



Confinement feeding in Western Australia

What is confinement feeding?

Confinement feeding is a feeding practice, often used during a dry season, that aims to promote animal health and welfare while preserving ground cover and land condition. This is achieved by confining livestock to a small area where they are fed a total ration.

Why should you consider confinement feeding?

The inherent value of confinement feeding can include:

- Better control of stock and easier management of feeding, watering, monitoring and handling. Visual assessment of stock is simplified when they are held in a smaller area and hand fed a formulated diet.
- Protection of areas vulnerable to erosion. If pasture cover falls below about 50%, wind can blow away soil particles, causing erosion and loss of valuable nutrients and topsoil. It is important to remove stock before these critical ground cover targets have been reached as ground cover will decay naturally.
- Allowing pastures to recover and establish after the break.
- Reducing seed set of introduced weeds in purchased feed.

Before moving stock into confinement, ensure you have the necessary resources to fully manage them over a realistic timeframe before they can be returned to pastures. This includes considering cash flow, grain and roughage, and water supply.

Is confinement feeding considered to be a feedlot?

Feeding stock for production, such as finishing prime lambs in a feedlot, is not covered in this fact sheet and specialist advice should be sought if you wish to set up a permanent feedlot. Feedlots must meet local government planning requirements and may also require approval from the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation. For advice on setting up a feedlot, contact DPIRD's Agribusiness Development at agribusiness@dpird.wa.gov.au.

How do I to set up a confinement feeding area?

There are 5 critical areas to consider when planning confinement feeding:

1. Site selection

- Avoid public roads or property boundaries.
- Ensure access to infrastructure such as yards, silos, and water sources.
- Consider a location close to a farmhouse to reduce labour, but far enough away so as not to place an emotional toll on residents. Locate convenient to yards, silos and water source.
- Pick a soil type that is stable and will compact to reduce dust loads, like clay or clay loam.
- A slope of three to four per cent is recommended to assist with run-off; but to avoid erosion. Confinement areas should be across the slope to avoid pen to pen drainage.
- Avoid sites close to watercourses and water storage infrastructure to protect against nutrient runoff.
- No more than 20% of the site should contain remnant vegetation. Existing shelter belts or vegetation can be utilised for shade. Trees within the confinement area will likely need to be protected from ringbarking.

2. Size

- 5m²/head is recommended for dry adult sheep.
- Mobs of 200-500 head are recommended.

3. Water

- A key limitation of confinement feeding is ensuring an adequate supply of good quality stock water.
- Calculate the amount of water available and the total water requirements of the stock to determine how many can be held in confinement and for how long. Dry sheep require an average of 4 litres/head/day; but this can increase to 10 litres/head/day in very hot weather.
- Avoid locating dams inside the confinement area, as they can become boggy.
- Flow rate is critical to ensure rapid replacement of water levels. Sheep will naturally take turns drinking so trough space is less important than flow rate.

4. Feed

- Stock fed in confinement need to have 100% of their diet supplied in a full ration, including energy, protein, mineral and roughage requirements.
- The amount fed should be at least the minimum requirements of the type of stock being fed. New feeds, especially grains, should be introduced gradually with plenty of roughage to avoid acidosis.
- Regular weighing and condition scoring is needed to maintain target condition, and poor performers should be removed and treated separately.
- Feed troughs should be used to minimise wastage and to reduce the incidence of animal health complications that are associated with grazing from the ground. Industry suggests 15-20m of double-sided trough per 100 sheep.

5. Animal health

- Keep an eye out for signs of acidosis, shy feeders, flystrike and pink eye.
- Regularly clean feed and water troughs to reduce the incidence of disease.
- Ensure the diet meets the nutritional requirements of the stock. This will make them more robust and resilient to disease.
- The reintroduction of sheep to pasture after confinement feeding must be managed carefully. The change in diet from grain to fresh pastures can cause health problems, such as pulpy kidney. Ensure vaccination for pulpy kidney is up to date and release sheep from confinement gradually, after they have had their ration for the day and aren't hungry and continue to feed hay and grain over at least a few days.

More information

For more information on confinement feeding, scan the QR code.

For information and resources to assist this season, visit the Season 2023 webpage at agric.wa.gov.au/Season2023



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