

Flush feeding / Flushing (By Christo du Plessis; Nutritionist Voermeester)

Flush feeding or as it is known in Afrikaans as “Prikkelvoeding” is a common practice in intensive small stock farming operations. Flushing means feeding the ewe so she is gaining weight about 2 weeks before breeding.

In sheep, live weight and ovulation rate are usually correlated. Up to a threshold weight which varies with genotype, ewes may not ovulate at all. Therefore flushing works best on thin ewes as the response of increase in body weight is more rapid and effective in these ewes. In this case the Ewes that are already in good body condition usually do not respond well to flushing. Mature ewes respond better to flushing than yearlings. Ewes that are leaner than body condition score 3.0 are going to need flushing before breeding. If ewes are very thin, the normal flushing period of two to three weeks will have to be increased to four to six weeks.

To get ewes to gain weight for breeding, the maintenance diet has to change. The ewes require a higher dry matter (DM) intake, meaning they need more feed to gain weight. They also require a higher digestible energy (DE) level, meaning they need more energy. For this you can flush ewes by feeding **those** 250g to 455g of an energy rich feed source per day or by moving them to a better pasture. If flushing is continued through the breeding season, it may enhance embryo survival during early pregnancy.

Flushing may increase lambing percentage by increasing the number of eggs that the ewes ovulate. A 10 – 20% increase in lambing percentage is possible. Thus, flushing is one of the most cost effective management practices you can implement. Here it is of importance that better results will be obtained with breeds' prone to give twins. The ovary contains large numbers of primordial follicles (early phases), most of which are resting. The transformation of a given primordial follicle into an ovulatory follicle (final phases) takes about 6 months in a ewe. Once a follicle has entered the final phases, it can either degenerate through atresia (to die), or it will ovulate. But of the relatively large numbers of primordial follicles that initiate growth, only a few will survive to the end, so the eventual ovulation rate is determined more by the number that escape atresia than by the number of follicles stimulated to grow and ovulate.

For this reason making use of flushing with a energy rich product like **Veekos Energy lick**, **Feedmaster finisher lick** and **Feedmaster Veld-finisher pellets** the number of follicles which escape atresia are increased, which increase the number of ovulated follicles. The maintenance of a good condition after conception will assure the increased ovulated follicles are fertilized and giving a higher pregnancy rate as well as an increased incidence of twins.

References: David R.Lindsey, Greame B. Martin and Ian H. Williams (**Nutrition and Reproduction**)