



Australia's largest elite genetics supplier

Damara Management Up-breeding Tips for Australia

Grazing

Damaras open up new horizons in sheer productivity because you are not locked into traditional management issues, shearing, crutching, mulesing, marking, lice treatments, jetting, losses that you traditionally experience from flies at particular times with hoggets and lambs. This breed allows you to break from tradition and into the capability of breeding all year round without losses. These sheep utilize a greater selection of summer plant species and have ability to thrive during these months. With plants and perennial pastures you can change your pasture species to convert summer rains into more nutrient rich plants that will accelerate growth rates DSE carrying capacity. Nitrogen fixing plant species increase grass growth biomass and nutrient value. Damaras graze a whole spectrum of plant and grass herbage, allowing better regeneration of plants when the rains return.

Roughage

Damaras prefer roughage first, and then work their way down into softer, supple plant material last. It is clearly noted in pastoral areas that faster regeneration of plant life occurs where Damaras have grazed. In the wheatbelt situation, Damaras require less supplementary feeding. Damaras draw on their tail reserves and perform exceedingly well during summer months on stubbles even with lambs at foot. Damaras have been found to have better digestive capabilities in converting roughage to energy, meat production: 'tannin bacteria in their stomach'

Damara Purity

The more the purity of Damaras increases the more unique the meat of lambs and even old ewes is in its flavor, juiciness and tenderness. Damara meat is unique in that when cooked its almost odour free, further enhancing opportunities into Asian markets. The tail of the Damara has unique qualities. It is known that when this fat is melted down and used for cooking with any type of meat, it has the ability to bring out the flavour of that meat. Studies have been undertaken regards quality and uses of tail fats here in Western Australia results are found to be promising with food grade quality plus other industry uses. The key to launching is quantity and consistency of supply.

Damara Rams

Damara rams are very fertile and will mate more ewes, and live and work longer than other breeds of sheep in Australia. The Damara improves meat quality in any breed of sheep that it is installed over. Hybrid vigour increases body size of progeny produced from any breed. The Damara breed of sheep is thousands of years old and hasn't been adulterated with other breeds of sheep. The Damara's uniqueness is that it rapidly brings any breed of sheep into hardiness, herding, quality parameters.

Profitability

The production of Damaras is not about producing the largest animal, rather about producing the most animals in a given time, ie. kilos per hectare. It is possible to have three drops of lambs in two years. Production profitability per hectare and reduced management costs if a \$65 profit plus per Damara ram lamb is assumed. All nutrition is used to produce meat rather than both meat and wool. Some producers have scanned ewes after a 10 week mating period and drafted off the pregnant ewes. By keeping the dry ewes with the rams until they are pregnant as high as 120% lambing can be achieved. Damaras are to the sheepmeat industry what Brahman cattle are to the cattle industry in Australia. More lambs survive! You can diversify into an exciting prime lamb option at F2/F3 cross with Meatmaster Rams. It's common now in Australia to budget for 150 % plus lambing per year. Best method to achieve this is leave rams in continually and the ewes tend to develop their own cycle pattern. Lambs tend to come down in large groups.

Breed Selection

Whether merino or crossbred ewes are used as base breeding stock, their progeny gain hybrid vigour. This will result in higher twinning rates and more lambs being produced. The Damara lamb's hardiness enables them to start nibbling and browsing at an earlier age, they don't rely solely on their mothers' milk, therefore not drawing down on their mothers' condition as much. Damara ewes have poly oestrus breeding cycles, breeding lambs all year round. In cross breeding programs with wool breed sheep select Damara genetics that have short hair coats. This will enhance cross breeding programs to minimise maintenance of offspring. Damaras thrive in wheatbelt conditions on stubbles during summer months.

Mating

A Damara ram can mate up to 150 ewes in 7-8 weeks. When first mating, it is important to get good coverage. The ideal is to work with a ratio of 1:100 to play safe for an eight-week period and continue block-mating groups of ewes. Damara rams are quite capable afterwards of going on to several other matings. This makes management - crutching, lambing, shearing – much easier, and reduces the risk of fibre transfer if you are using ewes from wool base to breed.

Block mating also enables management to be more efficient because at a certain time you know each mob that will be lambing down and can wean them at 12 weeks comfortably. Ewes can also be wet and dried, leaving the dry ewes in with the rams to achieve greater numbers of pregnancies resulting in higher production. Pregnancy in ewes increases shedding with the crosses and reduces wool growth further reducing management. Some growers have found commercially to leave Rams running with ewes all year round achieves higher production. Ewes tend to get pregnant within first weeks of having lambs at foot.

Lambing

Damara lambs are small at birth thus increased lambing survival plus their inherent hardiness. Less feed and nutrition is required to maintain survival rates of lambs. Sheep loss suffered by traditional breeds from flies is minimal in Damaras with less management requirements. Less time is spent bringing them into the yards and also no mulesing required, reducing arthritis and associated losses. All year round lambing increases cash flow and the Damaras herding instinct means a huge benefit in pastoral areas because they group together, reduces rams energies because ewes are not large distance apart and better able to reduce predator interference.

