

West Otago

Of specific interest to the West Otago group was the concept of having flocks lambing much earlier than current practice. The system of early lambing (mid-August) was compared to the current practice of late lambing (early October). The result was significantly greater numbers of lambs lost both due to exposure of the ewe and the lamb, and fewer live lambs. This decrease was greater at the High Hill site (6.7%) compared to the Low Hill site (4.2%).

Critical factors which need to be considered before deciding the economic significance of the result are the feed supply and the market price of the lamb. The reason for exploring the option to lamb early is to sell those lambs prime or store into an early market which provides a greater return relative to later in the summer.

Table 1. West Otago High Hill

Site					
West Otago High Hill					
	Present	Time			lsd
		Future 1	Future 2	Future 3	
Scanning percentage = 177%					
Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	299	292	288	284	5.2
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	129	127	125	124	1.9
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1340	1350	1355	1361	7.0
System					
	Early	Late			lsd
Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	316	281			5.9
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	134	123			2.1
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1305	1372			7.8
Mating Date					
	25-Apr	1-May	5-May	10-May	lsd
Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	289	284	283	281	5.9
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	125	124	124	123	2.1
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1354	1359	1362	1364	7.8

Table 2. West Otago Low Hill

Site					
West Otago Low Hill					
	Present	Time			lsd
		Future 1	Future 2	Future 3	
Scanning percentage = 177%					
Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	285	278	275	270	5.1
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	124	122	120	119	1.8
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1359	1368	1373	1379	6.8
System					
	Early	Late			lsd

Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	303	271			5.7
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	130	119			2.1
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1336	1378			7.6
	Mating Date				
				10-	
	25-Apr	1-May	5-May	May	lsd
Lambs lost (exposure of the ewe)	276	271	269	267	5.7
Lambs lost (exposure of the lamb)	120	119	119	118	2.1
Live lambs per 1000 ewes lambing	1372	1378	1381	1382	7.6

The loss of a small number of lambs needs to be weighed against the value of the live lambs and to their cost on the system. Providing adequate feed for those ewes and lambs at a time of the year when pasture production is less than feed demand has a relatively high cost and so market premiums must be significant. It will be this relationship of cost to value that will be more important than the relatively small drop in lamb survival.

Variations in mating date around the current practice of 10 May showed relatively small reductions in lamb survival. These values have been calculated using all climate scenarios, both present and future. The variation is very small with only 1% difference, or 10 lambs per 1000 ewes lambing, in final live lamb number, even though lambing is up to 15 days earlier.