

Flock performance key to identifying best genetics

Huw Rees Jones, Glanyrafon, Painscastle, Powys

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Glanyrafon is an improved upland and hill farm where there is a real focus on performance to identify the best animals for breeding. The right genetics plays an integral role in overall farm outcomes such as sustainability and increased profitability and so Huw Rees Jones keeps a close eye on his flock production. “Regular weighing gives me access to a mass amount of information about my ewes and rams,” comments Mr Jones. “The more information that is gathered the better he can track the overall flock performance.”

The flock consists of 1,000 Aberdale based commercials and 200 Pure Texels. The Texel flock provides terminal sires for his own commercial flock as well as producing yearlings for the ram sales in the summer. The rams produced from the farm come from the strongest genetics as the rams are run on a ‘mob’ basis (i.e. never housed); anything that falls short of the required performance criteria during their first winter is culled. This ensures that the remaining rams are resilient; able to perform at tugging time and then require as little management intervention as possible during the following winter.

It is important to the business that these rams, sold to other producers, can perform well under pressure and produce good fleshing lambs that meet their market criteria. The producer is then more likely to come back to buy more rams. “It is very important to me that farmers who buy my rams are confident in their purchase and will come back again next time to buy more,” states Mr Jones. “Therefore the identification of the genetic lines that produce these rams consistently is of great advantage to the breeding programme.”

A close eye is kept on the maternal breeding lines within the Texel flock. Their genetics and management plays a significant role in the success of a lamb crop. As the flock is largely managed by one labour unit it is important that the ewes lamb

easily with little assistance and yet are able to produce strong fast growing lambs for modern lamb production.

Mr Jones mentions: “The commercial flock is largely Aberdale based due to its proven high prolificacy, a maternal Texel line complements the existing genetics and can help provide higher conformation carcasses especially for the live market.” The flock lambs in three batches, the Texels lamb at the beginning of March, the main commercial flock lambs from the beginning of April and the flock breeding ewe replacements lambs from mid-April. Staggering the lambing period helps to spread the workload. Since the introduction of the Aberdales to the flock there has been an increase of 20% more lambs with the same production costs. Scanning percentage has increased to around 190% flock average but this comes with the need to manage the increased risk of triplets.

Mr Jones emphasises that careful management is key when dealing with very prolific ewes, they need to be able to withstand the conditions of an upland hill, forage based system by being able to get back into the right condition after weaning at twelve weeks and be ready for tugging.

Glanyrafon annually reseeds a percentage of the farm and this year Mr Jones has put down a Plantain and Italian ryegrass ley. He is hoping to introduce a new farm software system to incorporate EID and enable him to further monitor his stock. “I am hoping, with the new software system in place, to monitor around 800 lambs and their growth rates on the different leys; I will then be able to tailor my reseeding decisions around this data.”

Farm Facts:

Glanyrafon farm is a 1200 head sheep farm based near Painscastle with two other rented parcels within a 10 miles radius. The flock consists of 1000 commercial ewes from an Aberdale base and 200 pure Texels. Some Romney cross ewe lambs were introduced for the first time this year. All lambs are finished on farm and sold either deadweight or liveweight.