



Better Returns Programme

Autumn 2014

Bulletin

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE BETTER RETURNS PROGRAMME

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- Working with vets
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Calling all beef producers

Leaving the farm for meetings and events can sometimes be impractical, so BRP has started to bring industry experts to farm offices across the country via a series of conference calls.

The next two will be on:
Friday 7 November and
Friday 5 December starting at 1.30pm.
They run for about 45 minutes.

Farmers can listen in, but not talk to the technical specialists.

Dial **0844 473 0168** (from a landline) or **033 0336 0880** (from a mobile) a few minutes before the start time.

Then type the PIN **304890** when prompted.

Two topical subjects on beef health and feeding are covered during each call. Anyone wishing to ask a question can email it to brpconf@eblex.ahdb.org.uk during the talks. This will then be relayed to the speakers who will answer it at the end of the session.

Calls will cost 4p per minute. Telephone **0870 241 8829** for more details.



Use antibiotics wisely

By Dr Fiona Lovatt, MRVCS

Antibiotics are vital to treat and in some cases, prevent disease in animals and humans. However, they should always be used responsibly, which means using them as little as possible but as much as necessary.

- **As little as possible** – work with the vet, follow an effective farm health plan and maintain high standards of hygiene and husbandry practices
- **As much as necessary** – if animals become ill treat promptly in consultation with the vet, who may prescribe appropriate antibiotics. Always read the instructions on the label, administer the correct amount according to the weight of the animal and give the full course as directed by the vet

Increasing antibiotic resistance

Every time an antibiotic is used there is an increased risk the disease-causing organism will develop resistance to it. So in future it may be harder to treat that particular disease, as well as other possibly unrelated diseases in both animals and humans.

Lessening the risk

Avoid routine use of antibiotics where possible. Discuss alternative strategies with the vet.

Here are some practical sheep examples:

1. It is rarely appropriate to treat every newborn lamb with an antibiotic. It is better to concentrate on maximising their colostrum intake at birth. Certainly avoid automatic treatment of low risk lambs, such as singles or those born early in the lambing period
2. Do not routinely give ewes an antibiotic in late pregnancy to prevent losses from enzootic abortion. It is much better practice and more cost-effective to vaccinate them
3. It is appropriate to treat ewes lame with footrot promptly with an injectable antibiotic, alongside other control strategies such as vaccination and the timely culling of persistent offenders



We all need medicines to be effective to prevent and control disease outbreaks – whether on a farm, within the wider farming industry or in our hospitals. It is essential that producers and vets work together to use the medicines we currently rely on responsibly.



Research highlights crucial role of body condition

By Nerys Wright, Assistant Regional Manager, EBLEX

After a successful year-long pilot project looking at key performance indicators (KPIs) in commercial sheep flocks, EBLEX is to continue working with independent sheep specialist Lesley Stubbings and researchers from the University of Nottingham for a further three years.

The pilot project report is available at www.eblex.org.uk/research – search for Sheep KPI Validation Project. Results from this have already been incorporated into the updated Sheep BRP Manual 4: **Managing ewes for Better Returns**, available to view at www.eblex.org.uk.



Collecting useful data

The project is collecting key pieces of useful information including ewe Body Condition Score (BCS), ewe liveweight and lamb performance – specifically eight-week and weaning weights – on three commercial farms in England.

Electronic identification (EID) systems are being used extensively and the project leaders aim to provide guidance on data collection, processing and analysis to other EID users. Five time points – weaning, tugging, scanning, lambing and when the lambs are eight weeks of age, are being used as the focus for the data collection.

Knock-on effects

Early findings show that BCS and weight of ewes at mating and weight gain from weaning to mating, have a carryover effect on weaning weights of lambs the following year. There were significant positive relationships between ewe weight at both weaning and mating in 2012, as well as on litter size at scanning in January 2013. Heavier ewes (within a breed) at weaning had higher scanning percentages.

The project also shows that ewe BCS at mating and scanning influences the number of lambs born and reared which, in turn, influences the

total weight of weaned lamb per ewe.

Body condition at lambing and loss of body condition between lambing and eight weeks after giving birth, were key maternal factors determining the final lamb weaning weight. On average, across the four breeds in the project, a ewe with one unit BCS higher at lambing was associated with a 5.4kg increase in weight of weaned lamb for ewes rearing twins (Figure 1).

For ewes turned out with twin lambs, BCS at lambing was positively associated with combined lamb weights at eight weeks. This effect was consistent across all breeds.

Greatest losers rear heaviest lambs

The ewes that reared twins and lost the most body condition between lambing and eight weeks, produced the heaviest lambs at eight weeks.

This effect was also consistent across breeds, indicating that the ewes that lost

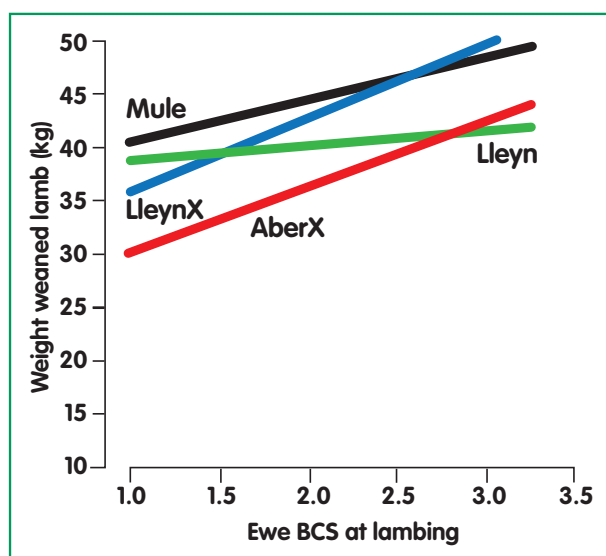
most condition, presumably because they worked harder producing more milk, did the best job of rearing their lambs. The results across breeds showed losing one unit of ewe BCS between lambing and eight weeks, equated to an increase in combined weight of weaned lambs of 6.2kg.

