



Fit to join

Improving ewe and lamb survival
through pre-joining assessment

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Key drivers of reproductive success

The ability of a ewe to successfully conceive, carry a pregnancy to full term, give birth and successfully raise a lamb can be broken into two key areas of focus: conception rate and lamb survival.



Improving ewe and lamb survival outcomes — the why!



Assessing ewes as 'fit to join' offers sheep producers an opportunity to increase ewe and lamb survival rates, productivity and profitability while improving animal welfare outcomes. On top of that, the process is fast, efficient and cost-effective.

Results

	Average ewe mortality (%)	Average marking percentage (%)*
Fit to join	2.2	137
Unfit to join	2.7	123

** marking percentage is calculated as lambs marked from ewes joined*

Economic benefit of between \$4-\$8 per ewe for classing and culling unfit ewes pre joining

Risk factors

- Body condition score (BCS)
- Udder health and structure
- Lameness
- Teeth
- Age-specific assessment criteria (i.e. ewe lambs and older ewes)



Body condition score



Udder health and structure



Normal udder



Unsound udder

Lameness

- Loss of body condition
- Predisposition to:
 - pregnancy toxaemia
 - hypocalcaemia



Teeth

- Little evidence to support culling broken mouth ewes if body condition score (BCS) is consistent with current feed on offer (FOO) and parasite management

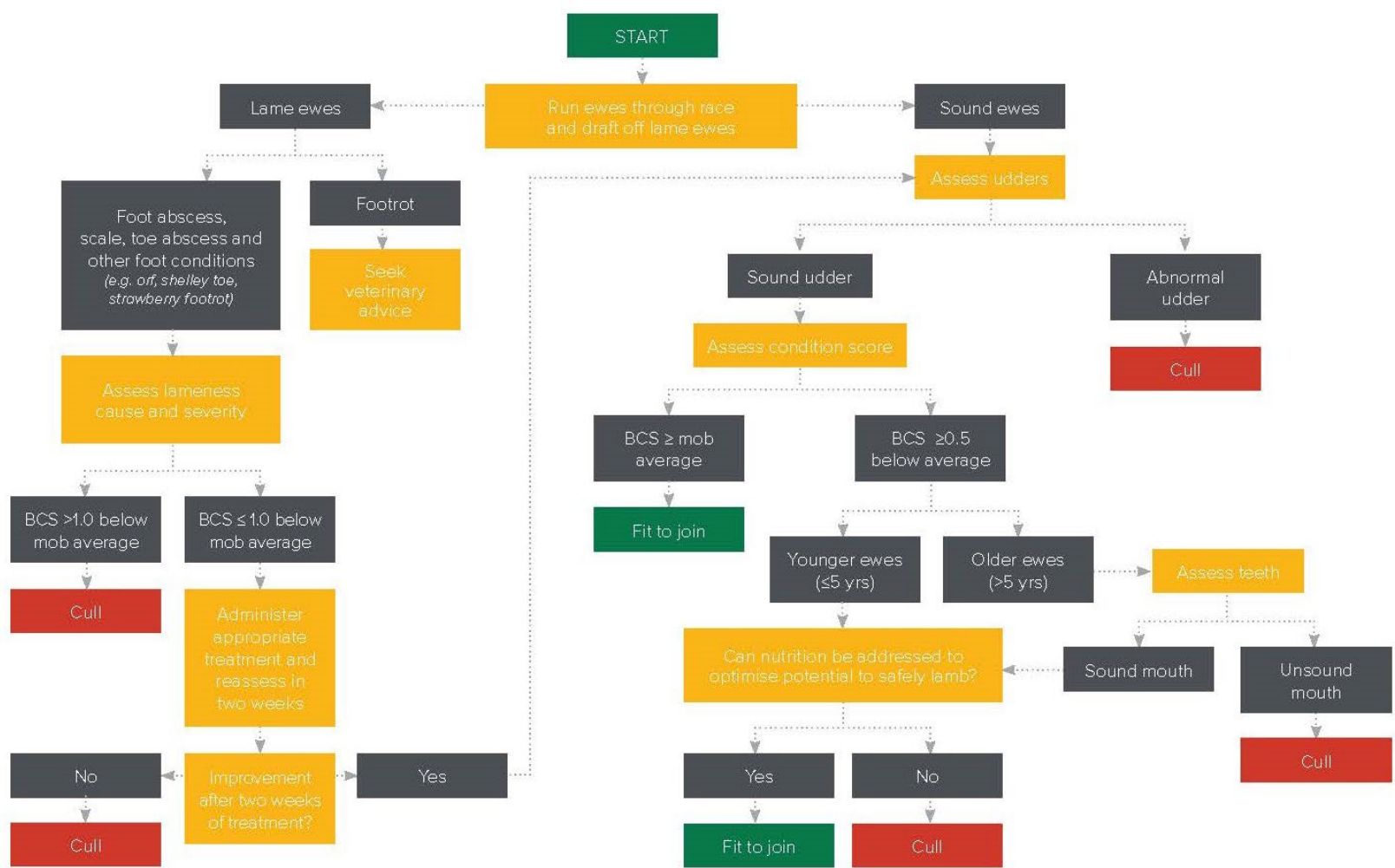


Impact of age

- Standard industry practice of 'cast-for-age' culling is not supported by evidence.
- Assess all ewes on their merits, with age as one factor in the mix.



Two-strike policy



Take home messages

- Ewes assessed as 'fit to join' are more likely to rear healthy lambs, increasing marking percentages, enterprise profitability and animal welfare outcomes.
- Key risk factors include: udder health and structure, body condition, lameness, teeth and age.
- Unfit ewes were four times more likely to scan empty and three times more likely to die between joining and scanning. Lambs from unfit ewes had a 21% higher risk of dying.
- The economic benefit for classing and culling ewes as unfit to join was modelled at between \$4 and \$8 per ewe.

Fit to join toolkit

- Ute guide (e-book)
- Ewe assessment overview (video)
- Udder assessment (video)
- Lameness assessment (video)
- Assessing older ewes (video)

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