

## Using swedes for pregnant ewes

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*Marc managed an AHDB Beef and Lamb funded project last year, with the aim of demonstrating the practicalities and financial aspects of using swedes in an outdoor lambing system.*



### The crop

The swedes were direct drilled into sprayed off permanent pasture on 30 May 2013 and the cost per hectare to grow the crop was £669.57 per hectare (ha). This includes all contracting costs, a rental figure and a cost for lime (to increase the soil pH to the recommended pH 6.0). The swedes received an application of 60 kg/ha of a 16:16:16 fertiliser and also received slug pellets at drilling. The seed rate for drilling was 0.7 kg/ha. After the initial drilling and fertiliser spreading no further inputs were applied to the crop.

On 20 December the crop dry matter (DM) yield was estimated to be 10.3 t DM/ha (based on the initial 10.3% dry matter content). The estimated cost of 6.49 p/kg DM produced was calculated. The table below shows the results on the three analyses taken over the winter and showed that the value of the crop did not deteriorate. The dry matter dropped due to the large amount of rainfall during January and February.

	<b>20/12/2013</b>	<b>11/02/2014</b>	<b>18/03/2014</b>
<b>Dry matter (%) *</b>	10.3	7.8	11.1
<b>Crude protein (%)</b>	21.4	10.3	10.8
<b>Ash (%)</b>	11.7	9.0	7.2
<b>Total oil (%) *</b>	<0.3	<0.3	<0.3
<b>Sugar as sucrose (%)</b>	23.0	30.3	39.1
<b>NCGD (%)</b>	<b>82.1</b>	<b>89.5</b>	<b>90.8</b>

### The sheep

A total of 266 mixed-aged performance-recorded Lleyn ewes, out of a flock of 400 breeding ewes, were monitored for the study.

All of the Lleyn ewes were given a selenium, cobalt and iodine bolus and were treated for fluke prior to mating from 5 November.

The rams were removed on the 12 December. The sheep were moved onto the swedes on 24 December, where they were strip grazed until March. During this time they received a second bolus and also a booster clostridial vaccine.

Ewes scanned as carrying twins were moved to grass from the swedes on 4 March, where they were set stocked at 12.5 ewes/hectare at a grass cover of 1,700 kg DM/ha. The fields were

monitored weekly to maintain grass covers at this level. The single-bearing ewes were moved onto grass on 18 March and were then stocked at 37 ewes/hectare at grass covers of 1,200 kg DM/ha. Covers were monitored with the ewes being tightened to 50 ewes/hectare because some ewes started to have lambing difficulties due to over-sized lambs.



## Project findings

- a crop such as swedes provides a cost-effective alternative to housing sheep, providing that the crop is grown well on relatively free-draining ground.
- the swede crop will maintain, if not slightly increase, the body condition score of ewes during pregnancy provided that the weather is not too extreme.
- the mixture of swedes in mid-pregnancy and grass in the last three to four weeks of pregnancy provides adequate nutrition to the in-lamb ewe, provided that lambing is timed to coincide with reliable grass growth
- the forage-based system does not seem to have any adverse effects on animal health.

[For more information read the full project report on the AHDB Beef and Lamb website](#)