



DOHNE

Solutions

NEW RAM INTEGRATION

Congratulations to purchasers of new rams.

The basic principles outlined here pertains to many species, not just sheep.

In the same way that hens establish a pecking order, or dogs need to know who the Top Dog is, and wolf packs have an Alpha male, rams struggle with each other to find who is strongest. This is a natural event.

New, and often younger, lighter rams introduced to other bigger, heavier rams are at heightened risk of injury.

Rams fight to establish supremacy. Primarily this involves head butting, where two rams face each other and back away until they charge at each other and bang heads. This usually lasts a short time until one or other retires with a headache, and submits to the other, who will often then chase the loser.

Skin injury can occur, and flystrike is a risk. Close observation is worthwhile for a week or two.

When a third ram tries to join in the struggle, they frequently employ the tactic of a chest charge to the one who is occupied in a face-off with another as described earlier. Broken ribs and hips or spinal damage occur at times. Severe injury and death can occur.

Buyers make significant financial outlay for new genetics, and the new rams are worth investing the time to minimise the risk of injury.

STRATEGIES FOR PROTECTING YOUR INVESTMENT

For clients purchasing and introducing one new ram, the “Rolls Royce” course of action is to muster and yard the existing group of rams into the smallest size yard that is comfortably safe, and then add the newcomer. The same principal applies if two, three, four or more rams are new.

Leave the whole group together for several hours so that they can get used to new individuals, and not get a run up and charge each other. The yard is neutral territory to all, so no-one is chief.

If it is at all possible, when letting the whole group out to pasture choose a new paddock. This way, the dominant ram is not returning to his own territory, which helps with safety of the new rams.

Another successful strategy is for new rams to be unloaded straight into ewe mobs. At the end of the mating period, all rams are removed from ewes and put together progressively over a relatively short space of time. Rams have a lower desire for dominance after working hard, and this is the primary reason that this strategy is so successful, especially when by necessity it is combined with all of them being returned together to a neutral paddock.

When a single ram is transported to a new property, they have travelled through new districts with unique and unfamiliar sights, sounds and smells. They are totally dis-orientated and anxious. A thoughtful, caring understanding of their new situation will help you make plans to settle them down. A single ram should be unloaded and immediately introduced to other sheep.

For many sheep breeders, the time involved in following these suggestions is a matter of minutes, not hours; and is a small price to pay to protect the carrier of new genetics, the new investment.