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Managing lambs to pasture senescence

Danny Roberts, Veterinary Officer, Albany

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What is the natural weaning process?

- Strong ewe-lamb bond to 90 days after the lamb is born – despite big reduction in milk yield from its peak at 2 to 4 weeks after lambing
- Attachment weakens rapidly after 100 days – most lambs are naturally weaned by day 150
- Milk yield of the ewe is a major determinant of the strength of the ewe-lamb bond
- There is a threshold level of milk yield in the ewe below which weaning naturally takes place – weaning occurs over a week
- Some ewes with reduced milk yields begin to wean their lambs at day 55 – 95% were weaned by day 135

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Weaning lambs before day 90

- The size of the lamb (minimum of 10 kg or 3 times its birth weight) is more important than its actual age (minimum of 8 weeks)
- Weaning before day 90 is more stressful to lambs and ewes
- ‘Train’ lambs to eat lupin or pellets while still with their mothers – creep feeding for pellets
- Lambs should be kept on the same feed before and after weaning until the stress of weaning has past (7 days)
- Weaned lambs less than 12 weeks of age require a high energy (11 megajoules (MJ) of energy) and high protein (>14% crude protein) for maintenance and growth
- Best to wean lambs onto green FOO (minimum of 1000kg/ha) but will need to continue to feed lupins
- Early weaned lambs require good quality water (maximum of 900mS/m)

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Timeline for a June 4 lambing over 5 weeks

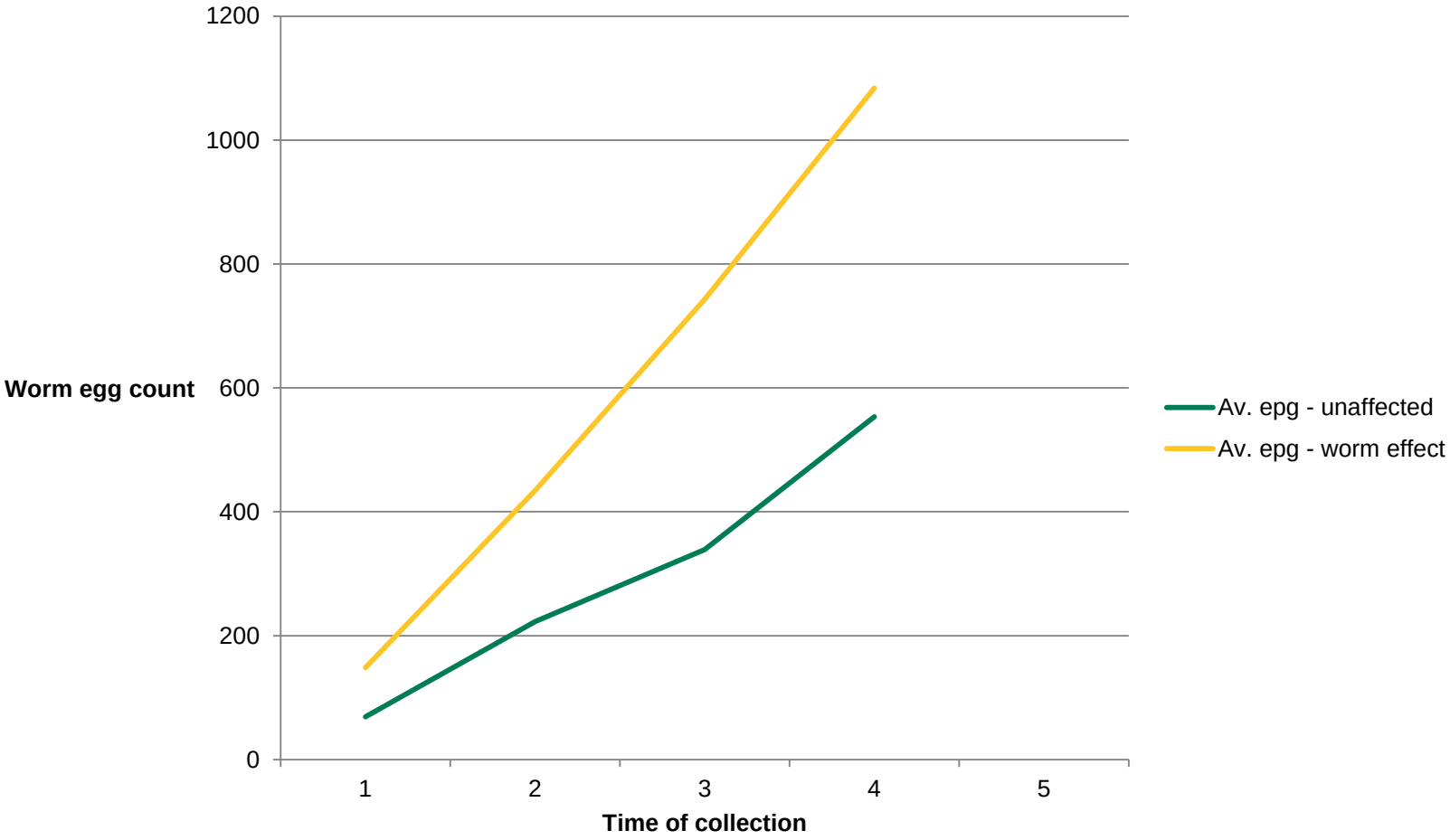
- Average birthday of mixed sex prime lambs is ~day 10 (range 8 to 18 days) with an average weight of ~5 kg
- Lambing marking occurs average of 51 days after the start of lambing – average age and weight of prime lamb is now 41 days and 17kg
- Need to wait for 21 days post marking – average age and weight of prime lamb is now 62 days and 22 kg
- Possibly wean prime lamb now - 73 days or 10.5 weeks after the start of lambing (80 days for Merino lambs)