Keep lambing period short

The project has also provided some data to support the need for keeping a compact lambing period. It found that each day that birth was delayed during the lambing period was associated with a 0.4kg reduction in the total weaning weight (in twins).

Data from the pilot year suggests that after eight weeks the factors that have the biggest impact on lamb weight gain after this point are ram genetics and feed quality. It was also found that lambs with poorer growth rates to eight weeks continued to have poor growth rates to weaning and beyond.

Figure 1: Higher BCS at lambing = higher lamb eight-week and weaning weights.



The new **Flock Management Calendar** and **Managing ewes for Better Returns** manual are part of a range of resources that EBLEX BRP makes available to English beef and sheep producers to help them make improvements to their businesses, in terms of cost reduction, environmental impact and animal performance.

These include regular newsletters, technical manuals and videos, as well as a busy programme of events around the country, covering the themes of breeding, selection for slaughter, health, fertility, nutrition, forage, systems and costings. For more information, visit www.eblex.org.uk and click on Better Returns Programme.

Online calendar makes planning easy

Efficient flock managers spend a lot of time planning to ensure key, time-sensitive tasks are completed at the right time. Many farmers are happy to remind themselves of important dates by writing them on a calendar in the farm office. However, increasing numbers are embracing new technology to capture essential information electronically.

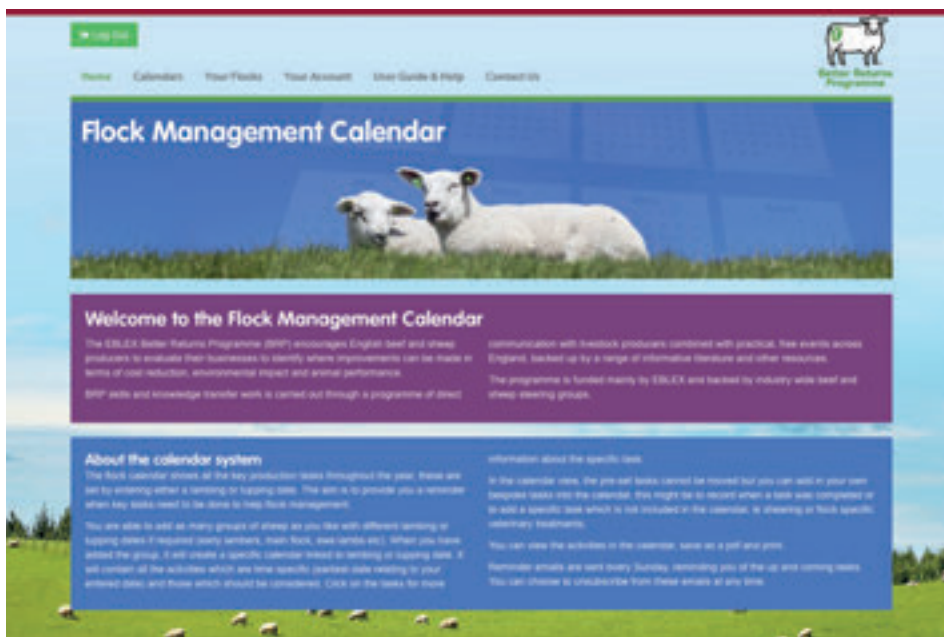
The EBLEX BRP **Flock Management Calendar** provides a simple, free-of-charge solution for remembering all the important tasks.

Once a tugging or lambing date is entered into the calendar, key production dates are set throughout the year, such as:

- When ewes should be scanned
- When vaccinations are due
- When ewes and rams should be body condition scored

Weekly reminders for upcoming tasks are automatically sent to your email account every Sunday.

Multiple calendars can be created for different groups of sheep, eg early lambers, main flock, ewe lambs etc, simply by adding different lambing or tugging dates. Each group will then have its own specific



calendar linked to that date.

As well as essential, time-sensitive tasks, the calendar also flags up other things that should be considered at different times of year, eg the risk of liver fluke or rising worm burdens. There is also an option for producers to add their own bespoke tasks, such as when the

flock is sheared or if any specific veterinary treatments should be administered.

Farmers can register for the EBLEX BRP Flock Management Calendar by visiting www.flockcalendar.com. An equivalent herd management calendar is being developed for beef farmers.

New guide to ewe nutrition

Sheep BRP Manual 12: **Improving ewe nutrition for Better Returns** is currently being updated with the latest ideas on feeding ewes, drawn from research and on-farm practice.



Ewe nutrition plays a vital role in the success of a flock's performance. Their feed requirements vary significantly throughout the year, depending on which stage they are at within the production cycle.

Feed and forage costs account for over 50% of the total variable costs of a sheep enterprise, so it is crucial to get the feeding right. Cutting corners is false economy and can lead to physical problems in the short and longer term.

