

Rotationally grazing to keep costs down

James and Anna King, Cowley Farm, North Buckinghamshire

James and Anna's philosophy is to achieve above-average levels of output while keeping costs as low as possible. They are setting out to do this by maintaining a simple system and spending minimal amounts on fixed costs such as machinery and labour.

They currently run around 750 ewes with half being mules lambing from mid-March, and the other half being Easycares, which lamb in mid-April.

The mules are tupped with high genetic merit Meatlincs, and the Easycare are bred pure to breed replacements. Current scan results are around 176% and these are likely to increase as the flock moves towards being all Easycares.

The aim is to get as many lambs sold as possible from grass or using stubble turnips, without the use of concentrates.

Around 80 beef cattle are contracted grazed from May to November, which provides income and is very useful for maintaining grass quality for the sheep.



Rotational grazing

Work from New Zealand suggests that having cattle in a sheep rotation could add 60g per lamb per day in growth rates due to improved grass quality

Rotational grazing

From May 2013, a group of 150 ewes and lambs were rotationally grazed until weaning. This was a useful trial, although it was a struggle to maintain sward height targets during the summer.

The aim is to try more rotational grazing this coming season. The plan is to set-stock the ewes and lambs for a few weeks after lambing, before starting to merge the groups and shift them around the fields.

The target will be to shift them every three to four days, so it is likely there will be three to four separate rotations running at the same time. Grass cover measurements in kg DM per ha will be taken regularly to monitor grass growth and availability. This will also be used to plan the speed of the rotations.

The cattle may be used behind the ewes and lambs to tidy up fields, so they are in optimum condition for the next time the sheep come to eat them.

The Kings will also look to wean earlier (normally around 16-18 weeks) to reduce competition between ewes and lambs when grass quantity is dropping.

The plan will be to rotationally graze the weaned lambs, perhaps with dry ewes following behind, with the aim of improving lamb performance. Creep feed may be used strategically to reduce the number of lambs on the farm in the winter.

Come and see for yourselves

An event on 'How do we rotationally graze sheep?' will be held at Cowley Farm in May.

This will be part of a series of 'Question Events' looking in more detail at how to integrate more focused grassland management into existing farming systems.

Check the [EBLEX events calendar](#) for more details.

Further information on rotational grazing and other grazing strategies can be found in the EBLEX BRP manual [Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns](#)

A library of technical information for beef and sheep producers can be found at www.eblex.org.uk/returns