District III Sheep Producers Identify "Windows of Opportunity" Through Ultra-sound Pregnancy Scanning

The Situation

Magic Valley sheep producers identified ewe pregnancy testing as a way to improve reproductive efficiency. They felt that if pregnant ewes were identified they could feed them better and leave the open ewes on aftermath feeds or sell them. Earlier attempts at pregnancy testing were too slow or lacked accuracy to make it feasible in large flocks. They also lacked capability to determine stage of gestation.

Our Response

In 1990 a producer group found an individual skilled in ultra-sound pregnancy testing. He had recently moved from Great Britain to Canada and conducted demonstrations in Idaho and Montana. As a result 16,000 head of ewes in south Idaho were scanned. Several small flocks were scanned and detailed records were kept to determine accuracy.

Achievements

Accuracy of pregnancy testing was in excess of 98% and counting the number of fetuses proved over 95% accurate. Open rate of range bands of ewes ranged from 3 to 8% Determining the stage of gestation was not as accurate but was on an average only 2 days off. As a result of this accuracy, 35,000 head were scanned in southern Idaho this past year. One more individual has been trained to scan and a veterinarian is devoting a large percent of his practice to work with producers that have this data.

"Windows of Opportunity" that have been identified as a result of this procedure include: 1) identifying open ewes, 2) feed management based on number of lambs carried, 3) grouping lambs based on stage of gestation. Data collected in the process showed a savings of 3 to 5 dollars per head on each ewe identified as open.

A video tape was produced through funding of the USDA "Appropriate Technology Committee" and the Idaho Farm Bureau on ultra-sound scanning that is available from the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension Service.

Cooperators

John Faulkner Maurice Guerry
Robert Petroch Emnic Pickett
Owen Wright James Hagermier
Dr. Darwin Yoder, DVM

The Future

A veterinarian now employs two people who conduct ultra-sound pregnancy scanning throughout the Pacific Northwest.

For More Information

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