Ewes draw on nutrients in their diet for maintenance, growth, lactation, reproduction and health. Poor nutrition can lead to reduced fertility, poorer lamb

survival, lower growth rates and even ewe death.

Base diets around forage

Maximising the amount of nutrients coming from home-grown forage helps reduce the amount of feed that has to be bought-in, cutting overall costs.

Having forages such as silage or hay analysed is essential, as it will reveal their energy and protein contents and allows the winter diet to be formulated more accurately. Every year has different growing conditions, so it is important to analyse the forages annually and to interpret and act on the results accordingly.

The best way to check that a diet is working is to assess the body condition of the ewes regularly. This is an important



task in sheep farming and when done properly, can have a real impact on the physical and financial performance of the flock.

The updated manual looks at these and all the other elements of ewe feeding, in more detail. Email brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or call **0870 241 8829** to request a free copy or view online at www.eblex.org.uk.

Nutrition workshops

BRP is also running some ewe nutrition workshops over the winter. Visit the events section of the EBLEX website for dates and venues.



Working with the vet

By Dr Mary Vickers, EBLEX Livestock Scientist

Vets are often only used on beef farms when there is an immediate problem, such as a difficult calving or pneumonia outbreak. They also appear for routine work like checking cows for pregnancy diagnosis or TB testing.

Most producers could probably make much more of vet visits, by taking the opportunity to tap into their expertise and tools. For example, there are a number of diseases that can be monitored easily by analysing blood or faeces. So it might be opportune to ask the vet to collect some samples and discuss the options, while they are already visiting for another matter.

Are BVD and Johne's disease a problem?

Bovine Virus Diarrhoea (BVD) and Johne's are two infectious diseases that are endemic in many herds, yet many producers are still unaware if their animals are infected.

Blood testing is an easy way to find out whether or not BVD is a problem. Ask the vet to take samples from five to ten youngstock, aged between nine and 12 months (depending on grouping and herd size) to look for BVD antibody. If the results are positive, there is likely to be an active infection and a persistently infected (PI) animal in the herd.

Biosecurity, ie preventing the herd coming into contact with sources of infection, is essential to stop the introduction of the disease into a BVD-free herd.

Vaccination is likely to be part of the control measures needed. However vaccination should

only be carried out in conjunction with finding and culling any PI animals.

Tissue testing all calves when they are ear-tagged, is a good way of checking for infected animals. The little bit of ear tissue that is removed in the process is collected in a small vial and sent off for testing. This low-cost sampling method can fit in well with routine calf management practices.

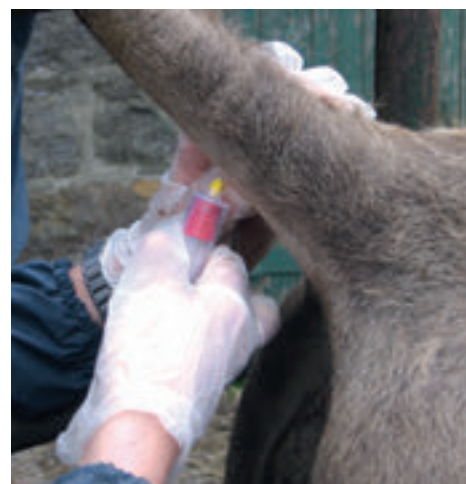
If negative, the tests should be repeated on the next crop of calves when they reach the appropriate age and should continue either at six-monthly or annual intervals, depending on the calving pattern of the herd.

Ask for samples to be taken

Johne's is more difficult to eradicate, but vets can establish a herd's status by blood sampling breeding cattle over two years of age.

In a large herd with no obvious clinical history, blood sampling cull cows is a good place to start, as these are the animals that are most likely to give positive results. Testing can be done on faecal or blood samples. Another approach in a beef herd is to sample all animals, including bulls, over two years, at pregnancy checking or TB testing.

Once the results are known, a control plan can be put into place. If blood samples are taken during TB testing, this should be done on



the first day of testing. There should be three months since the last TB test if the herd is on a more frequent testing regime.

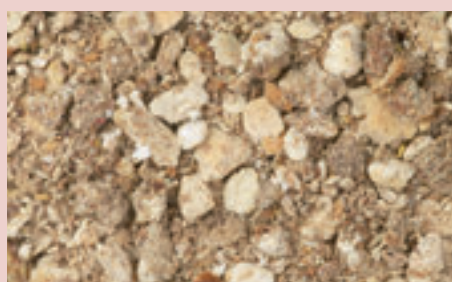
Trace element status

Blood tests can also be taken from cattle to monitor their trace element status such as for selenium, cobalt, iodine and copper, to see if any supplementation is needed. Deficiencies can impact fertility, growth rates and general health, particularly in growing animals.

Routine checking can also indicate whether supplements already being offered are really needed.

Sourcing and feeding co-products

Co-product feedstuffs, derived from human food and drink manufacturing and from the biofuel industries, are increasingly available for inclusion in beef rations. They can offer cost-effective feed options, but care is needed to ensure they are managed and fed for best effect.



There are five main factors to consider:

- Is it sourced from a reputable company?
- Is it the right feed for the stock?
- How will it work with other feeds in the ration?
- How does the cost and nutrient composition compare with other feeds?
- Can it be stored and fed appropriately to maintain its feed value?

