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Summary only

EARLY LAMB PRODUCTION AND ITS PLACE IN
NEW ZEALAND FARMING

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FIVE HUNDRED EWES on four farms were treated with hormones in January to start their breeding season early. Sponges impregnated with 60 mg medroxyprogesterone acetate were inserted into animals for 13 days. On the day of sponge withdrawal the ewes were injected with 750 i.u. pregnant mare serum (PMS). Over 95% of the treated ewes mated within four days of the PMS injection. Most of the ewes that did not become pregnant at this mating came into oestrus about 17 days (1 cycle length) later, mated and became pregnant to the second mating. On each farm the second induced oestrus was before the peak of first mating in untreated sheep on the same farm and therefore can be regarded as a benefit from the treatment and set against its cost.

The advantages and disadvantages of early lambing on the farms in the trials were discussed. It is suggested that early lambing, induced by hormone treatment, may have a place on farms in the North Island that grow crops of barley or maize and can grow a winter crop of barley or Tama ryegrass. Also farmers in areas that experience good winter pasture growth but early summer drought could consider using this technique. An earlier start in the lamb killing season could result in economic advantages to the slaughter houses through spread of capital costs.