LIFETIME WOOL. 7. PROGENY GROWTH RATES

B.L. PAGANONI A, M. FERGUSON B, G. KEARNEY B and T. PLAISTED C

A School of Animal Biology, University of Western Australia, Crawley, WA 6009
B Primary Industries Research Victoria, Department of Primary Industries, Hamilton, Vic 3300
C Sheep Industries and Pasture, Department of Agriculture Western Australia, Albany, WA 6330

Increasing feeding levels during early and mid-pregnancy can improve the growth rates of progeny (Dwyer et al. 1994), especially when ewe nutrition is restricted during lactation (Dove et al. 1988). Greenwood et al. (1998) found that high birth weight lambs were more efficient up to 20 kg liveweight, and tended to grow faster than low birth weight lambs. In addition, lambs poorly grown in the first 3 months of life, although not permanently stunted, took several years to ameliorate their growth handicap (Allden 1968). This paper reports preliminary data from the Lifetime Wool project (Thompson and Oldham 2004) on the effects of ewe nutrition during pregnancy and lactation on the growth rates of their progeny to 12 months of age.

Ewes were differentially fed to achieve a mean condition score (CS) of about 2 or 3 by day ~90 of pregnancy, and then grazed varying levels of feed on offer (FOO; kg DM/ha) until lambs were weaned. Ewe liveweight profiles through pregnancy and lactation are reported by Ferguson et al. (2004). After weaning the progeny were grazed in common, and weighed every 2 to 6 weeks.

Improving ewe nutrition to mid-pregnancy appeared to increase lamb growth rates until 12-months of age at the Victorian site, although the impacts were less than that reported by Dove et al. (1988), and not present at the Western Australian site. The relative effects of FOO during lactation on progeny growth rates were much greater, such that the range in liveweights at weaning between the extreme nutritional treatments was 16 to 22 kg and 14 to 28 kg at the Victorian and Western Australian sites, respectively (Figure 1). These differences still existed at 12 months of age, but were less than 3 and 4 kg at the 2 sites, respectively. Lower weaning weights were associated with significantly higher mortality until 12-months of age. Lower weights at 12-months would also be expected to influence annual fleece wool production, the proportion of animals suitable for specific markets and reproductive performance of replacement ewes. It is too early to say if lambs in this experiment that were poorly grown in early life will eventually catch up, as suggested by Allden (1968).


Email: bpaganoni@agric.wa.gov.au