Watch out for transport costs

Transport costs have a substantial impact on the value of co-product feeds, as can moisture content. Always ask for a



'delivered price' and compare feeds on the basis of price per tonne dry matter (DM), while also taking into account the nutrient composition.

Speed up genetic progress by using AI

The main advantages of using artificial insemination (AI) in suckler herds is to:

- Access superior genetics
- Avoid the need to buy different types of bulls for different groups of females

AI is an old technology that has been used with dairy cows for many decades. However, it is not often used in suckler herds due to the difficulty of identifying cattle on heat and then handling them for service.



Synchronisation programmes

Fixed-time AI, using a synchronisation programme, provides a partial solution to this problem. It avoids the need for accurate heat detection because cattle are served at a pre-defined time. However, it can involve multiple handlings, so good infrastructure and calm handling of animals is vital.

Choosing and implementing the most appropriate synchronisation and AI programme for the herd can be complex and obtaining input from an expert is recommended.

Cows or heifers must be managed well so that they are in the correct body condition score (BCS 2.5-3.0) when they are inseminated.

For heifers, it is essential they are well grown and at 65% of their mature cow weight at service. Minimising stress is key, so handling facilities must be good and feeding and cattle social groups should not be changed during the six weeks before and after service.

A new BRP+ report: **Artificial Insemination (AI) and Oestrus Synchronisation of Beef Cattle** has a lot more details on this and can be viewed in the BRP+ section of www.eblex.org.uk.



The typical composition of a variety of co-product feeds, along with upper inclusion rates, can be found in the EBLEX **Mini Feeds Directory**, which can be viewed at www.eblex.org.uk.

A simple equation to assess the value of a feed on a DM basis is to divide its value (£) by its DM%, eg wheat @ £120/tonne divided by 85/100 = £141/tonne DM.

It is important to consider the unit costs of energy and protein in each different feed. The EBLEX **Blend calculator** can help with this and is available to use free of charge at www.eblex.org.uk.

Total mixed rations

Many co-products are suitable for inclusion into total mixed rations. They must be mixed well with the other ingredients to ensure a

consistent ration is presented to the animals.

Many of the feeds from the human food chain such as bread, biscuit and maize meals are processed carbohydrates and break down rapidly in the rumen. It is important that rations using this kind of ingredient are formulated with enough structural and digestible fibre to maintain rumen health.

There are a number of co-products such as 'moist' feeds from the brewing, distilling and maize and wheat fractionising industries, that are perfectly safe for feeding direct, or in combination with forages and other farm-produced feeds.

Conversely, some co-product feeds can have palatability issues, not least when they are first fed, such as fresh citrus-based pulps.

Also some 'moist' feeds may have mineral or vitamin deficiencies due to depletion during processing.

Seeking professional nutritional advice before including any co-product feeds is a good idea, to ensure they are used cost-effectively and safely.



New stick for measuring grass

EBLEX has designed and produced a new sward stick that converts compressed sward height into kg dry matter (DM) per ha, making it easier for beef and sheep farmers to find out how much grass is growing in their fields.

This new tool works on a similar principle to a platemeter, but a hand or a clipboard is used to compress the sward rather than the 'plate'. The calibration is based on figures from New Zealand but is being robustly tested on English farms. Email brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk to request a new sward stick.

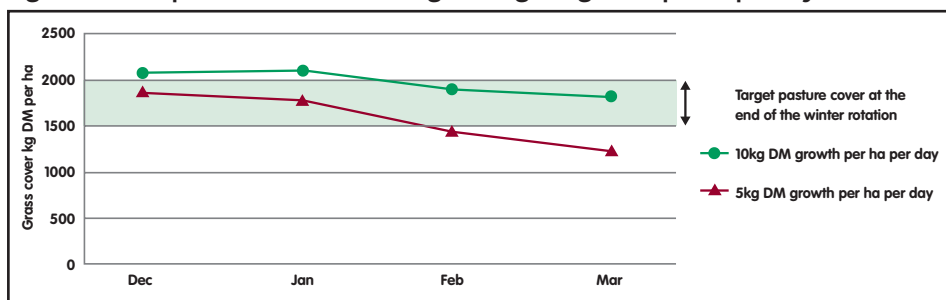


Why measure now?

Although this may not seem like the best time to be measuring grass it can be very useful.

As stock may not be grazing now, calculating grass growth is relatively simple, ie it is the difference between two

Figure 2: Cover predictions based on 5kg or 10kg DM growth per ha per day



measurements divided by the number of days between the measurements. For example, $(1750-1650)/20$, gives a result of 5kg DM per ha of growth per day. Grass may not be growing a lot, but it may be growing more than we think it is.

Taking a measurement every month using the new sward stick at this time of year, even on a handful of fields, will give an idea of what is happening and how the weather is affecting grass growth (also referred to as pasture cover).

Follow a winter feed budget

For sheep farmers running an 'All-Grass

Wintering' system, it is vital to follow a winter feed budget. This should have been drawn up in the autumn to allocate the correct number of stock to each area of grazing. Now is a good time to assess pasture covers against the predictions within the feed budget.

Figure 2 shows an example from the BRP+ document on All-Grass Wintering, showing the cover predictions based on 5kg or 10kg DM per ha per day growth. This approach can be used to monitor actual covers. Decisions can then be taken if growth rates move out of the target zone.