Health and husbandry

- Vaccinate at marking and weaning for the clostridial diseases, cheesy gland and scabby mouth
- Provide a booster vaccine 4 weeks later
- Divide the weaned lambs into groups based on weight at weaning
- Drafting a small tail (11% of the mob) and preferentially manage

Worm egg counts in prime lambs

Average worm egg counts (epg) in producer group of lambs



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Scour worms – how to avoid forgoing $3 per head?

- Collect 20 faecal samples from lambs around 70 days or 10 weeks after the start of lambing to get average WEC for mob
- If greater than 250 epg plan to give an **effective** drench (and wean) the lambs at 14 weeks after the start of lambing
- If wean lambs - re-sample 4 weeks later - greater than 250 epg – then give another **effective** drench
- Prepare a lower worm burden paddock to wean the prime lambs – otherwise worm burden the lambs will be the same within 4 weeks

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Energy and protein for 3 month - 22 kg prime lamb

- Grow at 150 g/h/d requires 10.2 MJ/day and 80 grams of metabolisable protein
- FOO needs to be 1100 kg/ha (80% digestibility) or 1800 kg/ha (70% digestibility)
- Confinement feeding
- Pellets (11MJ and 14.5% CP) – 940 g/h/d
- Lupins – 750 g/h/d plus roughage
- Ensure small lambs can consume supplement from feeder

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Lamb marking to 22 weeks after the start of lambing – 14 flocks

Year	Percent of long term average Winter Growing Season (WGS)	Average WGS (mm)	Average growth rates in prime lambs (g/h/d)
2013	106%	443	244[c]
2014	108%	444	234[c]
2015	82%	343	210[d]

Support

Weaning before day 90 vs after day 90

- The growth rates of prime lambs from lamb marking over the next 48 days was the same in 2013, 2014 and 2015 (to 14 weeks after the start of lambing)
- Assume supplementation and FOO has provided sufficient energy to the ewe and lamb unit
- However the growth rates in prime lambs in the next 57 days was significantly reduced in 2015 compared to 2013 and 2014
- Assume energy is derived from FOO only
- At pasture senescence expect early weaned lambs to be lighter

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Thank you

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