



SHEEP SHEET

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When it comes to culling sheep, how do you decide which sheep to keep and which to get rid of? Most of us have relied on the age-old "eye-ball" method. But that method can fail as I have experienced far too often.

Although some sheep may look good, it doesn't mean they are good. Sheep are more challenging than other livestock because you must select for both meat/growth and wool traits. This combination isn't always compatible. In other words, the biggest, quickest growing meat sheep often are the least desirable wool sheep.

Generally, when I am making cull-keep decisions, I start by culling for age, deteriorating quality of the teeth, lack of structural soundness, including poor eyesight, lameness, body condition, etc. Check for peritoneal ruptures, udder soundness and health, no hard bag, mastitis and there are two functional teats (nipples) and not missing due to a shearing accident.

EWE CULLING GUIDELINES:



Although culling standards vary from one breed to another, the following guidelines are general enough to apply to most every breed:

Teeth:

Make sure all teeth (incisors) are present. Look for length, spread, and missing and loose teeth. Feel for oversized or missing molars.

Culling Ewes

Sheepdex: E-5

Udder:

Ewes should have sound udders with no lumps, hardness or excessive fibrous material. Udders should be felt. They should not be excessively large and both halves should be relatively close to the same size. There should be two functional teats.

Age:

Some range producers routinely cull at five (5) or six (6) years of age while others use the "mouth and bag" method. If there's a problem with the udder, a ewe should be culled.

Genetic Interval/Genetic Progress:

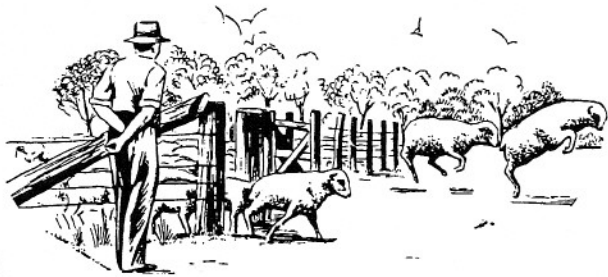
When striving for rapid genetic progress, offspring should average better than their parents. Therefore, below-average ewes generally are called at a younger age based on production records and the average age of the flock should become younger.

Lamb Production:

Based on performance records, a relatively small percent—generally less than 20 percent—are considered outstanding performers within a flock. This superior group should provide the best genetics for improvement in the next generation. The use of EPD's [Expected Progeny Differences] will greatly improve the accuracy of ram selection, therefore providing the opportunity to use the best performance-evaluated rams in the breed on the outstanding performing ewes within your flock. The rate of improvement obviously can be enhanced as with other species through the use of artificial insemination. Culling rate on the basis of performance will depend on management decisions relative to flock expansion and desire for rate of genetic improvement. Generally, it requires a 15 percent replacement rate to maintain flock size, so culling 30 percent of the flock based on performance records will speed up the rate of improvement.

Wool Production:

Wool traits are highly heritable, therefore a producer can realize significant changes in selection for fineness, staple length and fleece weight. Producers should use objective wool measurements to select rams and replacement ewes. Through the National Sheep Improvement Program, EPD values for fleece traits are available. Again, the selection/culling ratio should be based on flock production goals and records.



Structural Soundness/Body Condition and Conformation:

Sheep must function well in their environment to be productive. Skeletal soundness, proper condition, freedom from defects and disease are important criteria. Poor body conformation, excess wrinkles and animals that do not fit the body conformation standards of their flock should be culled. Sheep with chronic diseases or complications from earlier conditions such as foot rot, arthritis, abdominal rupture, etc., should be culled unless you are willing to commit to proper treatment.

*The Navajo Sheep Project;
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