More information on growing and grazing grass

There is an increasing amount of information on the use of grass and grazing in beef and sheep systems at www.eblex.org.uk. These include Generic BRP Manual 8: **Planning grazing strategies for Better Returns**, BRP+ **All-Grass Wintering of Sheep** and a range of video clips on different aspects of grassland management.

Making the most of maize



The starch, energy and intake characteristics of maize silage, together with its high dry matter yield potential, make it a good feed for beef cattle and sheep.

England has both suitable and marginal areas for growing maize. The best places experience high temperatures during summer, have medium textured soils and are at low altitude. However,

maize can also be grown on less favourable sites, where techniques such as drilling under plastic will improve performance.

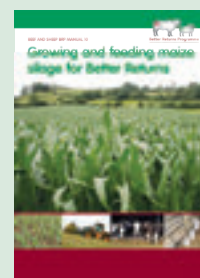
Wherever it is grown, maize requires attention to detail, from ground preparation right through to ensiling. A good seedbed and careful sowing will give maize the best start. Keeping on top of weeds during establishment helps maximise yield. Field-tests can determine the right time to harvest, while consolidation and sealing at the clamp will produce a high-quality feed.

Selecting early maturing varieties, those with the highest dry matter content at harvest on the BSPB Forage Maize Descriptive List, will reduce the risk of having to harvest in unpredictable autumn weather.

Maize silage is a good cereal replacement due to high starch levels, but its protein content is low. If fed with a high protein component, it can provide a well-balanced, cost-effective feed for beef cattle and sheep at key stages in their production cycle.

EBLEX has just published a new Generic BRP Manual called **Growing and feeding maize silage for Better Returns**, which is full of good advice on how to manage the crop. Email brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or call **0870 241 8829** to request a free copy or view at www.eblex.org.uk.

There will be a series of events this winter for farmers considering growing and feeding maize to their cattle or sheep. Keep an eye out for the dates and venues on the events calendar at www.eblex.org.uk.



Focus on recording



Take part in Stocktake.

By Richard Meredith, Regional Officer, Stocktake

EBLEX launched Stocktake in 2012 to replace Business Pointers. This move brought the benchmarking initiative back in-house, with EBLEX itself collecting data from English farms with a range of cattle and sheep enterprises.

These annual figures have become the industry standard by which English beef and lamb producers can compare their performance and see where there is scope for improvement in their businesses.

The aims of Stocktake are to:

- Compare the physical and financial performance of hundreds of beef and sheep enterprises a year
- Provide a confidential and independent benchmarking report back to participating producers
- Summarise the data within the Stocktake Report which publishes 'average' and 'top third' figures, against which other producers can compare their performance



What is involved?

Any beef or sheep producer farming in England can ask to take part by emailing richard.meredith@ahdb.org.uk or by calling **07717 493015**. Farmers typically spend no more than three to four hours assembling the basic farm information.

The data is usually collected for a production cycle year, eg tugging to tugging or weaning to weaning. A trained collector visits the farm to check the figures and upload the information.

Once analysed, the producer receives a detailed benchmarking report of their own figures, which highlights the strengths and weaknesses of their enterprise compared to similar operators. Each individual enterprise report calculates the output, gross and net margins and total costs of production.

Based on the results, farms are ranked as being in the 'top third', 'average', or 'bottom third', based on net margin compared with the other farms in the sample. Participants can access their own data, results and look at different types of reports whenever they wish via the Stocktake website.

Technical help on offer

The Stocktake team contacts first-time users once their report has been received, to deal with any queries and to put them in contact with EBLEX regional managers or members of the technical team if necessary.

There are also some beef and sheep discussion groups in England that focus on costs of production information. EBLEX can identify local groups if farmers wish to join one. Many producers find it useful to discuss their results with other farmers, as this often generates ideas and suggestions on how to improve the weakest areas of their business.

The results can also generate budgets that can be used to monitor progress. Producers who participate year after year have the most to gain, as the value of benchmarking increases as the data builds over time.

The Stocktake Report is produced every November and is a useful and interesting guide to the physical and financial output achieved by a large number of cattle and sheep farmers across England. However, it should not replace the preparation of individual on-farm costings, using actual figures generated by each specific enterprise over the past year.



Which EID equipment?



Recording and monitoring stock performance is an essential part of a farm business. It can be used to identify areas that can be improved or to monitor the effect of any changes made.

Using electronic identification (EID) can make the collection and analysis of data far easier and quicker than recording manually. However, understanding what EID involves and deciding what equipment to buy can be a minefield.

EBLEX is in the final stages of compiling a brief guide to help producers who may be thinking about investing in EID. This will contain a brief background of the technology involved and the various hardware and software available. It will also outline some of the factors to consider when deciding what equipment to buy, such as where the tags will be read and what kind of data will be recorded. The guide will be available in the next couple of months on the BRP+ area of the EBLEX website www.eblex.org.uk.

Focus on best practice



Always inject in the neck

By Liz Ford, Regional Project Manager, EBLEX

Injecting cattle and sheep, whether it is for vaccination or treatment, is an important part of stock management. However, injections must be administered carefully as done badly, they can have a detrimental impact on carcase value.

At this year's summer shows, the BRP team asked producers where they would routinely inject their stock. The results showed that more than 45% of the producers questioned, would still routinely inject cattle and sheep in the rump.

However, both intramuscular and subcutaneous injections should always be administered in the neck where possible.



