

Time to complete your annual ram NCT

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Rams are being let out around the country these last few weeks for the early season lambs. Ram infertility or sub-fertility is quite common and, in many cases, the problem goes unnoticed until scanning time.

Rams should be raddled and the colour changed at least every 14 days. This enables you to detect a high repeat rate quickly, allowing you to take corrective action before it is too late.

There is an option of changing the raddle every seven days to have lambing dates for the ewes. This will allow feeding

programmes pre-lambing to be tailored on a group basis.

Why is he infertile?

Rams are prone to several infectious diseases that need to be kept under control. Any reason for an increase in scrotal temperature can lead to reduced fertility or infertility for six to eight weeks, due to heat stress or an infection anywhere in the body. Some diseases may affect the reproductive organs directly and could lead to permanent infertility due to irreversible changes of the reproductive tract.

Cost

The cost of infertile and sub-

fertile rams can be dramatic, especially if the mating season is not monitored.

Later lambs leading to later slaughter date, increased number of barren ewes, decreased number of lambs per ewe, cost of synchronisation drugs (in early lambing systems) and the purchase of a new ram are all costs that will leave less money in the farmer's pocket.

BSE

Preparing a ram for breeding should start well in advance of the breeding season.

The purpose of a breeding soundness exam (BSE) is to evaluate a ram's potential breeding ability.

The exam consists of two parts: a physical examination and semen evaluation.

The general health of the ram should be evaluated by observing his eyes, feet, legs, prepuce and penis for any defects that would interfere with breeding.

The testes and epididimides should be palpated and the scrotal circumference should be measured.

Semen samples can be collected using either electroejaculation or via an artificial vagina.

The willingness to breed ewes is highly variable among rams and can have a major impact on sheep production.

Libido is a ram's desire to mate. This should be monitored during the mating season using raddle markings.

If you have any concerns about your ram's fertility, please contact your vet.

Killian Farrell works at Geraghty & Neary Veterinary, a three-vet large-animal practice in Mountbellew, Co Galway. Geraghty & Neary Veterinary is a member of XLVets. XLVets is a group of progressive practices who are working together to achieve a better future for agriculture and veterinary in Ireland. For further information go to www.xlvets.ie.