

The Maidens Monitor (April–June 2024)

The Making Maidens Weight producer demonstration site (PDS) is exploring ways to improve lamb marking rates from maiden ewes in central west Queensland. Conception rates of maidens in the region are generally good, however, converting these foetuses to lambs remains a challenge. The demonstration properties are exploring condition scoring, weighing, supplementation, scanning and udder assessment of ewes to improve their marking percentage. As part of this, demonstration sites are collecting individual animal data with electronic identification (eID) in large-scale, commercial operations and highlighting how this data is useful for decision-making.

How are we using WhatsApp?

The Making Maidens Weight WhatsApp chat continues to be a great way for producers to engage with the PDS. Now reaching 57 members, producers have been sharing their data and experience of the season’s wins and challenges and benefiting from the observation of other producer’s contributions. This quarter, the chat covered worm burdens and parasite control, lambing observations, initial lamb marking results, links to key resources and the promotion of local events relevant to sheep and goat producers.

Recent results

Lamb marking results from the demonstration sites have not yet been discussed in the chat as recording is ongoing. One property entered initial marking results for twin-bearing ewes, and another added recent scanning data with known unavoidable challenges having influenced their results.

	Mixed age	2021	2022
Marking % (twinning ewes)	80%	36%	86%
Scanning (mixed age ewes)	38% twin, 34% singles, 28% empty		

Figure 1: Data entered into the WhatsApp discussion chat between April-June 2024

Topics of discussion in the chat

Worm management

One producer shared some significant worm egg count (WEC) results despite numerous drenches in the past twelve months. Testing occurred because sheep were not performing as well as expected, given the season. This led to a discussion on drenching practice and the sharing of information for the local contacts who can either conduct WEC tests locally or send samples away for testing.

WormBoss is a great resource to assist with deciding whether to drench, testing drench resistance and for information on best practice drenching. WormBoss recommends using combination drenches where possible. Combination drenches are likely to have a



Image 1: Lambing time at Dunblane in mid-April

higher kill rate than individual actives (unless you have tested for drench resistance and the individual active is fully effective). Research has shown that using combination drenches prolongs the life of the individual actives within them, thereby slowing the development of drench resistance on your property. Check out the WormBoss website here → <https://wormboss.com.au/>.

Pre-joining maiden ewe condition

When pregnancy testing results trickled through, the discussion centred around the importance of ensuring maiden ewes reached their target joining

weight and mixed aged ewes were at an appropriate condition score.

Lamb marking rates

In early April, there were early reports that there seemed to be fewer lambs on the ground, particularly in the maiden ewe mobs. Attendees at the PDS Field Day indicated lamb marking rates were reduced with possible reasons including tall pastures compounding mismothering, nutritive value of pastures, predators, thermal stress and disease. The PDS group would like to follow up on these factors, so if you would like to discuss, please contact Millie Sheales (0428 102 841 or millie.sheales@daf.qld.gov.au).

Maidens, Measurement & Merch Field Day – 12 June 2024

The PDS organising committee was blown away by the response to the first Field Day of the project. The event drew 55 producers and a total of 81 attendees. Hosted by demonstration site Beaconsfield, the first half of the day was spent inside the woolshed discussing results from the demonstration sites, legislative requirements for eID of sheep and goats, and the new support from Elders assisting producers to integrate eID into their system. Two producer talks and a Q&A panel allowed four producers to share their experience with yard design to accommodate new infrastructure, collecting and using data for decision making and the benefits and challenges of collecting and using data.

Key takeaways from the producer sessions:

- Know your *why*. What decisions do you want to make, and what pieces of information (data) do you need to make them?
- If you intend to go down the path of recording and using data, everyone in the yards must value that data collection to ensure the data is accurately recorded.
- Make it work for you. From the data you collect, when you collect it, what equipment you use to collect it and how you collect it, everything will be unique to your operation.

After lunch everyone was split into four groups for the afternoon. The groups rotated between 1) Dr Gordon Refshauge doing body condition scoring and wet & drying demonstrations, 2) TePari and Coopers Allflex,

3) Peak Hill Industries and Enduro tags and 4) Prattley and StockPro.

This provided an opportunity to see handling equipment demonstrated, have a look at the differences between eID tags, meet reps and reflect and discuss within groups what have been learnt or seen throughout the day.

Social refreshments, sponsored by local Suncorp and Elders branches, were enjoyed as the sun went down and those who didn't have to travel far enjoyed fireside chops and a slow-cooked meal/roast?

Useful resources from the field day

Sheep condition score app:

<https://tinyurl.com/5n8ksm39>

Lambing planner app: <https://tinyurl.com/4j89m22t>

Udder assessment video ft. Gordon Refshauge:

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=ceL3i5IdOxo>.

Udder assessment video ft. Andrew Whale:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cNjyYDAyQ>.

Sheep and goat individual electronic identification:

<https://www.business.qld.gov.au/industries/farms-fishing-forestry/agriculture/animal/nlis/sheep-goat-identification>.

If you would like to join the WhatsApp discussion chat or receive quarterly producer newsletters please contact Millie Sheales, details below.

Upcoming events

- Winter webinars – to be announced
- Field Day – end 2024

More information:

Millie Sheales, Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, Longreach

M 0428 102 841

E millie.sheales@daf.qld.gov.au