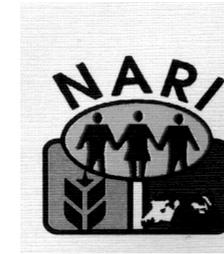


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National Agricultural Research Institute

Sheep



NARI TOKTOK SERIES
LAB 012 E

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INTRODUCTION

Sheep are small, easy to handle animals that can live on a diet of young, green leaves. Such animals can be managed easily by family labour unless the number of animals is large. Meat, wool, skins and manure are the major products from sheep. Meat from a single sheep can be eaten by an extended family without storage problems in rural areas.

There are many breeds or kinds of sheep. However, the common breeds in PNG are the tropical Priangan and the Highlands Halfbred which has developed from the Priangan and more recently introduced breeds like the Corriedale and Perendale.

Common names used for sheep are:

- Ram** – uncastrated male sheep used for mating and breeding
- Ewes** – female breeding sheep
- Wether** – castrated male not needed for breeding and especially for market
- Ram hogget** – uncastrated young male sheep from weaning until mature
- Ewe hogget** – young female sheep from weaning until first lambing
- Lamb** – all baby sheep from birth to weaning

Breeding sheep

Sheep (ewes) are ready to mate at about 8 months of age. A single ram can mate up to 25 ewes or more. Breeding is to obtain offspring and increase flock numbers but choice of animals used or kept for breeding can enable you increase the quality of the flock and obtain better lambs in the future.

It is important to mate together unrelated animals to avoid inbreeding in the flock. This is described in another NARI Toktok.

Lambs are weaned at about four months of age. Ewes will be ready to mate again shortly after lambing but this depends on health and body condition.

Recording

You should keep a record of the animals going in and out of the flock. This will enable you to judge how well you are doing in sheep rearing and helps reduce confusion in breeding.

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At the end of a successful pregnancy they will show enlarging of the udder, swelling of the vulva or the opening of the vagina and uneasiness as they prepare for lambing.

Lambing in sheep takes place five months after mating. Routine monitoring during the pregnancy period is critical. Cases of difficulty in lambing can be assisted by the stockman but, in most cases, it is best not to disturb the ewes but let them clean and look after their new lambs. Inexperienced stockmen should seek advice from DPI or experienced farmers.

Mouthing sheep

The approximate ages of sheep can be found by opening the mouth and observing the teeth. The type of teeth, numbers and amount of wear of teeth indicate the age of the animal. A separate NARI Toktok is available to enable you to learn how to do this.

Identification of individual sheep

Breeding sheep need to be identified in order to record performance or special characteristics of interest. This is not a problem if you have only a few sheep. For breeding or selection in large flocks, identification or numbering is required to avoid confusion. Two common ways of identification are ear tagging with plastic or metal tags and ear marking by notching or tattoo. Tools and equipment are available in agricultural stores but ear notching can be done with a clean, sharp blade.

MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

There are many management practices used in raising sheep. The management system chosen will depend on the available resources, environment, climate and social culture of the area. The general practice is to allow daytime free or tethered grazing and house the animals at night.

Supplementary feeding

Sheep obtain their feed requirements mainly from pasture grasses and other green fodders but other feeds can be provided by the farmers as supplements. Supplementary feeds come in many forms but common practices of many smallholders are to use household vegetable wastes and fodder cut from trees. Supplementary feeds are generally high quality feeds that help increase the total food intake of the animals and are best used for ewes during the later stages of pregnancy and while their lambs are still sucking milk.

Drenching sheep

Internal parasites or worms that live in the sheep's stomach or intestines and compete with the sheep for its food can be controlled by drenching with a suitable chemical. There are several kinds of drenches in the agricultural stores. Some are specific for particular parasites while others kill a wider range. Some examples of these drenches are Nilverm, Ivermectin and Levamisole. Dose rates and directions should be found

written on the containers. Advice should be sought before spending money on drenches because worms may not be a problem for most smallholder farmers.

Crutching and shearing

Crutching is the removal of soiled wool from around the back end of the sheep. It is mainly done before shearing, mating and lambing, or during times when flies are worrying the sheep, to ease breeding and lambing, obtain clean wool and prevent flies from laying their eggs on the sheep.

Shearing or removal of all the wool is normally done once a year to get the wool to market or for the farmer's own use. Wool is one of the main products particularly of Highlands Halfbred sheep.

Tail docking

Docking of lambs is the removal or shortening of the tail in long tailed sheep. It makes the sheep look healthy and attractive. It is often done to discourage flies from laying eggs (fly strike) and reduce tail interference in breeding of ewes. There are two main ways of tail docking: (i) cutting with a knife or blade; (ii) use of rubber rings (elastator). However, tail docking should not be done unless there are obvious problems with flies or with mating.

Foot trimming and foot bath

Trimming of the hard hooves of the feet is to avoid abnormalities that cause pain to the animal and to prevent disease of the feet (foot rot).

Foot bathing is the dipping of the feet into a chemical solution to harden the feet and prevent decaying. Formalin and copper sulphate are common chemicals used that are available in stores. The recommended rates of mixing with water must be obtained when buying these chemicals. Any suitable containers, buckets or especially designed shallow baths in concrete floors can be used to hold the foot bath solution.

Castrating lambs

Castration is the removal of the testicles from young ram lambs. Two methods of castration are available: (i) cutting with a knife or blade; (ii) use of elastator rings and applicator. Castration should only be done if necessary to control unwanted breeding by rams waiting to be sold or used for meat. Expert advice and training should be obtained before attempting castration.

Mating and lambing management

Ewes give many signs to indicate when they are ready for mating and when they are close to lambing. It is necessary to know these signs for management of breeding stock. Ewes will seek for rams and allow themselves to be mated when they are ready (on heat).