Key guidelines

- Products should be stored according to the manufacturers' instructions
- Always use a clean, sterile syringe and needle. If using a multiple injection gun, ensure the needle is disinfected between injections with a recognised sterilisation system. Never insert a used needle into a medicine bottle
- If the site to be injected is dirty, clean the skin and swab with an alcohol-impregnated wipe or cotton wool. Avoid injecting animals that are wet
- Before injecting, check the expiry date, read and follow the directions of the product to be used. Some products need to be shaken first. Adhere to the stated withdrawal periods to ensure stock are not marketed too soon after the injection has been given

- Use the correct size of needle according to the size of the animal and site of injection
- Ensure the animal is adequately restrained before attempting the injection

Subcutaneous injections

Subcutaneous injections are administered in areas where the skin is loose (mainly the neck). Grasp a fold of skin and slide the needle through the skin parallel to the animal's neck. This method will avoid penetration of underlying muscle.

The needle should be inserted several inches from the operator's hand to avoid accidental self-injection. The plunger of the syringe should always be pulled back to see if there is any blood visible. This ensures the needle is not located within a blood vessel. If a large dose is to be delivered it may be better to split the dose between two injection sites.

After the injection briefly massage the site to improve the distribution of the injected product.

Intramuscular injections

The main site for intramuscular injection is the muscle mass of the neck. This ensures no valuable cut of meat is damaged, while the constant movement of the neck ensures good dispersal of the product.

The animal must be adequately restrained before injecting. Draw up the solution into the syringe. Disconnect the needle and hold the hub firmly between thumb and middle finger. Insert the needle into the muscle to the hub with a sharp slap action. Connect the syringe to the needle, draw back to check for the absence of blood, then slowly inject the contents of the syringe over ten seconds. Do not inject too quickly as this may cause pain to the animal.

Never insert the needle when connected to the syringe as this makes it more difficult to insert to the correct depth with a single movement. The syringe hub is the weakest point and will often snap if the animal moves, rendering the contents of the syringe useless and creating potential animal welfare and meat safety issues. Massage the injection site gently.

Meat quality issues

Blemishes or injuries at injection sites are visually unappealing and may deter consumers from purchasing a product. Further trimming may be required prior to sale, resulting in extra processing time and a loss of meat yield. In particular, lesions or scar tissue can develop in poorly administered intramuscular injections, which will require trimming before sale.



Photo courtesy of ABP

Abscesses can often form at injection sites. These have to be cut out of the carcase, which takes time and also reduces meat yield. It also potentially devalues the primal cut or carcase, particularly the case in lamb, where trimming often results in downgrading. Most abscesses are avoidable if injections are carried out with care, paying particular attention to good hygiene practice.

For further information see Generic BRP Manual 9: **Minimising carcase losses for Better Returns**, which is available free of charge by emailing brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or calling **0870 241 8829** or view it online at www.eblex.org.uk.

EBLEX health and welfare projects

Results from EBLEX funded R&D projects, looking at the two most common diseases affecting sheep flocks, have been discussed at recent RDPE events.

Biotin and lameness

White line disease can cause lameness and poor hoof integrity, which may be a precursor to other infections including footrot. Some studies have suggested that the nutrient biotin may have a role to play in the prevention of this disease.

EBLEX funded a farm study to investigate the effect of biotin supplementation on the severity of white line disease in ewes.

The study found that biotin had no significant effect on the disease, but did have a positive effect on lamb liveweight at ten weeks of age. However, in this study, the benefit of lamb liveweight gain did not outweigh cost of supplementation.

Mastitis in ewes

It is estimated that 20-30% of ewes culled from flocks at weaning have chronic mastitis with palpable lumps in their udder. Whilst the disease has a significant impact on flock health, little is known about the true causes or costs of mastitis.

This project aims to better understand the impact of keeping ewes with lumpy udders and the effect nutrition has on the incidence of mastitis.

The work will also develop a series of scoring systems to help identify ewes most prone to mastitis. This project is due to conclude in December this year.



Understanding cryptosporidiosis



An EBLEX-funded PhD student, Sarah Thomson has nearly completed her work at Moredun Research Institute in Scotland, looking at the parasitic disease cryptosporidiosis.

This is the most commonly diagnosed cause of diarrhoea in young calves less than six weeks of age and one of the most common in lambs in the UK.

Clinical signs usually include profuse watery diarrhoea, reduced feed intake, weight-loss and in severe cases, death. In lambs the

effects can be more severe, as they can become dehydrated much faster than calves.

Cryptosporidiosis is very difficult to control because the parasite is very hardy and can survive in many environments and withstand many disinfectants. There is no vaccine available to prevent disease and only one treatment is licensed for calves (halofuginone), although this treatment does not completely cure the disease and cannot be given to scouring animals. There is no treatment for lambs.

Research findings

Sarah's work has shown that young calves shed different types of *cryptosporidium* compared to their dams, despite being infected with the same species of the parasite.

Furthermore, as calves grow the species of the parasite they were infected with changes. This information improves our understanding of transmission routes and will help devise better control strategies for the disease in future.

