 2-week prebreeding period. Columbia ewes were exposed 1 week later (first year) and 2 weeks later (second year) than Hampshire ewes. Lambing results indicate only teased Hampshire ewes in the second year had earlier lambing dates than nonteased contemporaries. Teasing resulted in little benefit for Hampshire ewes in the first year or for Columbia ewes in both years. The use of teaser rams in this study provided mixed results under these conditions (September mating) with the breeds tested.

Introduction

The common recommendation that use of teaser rams will stimulate earlier estrous activity and increased lambing rates is based on limited data for specific locations. This study was undertaken to measure the responses following exposure to teaser rams in purebred Hampshire and Columbia ewes in South Dakota normally bred during September.

Experimental Procedure

Purebred Hampshire and Columbia ewes were randomly divided within age and subsequent sire groups into nonteased and teased groups for 2 consecutive years. Hampshire ewes (78 head) were assigned to treatment August 20, 1985, and Columbia ewes (74 head) August 27, 1985, for the first year. For the second year, Hampshire ewes (82 head) were assigned to treatment August 19, 1986, and Columbia ewes (69 head) September 2, 1986. Sterilized crossbred Finn rams were placed with the teaser groups at this time (1 teaser ram:15-20 ewes). The nonteased group was separated from other ewes and/or rams by a minimum of 100 yards during the 2-week period. An exception occurred in the first year during the second week of teasing for Columbia ewes when the minimum separation was 10 yards from the corner of one pasture to another. After the teasing period, ewes were regrouped according to sire groups and intact rams were placed with the ewes for a 35-day breeding period. Ewes grazed brome grass or alfalfa-brome grass pasture and were flushed with 3/4 lb cracked corn per head per day for

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2 weeks prior to joining with intact rams. After the breeding period, ewes were combined and managed as one flock through lambing.

Results

Lambing results are shown in table 1. The use of teaser rams to stimulate earlier estrus, thereby resulting in earlier lambings, did not occur in the Hampshire ewes in the first year or in the Columbia ewes in both years. Columbia ewes were exposed to teaser rams 1 week after the Hampshires in the first year and 2 weeks after the Hampshires in the second year. This may have been late enough in the breeding season to mask the expression of the effect of the teaser rams or these ewes may simply not respond to a teaser ram. The teased Hampshire ewes in the second year did respond to the teaser rams, with more ewes lambing in the first 17 days of lambing than nonteased Hampshire ewes. Although lambing rate (no lambs/ewe lambing) was numerically higher for teased ewes in the second year, the opposite occurred in the first year.

Improved lambing performance by using teaser rams only occurred in Hampshire ewes in the second year. Little benefit was seen in other groups. This may be the result of a lack of stimulation by the teaser rams or insufficient isolation of the nonteased ewes from rams either prior to or during the teasing period.

TABLE 1. EFFECT OF EXPOSURE TO TEASER RAMS ON REPRODUCTIVE RESPONSE OF HAMPSHIRE AND COLUMBIA EWES

| Teaser group | No. ewes | No. lambing 1st 17d | No. lambing 2nd 17d | Total no. lambing | Mean lambing date | Mean no. lambs/ewe lambing |
|--------------|----------|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Year 1 | | | | | | |
| Hampshire | | | | | | |
| Teased | 39 | 32(97) ^a | 1(3) | 33 | Feb. 2 | 1.73 |
| Nonteased | 38 | 28(82) | 6(18) | 34 | Feb. 5 | 1.88 |
| Columbia | | | | | | |
| Teased | 35 | 25(78) | 6(19) | 32 | Feb. 13 | 1.78 |
| Nonteased | 36 | 25(78) | 6(19) | 34 | Feb. 13 | 1.81 |
| Year 2 | | | | | | |
| Hampshire | | | | | | |
| Teased | 42 | 33(92) ^b | 3(8) ^b | 36 | Feb. 2 | 1.94 |
| Nonteased | 40 | 11(28) | 27(69) | 39 | Feb. 11 | 1.82 |
| Columbia | | | | | | |
| Teased | 34 | 20(69) | 9(31) | 29 | Feb. 20 | 1.86 |
| Nonteased | 35 | 22(69) | 9(28) | 32 | Feb. 22 | 1.68 |

^a Number in parenthesis are percentages.

^b Teased different from nonteased (P<.01).