Fall Feed or Fuel Load

What’s a prudent sheep rancher to do?! 

Dan Macon
Flying Mule Sheep Company / UC Cooperative Extension
January 14, 2020
Road Map

Production Systems

Conserve forage for fall/winter grazing?

Or graze it before it burns?

Our Approach
Fall Lambing vs. Spring Lambing

Why production systems matter…

Fall Lambing

Spring Lambing
Nutritional Demand and Production Systems

- Breeding ewes have two peaks in nutritional demand:
  - At flushing (2-4 weeks before breeding) and breeding.
  - At late gestation and lactation.
- Breed selection is driven by many factors (markets, climate, etc.).
- Unlike the Central Valley, we get too much precipitation to raise fine wool sheep (which means we can’t lamb in the fall).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production System</th>
<th>Flushing &amp; Breeding Forage</th>
<th>Lambing Forage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fall Lambing</td>
<td>Springtime Rangeland Forage</td>
<td>Alfalfa Stubble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Lambing</td>
<td>Irrigated Pasture &amp; Supplemental Grain</td>
<td>Springtime Rangeland Forage</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nutritional Demand and Production Systems

• Post-weaning and early gestation nutritional demands are much lower.

• Dry ewes can be pushed nutritionally – we can use them to graze dry forage (aka, fuel load).
What does this mean for FMSC?

• We use a conservative stocking rate to make sure we have enough forage in the late fall (even if it doesn’t rain).

• We have a very short window (75-80 days) in the summer when our sheep are available for fuel reduction grazing.

• Without targeted grazing as a revenue stream, we have to optimize reproduction.
Putting this into practice…

• We trade winter/early spring forage for strategic summer fuel load reduction.

• Our landowner partners own ~300 acres of annual rangeland west of Auburn.

• We collaborative plan our summer grazing to modify fine fuels in critical locations:
  • Roadsides
  • Downhill from structures
  • N/NE of structures
  • Between the community and potential ignition sources
Before and After…

Image Name: heredia culdesac-2018-Jun-18 point
GPS co-ordinates: 38.956231, -121.183065
Date: Jun 18, 2018 at 9:36:11 AM PDT
Direction: 275 N

Image Name: heredia culdesac-2018-Jun-23 plot 2
GPS co-ordinates: 38.956230, -121.183067
Date: Jun 23, 2018 at 9:57:56 AM PDT
Direction: 275 N