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Winter cell grazing – how farmers have coped this winter

'All-grass wintering' is a winter cell grazing system where pregnant ewes are grazed at high stocking densities and moved frequently (from daily up to every four days) throughout the winter using electric fencing. This system improves grass utilisation, tidies up pasture and helps budget grazed grass to manage ewe body condition.

This winter has been a challenge for some of the pioneering demonstration farmers trying to do this. Many in the south west of England with land underwater have had to resort to a plan B such as housing, using other forage crops or moving stock to drier land.

Here are some tips from farmers who have escaped the worst of the wet weather but still had to deal with wet conditions:

- Reduce the days in each paddock, ie move from four day shifts to three or one day shifts to prevent poaching
- Change the order of the paddocks in the rotation so the well-drained paddocks or denser swards are used in the wettest weather
- Place gateways at the top of the slope so the ewes do not slide down when being moved
- Allow extra space to reduce stocking density
- Keep the ATV away from the flock unless they are being moved, as they may mob up and poach harder
- Make changes now, i.e. by housing some or moving them to a sacrifice field, to ensure supply for the latter half of the season when grass supply is critical for late pregnancy
- Remove ewes in poor condition
- One farmer's ewes experienced soil balling in the feet so he ran them along a road to remove it.



Better in the north

The more fortunate farmers are those in Northumberland, who are experiencing drier conditions and good grass growth. The system is holding up well there, with early grazed fields now measuring growth at 1300-1500kg Dry Matter per hectare (DM/ha).



For example, one farmer's four year-old ley grazed down to 1000kg DM/ha on Boxing Day had recovered to 1500kg DM/ha by early February. This means the grass has been growing an average of 11kg DM/ha/day over that time.

Another farmer in Cheshire recorded 30kg DM/ha/day growth for an Italian ryegrass sward drilled on September 10. He is strip grazing 50m x 40m strips with 250 twin-bearing ewes in an attempt to utilise this large amount of grass.

The main theme coming from all the all-grass wintering demonstration farmers is flexibility. It is essential to have a back-up plan in place for adverse conditions and the ability to alter

plans to deal with unexpected situations as they arise.

For more information about winter cell grazing, download the EBLEX BRP+ document [All-Grass Wintering of Sheep](#)