Currently the best way to control cryptosporidiosis is through good farm management and hygiene practices:

- Frequent mucking out of calving areas and calf-houses, combined with steam-cleaning and disinfection to reduce environmental build up
- Calves kept outdoors are at less risk than those housed. High stocking densities should be avoided
- Infected animals should be isolated, with separate feeding utensils and tools etc, until at least two weeks after the diarrhoea stops
- Sufficient intake of good quality colostrum as soon after birth as possible will reduce the severity of the disease



Other EBLEX News

The Better Returns Programme is just one area of work that EBLEX undertakes on behalf of English sheep and beef producers.

Here are some more initiatives EBLEX has carried out recently, with the aim of boosting efficiency and profitability across the red meat sector.

Quality Standard beef and lamb on TV



A new TV advertising campaign to promote Quality Standard and Red Tractor beef and lamb mini roasts, aimed at re-invigorating the traditional roast dinner, has just finished its run on the small screens.

EBLEX's 30-second advertisement, called 'Jetpack Journey Home', aired nationally on ITV during prime-time slots for six weeks until the end of October, promoting beef and lamb mini roasts as a quick, easy and versatile midweek meal.

The adverts feature a man at the end of his working day volunteering to take charge of supper. He delivers a rousing speech to his

stunned co-workers before donning a rocket-powered jetpack, lifting off and crashing through the ceiling of his office. As he powers through the sky he slowly pirouettes to reveal the jetpack is in fact an oven, and that he is cooking a delicious mini roast joint – the perfect midweek evening meal.

The campaign, which featured the Why Wait 'til Sunday? message, has also been supported by extensive social media, digital advertising and in-store promotional activity.

Watch the advert on the EBLEX website at www.eblex.org.uk/marketing.

Celeb mum highlights lamb's versatility



Celebrity mum Stacey Solomon has joined forces with chef Nisha Katona to put lamb in the spotlight by encouraging mums to get cooking with keema.

Stacey and Nisha star in a video in which they use keema, an Indian dish made with lamb mince, as the base for quick and easy meals, which will prove popular with families.

Keema can be served in its traditional form with rice or naan bread, but is so versatile it can be used to give a twist to family favourites such as shepherd's pie, or be added to pasta for a new-style bolognese or to jacket potatoes.

The video, together with a variety of recipe ideas, can be found at www.simplybeefandlamb.co.uk.

Assurance scheme continues to set standard after a decade

EBLEX's Quality Standard Mark (QSM) scheme for beef and lamb is celebrating ten years of helping support a sustainable and profitable industry for farmers.

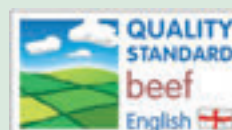
The scheme was launched in 2004 to respond to consumer concerns about the eating quality of red meat. Since then it has evolved to provide one of the highest levels of independently inspected, quality assurance schemes for meat in the UK.

The Mark addresses eating quality alongside tough specifications covering food safety, animal welfare and care for the environment. QSM beef and lamb is assured from farm through to the point of purchase, enabling suppliers to provide total product integrity for their customers.

EBLEX's Laura Bishop, marketing manager for quality schemes said: "Benefits can be seen throughout the supply chain, as the tough specifications create greater carcase yields and enhance farm profitability. Scheme members also benefit from a wide range of marketing materials to support sales of QSM beef and lamb.

"Consumers are more aware than ever about food safety and traceability and are increasingly looking for assurance and origin indicators on packaging and menus. The QSM scheme provides guarantees of provenance, quality and consistency."

For more information about the QSM scheme, visit www.eblextrade.co.uk or call **0845 491 8787**.



Huge potential for sheep meat exports to China

Gaining access to the Chinese market for lamb produced in England would be a game-changer for the industry and could help manage price volatility. These are the findings of an EBLEX-led delegation that recently returned from China.

Although any export deal for beef and lamb is still several years off and subject to intense negotiation, with a rapidly-growing middle class and steep upward demand for red meat as diets change, the potential returns from sales in the Far East are likely to be tens of millions of pounds per year.

To better understand where the opportunities lie and how the market works, EBLEX led a small delegation to China with the National Farmers Union (NFU) and National Sheep Association (NSA). They were invited to the Inner Mongolia region, which has the largest sheep population in the world and currently supplies much of its lamb to be consumed in the Chinese domestic market.

EBLEX export manager Jean-Pierre Garnier and Chris Lloyd, EBLEX industry development manager, together with Charles Sercombe, the NFU's livestock board chairman, and Phil Stocker, chief



executive of the NSA, visited farming and sheep breeding companies as well as farms, abattoirs and markets.

"Wages in China are rising by 13% a year and demand for lamb is expected to hit one million tonnes by 2020. The potential is significant if we can secure market access. English producers and processors could be the big winners," said Chris Lloyd.

"First we need to understand the Chinese sheep sector and its current supply chain to see where our own supplies could fit in and how that would be best achieved.

"For instance, with lamb production being

cyclical, there may be periods where their supply is tight and we may be able to capitalise on this.

"The Far East is already the second largest export market for English lamb after France, even without access to mainland China.

"While China is undoubtedly an important destination for many fifth quarter products, with the changing demographic of the Chinese population, there is also opportunity in the high-end quality-assured market."

New 'Lamb Yield Guide' launched

The EBLEX trade marketing team has developed a new **Lamb Yield Guide**, which takes a detailed look at the processing of the lamb carcase from farm to plate.

The guide, which follows on from the success of the **Beef Yield Guide**, has been developed to help businesses in the supply, processing and independent butchery sectors gain maximum yield and value from the lamb carcase.