Handling

It is important to remember when putting Damara rams in with ewes for the first time, it is best to put ewes into a smaller paddock and then install the Damara rams with them. Especially in pastoral areas it is very important that the Damara ram is introduced to flocks of sheep in smaller paddocks for at least 24 hours and then moved to a larger paddock. Avoid putting Damaras into a yard by themselves because when isolated from others they can panic due to their herding instinct. Therefore when handling Damaras, always have them in pairs. Damara rams can also be competitive if more than one ram is in a mob of ewes. When loading Damaras, because of their herding instinct a wider race is recommended so they can run up 2-3 abreast. If they are kept running they will be loaded very quickly. When unloading Damaras it is best to let them run into a smaller yard letting them trickle out of that into a larger one. Because of their herding instinct Damaras are happy running towards groups of sheep, but when they don't see sheep they will herd back together.

Fencing Requirements

Damaras don't appear to require any better fencing than what you consider standard for merino but if you acquire Dorper cross infused blood females or introduce Dorper or Meatmaster rams they have an inherent trait in wanting to get under fences. Be prepared to substantially upgrade your fencing facilities if groups are allowed continually to escape under fences. This will educate other sheep to do the same and in turn larger numbers and lambs taken away to other mobs will be educated to this fact, then you will find electric fencing is a restraining tool. Also barb wire 1.8mm plus high tensile placed at bottom of existing fence, but you need to be particular with its location.

First Cross (F1)

First cross Damara ram lambs can be turned off at 4-5 months of age. If they are to be exported to the Middle East markets it is necessary to scratch them with scabbi-guard. This can easily be done in a long race: simply lift their tails and scratch the bare skinned area. An accredited scabbi-guard endorsed officer will have to give them their second scratch and tag identification is inserted in the ear.

F1 ewes can be mated when about 36+ kilos, approximately 5-6 months of age depending on the feed regime. Producers have experienced better results in pregnancies if young F1 Ewes are crutched before mating in pastoral areas, wool around tail area can become matted with prickle seeds and other vegetable matter making it difficult for rams to mate. Some producers have found docking the tails higher in first cross ewes makes management easier, but if they are sold to the Middle East markets this could result in a price penalty. In the wheatbelt of WA crutching normally suffices until shearing 12 months later. This also depends on the time of year the lambs are dropped. The wool cut is between 2-3 kilos depending on the breed of ewes used. Wool has no problem in selling - there are orders for this unique wool with United Farmers of WA acquiring container loads from around Australia. Farmers have found that by using Clik sprayed around the breach and across the back of a sheep this has saved them from the need to crutch to protect sheep from fly strike.

Second crosses (F2)

A management tip: Farmers with, F2, F3, F4 ewes. Superior advantages are being experienced with 150% to 190% lambing with rams running with ewes constantly provided that highly nutritional pasture and management to compliment breed cycle. As with first crosses, the second cross ram lambs should be turned off at 4-5 months. The second crosses have a lot more muscling than the first crosses as their hybrid vigour makes them grow much faster. The tail on the second cross is larger at the back, they have more definite colours, and the herding instinct is much stronger again. It is possible to achieve 3 lambings in two years with the F2.

Second crosses do not require shearing. As they grow older their hide becomes tougher and the bare skinned area around the tail increases. The meat of the second cross is of superior quality to the first cross because the Damara is becoming more pure. Their meat is unique when cooked it is almost odour free. Trials have been already undertaken with markets further enhancing opportunities into Asian markets in the future.

Third crosses (F3)

Management is the same as for first and second crosses. Third crosses are very much like pure-bred Damaras except their coats retain more hair fibre. In the second and third crosses the leather hide will become more valuable. The direction of this for the future is being developed. Also they retain the superior Damara mothering trait.

Prime Lamb Option: Meatmaster Rams, or terminal sires F2/F3 cross Damara Ewes

In selecting breed genetics for Meatmaster select Damara Rams with short hair coats. With Dorpers choose the hair breed Dorper that sheds its coat. This will produce easier care offspring. By introducing what is called in South Africa the 'Meatmaster' the option is available to compete in the prime lamb market. This is a Damara-Dorper cross ram that is put over a second or third cross ewe. Also other breed sires are crossed over Damara rams. Progeny are faster growing with excellent muscling, meat qualities. They retain their herding instinct and hardiness. They require minimal maintenance and have a short tail with no docking required. Meatmasters is a profitable prime lamb that will compete against British breed prime lamb qualities. In South Africa they are found to be superior.



Meatmaster Rams



Meatmaster Ewes

On property growth rate trials progeny has achieved weight gains above 45 kilos at 16 weeks. **The Meatmaster also thrives in a higher rainfall environment. 150% lambing plus per year can be attained and faster growth rates with good management.** Meatmaster info: <http://www.meatmaster.org>

Pastoral Areas

It is important to change from the traditional once a year muster, to mustering several times a year. This reduces cross contaminating ram lambs over their mothers, speeds up the transition phase from a wool enterprise to meat and increases profitability by removing young ram lambs.

Feedlots

Damaras perform exceptionally well in feedlot situations – farmers have reported faster growth rates against other breeds. They travel exceptionally well in transport and shipping overseas. They handle heat, stress better.

Markets

We have very strong markets in the Middle East that will take a considerable amount of time to saturate. Other markets are being developed in Asia and North America with keen interest now from France. Our biggest challenge is maintaining supply as we develop other markets. We are working to develop chilled international markets. In March 2005 we commenced developing our domestic market.



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