

Sheep feed and water requirements

Recovery after fire

Feed

After a fire event, an immediate concern for sheep producers is how much and what to feed their livestock. A good feeding program will ensure that sheep are getting the correct amount of energy and protein required for their maintenance and growth.

A guide to the weekly amount of feed needed is provided in Table 1. Hay quantity required for adult sheep and weaned lambs is for maintenance only, while the grain and hay noted for early weaned lambs yield a weight gain of 1 to 2 kg per head per week.

Stock class	Energy required each week (MJ ME)	Minimum crude protein (%DM)	Kilograms of hay per head per week
Adult dry sheep, ewes in early stages of pregnancy in store condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 40 kg liveweight, medium framed Large framed, or crossbred ewe at 60 kg liveweight 	42 57	6 6	5 (or 7 if only poor quality hay is available) 7 (or 10 if only poor quality hay is available)
Pregnant ewes, last four to six weeks before lambing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium framed Large framed, or crossbred at 60 kg liveweight 	62 84	8 8	7 10
Ewes with lambs at foot <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium framed Large framed 	84 120	10 10	10 14
Lambs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early-weaned lambs up to 15 kg liveweight gaining 1 to 2 kg per head per week Weaned lambs greater than 15 kg liveweight 	35 35	12 10	A 3.5 kg mix of 75% cereal grain and 25% high protein source (e.g. lupins), plus good hay at 10% 4.5

Table 1. A guide to the weekly feed requirements of sheep

The quantity of hay assumes all requirements are being met from hay and that the hay is of reasonable quality (8.5 megajoules per kilogram of dry matter). A small square bale is approximately 25 kilograms, a round bale approximately 330 kilograms, and a large square bale approximately 500 kilograms.

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The hay amounts noted in Table 1 assume no pasture is being fed. Fresh pasture has a high energy content (11 MJ/kg DM) and even a small amount of pasture can significantly reduce the amount of supplement required. The total nutritional requirements of early weaned lambs up to 15 kg cannot be met solely by hay, and therefore feeding a grain mix is strongly recommended.

Water

When planning for sheep drinking water requirements, use the following recommendations for different stock classes as a guideline. Water requirements can change dramatically with the weather. On very hot days intake will greatly increase, so you need to reliably supply the maximum rates. British breed sheep need up to 20 per cent more water than Merino sheep in hot weather.

Stock class	Litres consumption per head per day
Weaned lambs	2-4
Adult dry sheep	
• Grassland	2-6
• Saltbush	4-12
Ewes with lambs	4-10

Feeding system

Given the loss of ground cover caused by fire, the risk of losing valuable soil is high. It may be worth considering feeding stock in containment areas to protect zones that are vulnerable to erosion. The containment site must comprise:

- a moderate slope and a well-drained stable soil (e.g. clay, clay loam)
- at least 500 metres from watercourses and water storage areas, or install a nutrient filter downslope of the site
- adequate shade and shelter, access to good quality drinking water and facilities
- easy access by vehicles for filling feed and water troughs, and for cleaning
- limited potential for noise and/or smell concerns for both you and your neighbours
- a minimum area of 1 m² per head for lambs up to 41 kg, 1.3 m² for adult sheep and 1.8 m² for ewes with lambs (areas from 2.5 to 5 m² per sheep are also successful). Approximately 500 sheep per mob is a good size for management.

Further information

For sheep producers facing a feed shortage, early decisions are critical (and usually give a cheaper outcome). Decisions need to take into account the farm situation and feed options available. Further assistance can be provided by the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) Fire Recovery Team in the Agriculture Services and Biosecurity Branch. Contact your nearest DEDJTR office for referral to a Livestock Extension Officer.

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