It provides information for each stage of

the production process and highlights that traditional lamb cuts account for 35 per cent of the yield from the animal, fifth quarter products amount to 53 per cent of the yield, with bone, fat and drip loss accounting for the remaining 12 per cent.

It also features a useful lamb carcase classification chart which highlights the specific conformation and fat class requirements needed for lamb to comply with EBLEX's Quality Standard Mark (QSM) scheme.



More information about the QSM scheme and EBLEX trade marketing activity can be found at www.eblextrade.co.uk.

16-year high for UK sheep meat exports

UK export volumes of sheep meat in the first six months of 2014 hit their highest half-year level since 1998, according to EBLEX figures.

Global shipments totalled 48,000 tonnes in the first half of the year, an increase of almost two per cent compared to the same period in 2013.

Demand from non-EU markets has helped drive this growth, with shipments to these markets 36% ahead of 2013 levels at 10,600 tonnes. The total value of UK sheep meat exports for the period was up three per cent on the year at £183.9 million.

More information can be found at www.eblex.org.uk/markets/market-news.

Focus on finishing



'Meat' producers make more money

By Steve Powdrill, National Selection Specialist, EBLEX

Value for money, appearance and eating quality are what consumers are looking for when they buy meat, so sheep and beef farmers should bear these purchasing preferences in mind when they finish stock this autumn. Thinking of themselves as 'meat' producers rather than 'lamb' or 'beef' producers may help them deliver the type of meat the market really wants.

Fat in particular is an issue with consumers. It also costs farmers a lot to put fat on an animal and is costly for abattoirs to take it off and dispose of. It also results in a product that will struggle to sell.

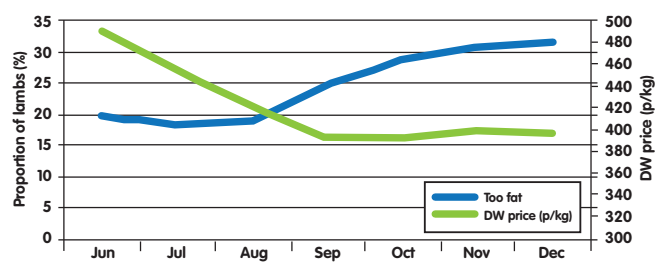
Don't hang onto lambs

It is clear that some producers still hold onto their lambs longer than necessary at certain times of the year, in the hope that market prices will rise. But often they never do and the animals just get fatter and fatter which attract increasing price penalties for going over-fat instead.

Between September and December 2013, more than 25% of lambs were too fat, while almost one in three were over-fat during November and December (Figure 3).

Fat deposition requires four times the amount of energy needed to produce lean tissue, such as muscle – so feeding expensive rations to put on additional fat is a complete waste of time and money. Lambs in the correct condition for their designated market will maximise returns.

Figure 3: Proportion of lambs slaughtered in GB deemed too fat compared to the Standard Quality Quotation (SQQ) price in 2013.

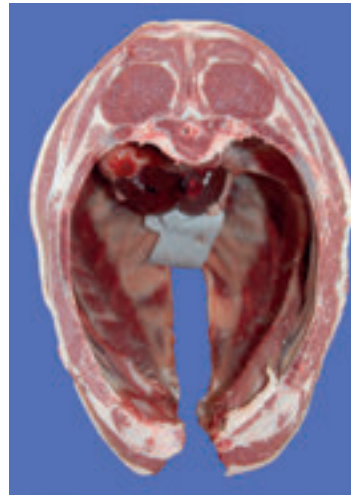


Consistency rules

There is no doubt that English farmers can produce fantastic lamb and beef. However, at times there can be a problem with consistency.

For example, getting all cattle in a group to hit the required specification is not easy, requiring great attention to detail in the run up to selling.

It is vital to find a market first. Do not produce a batch of cattle then try and find a customer for them. It is far better to identify a potential market (or several) first, then produce animals to suit their specific requirements.

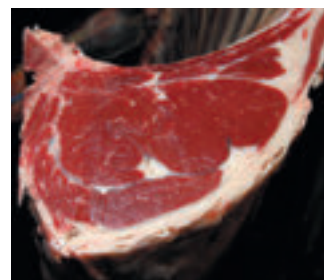


The sheep carcass on the left graded at R3L and has a much higher saleable meat yield than the carcass on the right which has much more fat on it and graded at R4H.

This can be particularly tricky at this time of year. Stock sold out of yards is often more heavily fed and less mobile than those finishing off grass. Consequently, they are often fatter than the market wants.

The key for drawing cattle is to sell them when they are ready and not to sell on weight alone. Frequent, careful handling is essential to ensure each animal has reached its target specification for weight and conformation.

While there are many market requirements for beef, including maximum and minimum weight bands, more than 80% of meat buyers are looking for animals that classify as R4L.



R4L eye muscle



O+5H eye muscle

A large library of information on breeding, feeding, management and selection for slaughter is available at www.eblex.org.uk.

Free BRP Live-to-Dead days are also held regularly at abattoirs across England. These offer an excellent opportunity for farmers to compare live animals with their carcasses very soon after slaughter. See the events section of the website for details of forthcoming days or call the EBLEX Events office on **01904 771211** to be put on the waiting list.

For more information contact:
EBLEX BRP

Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board
Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth
Warwickshire CV8 2TL

Tel: 0870 241 8829
Email: brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk
www.eblex.org.uk



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