SUREROOT project
Clare Parnell and Philip Kent, near Trelights, Cornwall

For the last five decades, Clare and Philip have been pushing the boundaries when it comes to progressive farming. On their beef and sheep farm in Cornwall they have been using EID for nine years, both as a comprehensive tool to record everything from birth, and also as a tool to identify problem ewes.

They began monitoring faecal egg counts in the 1970s and continue to use them to plan the worming policy and to identify underperforming fields.

In recent years, Clare’s nephew Philip has joined the business and he has focused the farm more on grassland management, in order to reduce reliance on bought-in feed and to overcome the challenge of ground drying up in summer.

Clare and Philip currently farm 182 hectares (452 acres) with 34 ha (85 ac) of cereals, 132 ha (327 ac) of grassland, 11.3 ha (28 ac) of chicory, plantain and white clover leys and 5 ha (12 ac) of fodder beet. They use the fodder beet in the spring when demand is at its highest.

The farm has 750 Romney x polled Dorset ewes, which lamb indoor from the end of January to the end of February, plus 250 ewe lambs that lamb from mid-March. They rear around 165% and aim for daily liveweight gain in lambs of 300g per day without any creep and make use of the chicory and leys. They are planning to move the focus from early lamb production to an outdoor April lambing system to reduce costs, and have forecast that they can reduce production costs by 80p/kg deadweight.

Clare and Philip purchase 140 British Blue X Friesian calves each spring from one selected farm, in order to reduce the risk of buying-in disease, and aim for 300kg beef carcases in their second season.

They rotationally graze ewes in mobs of 250 on 3-4 hectare fields, moving the mobs every 4-5 days. They also rotationally graze the cattle with the aim of them gaining up to 1.5kg per day. This isn’t currently working as well as for the sheep, but the cattle have a role to play in improving the quality of grazing for the lambs.
The farm is involved in a BBSRC-funded project called SUREROOT, as one of the demo farms taking part in the five-year project, which aims to evaluate whether selecting grasses for deeper rooting systems could be beneficial for grass growth and longevity. They have a one hectare field that is being used to compare whether a deeper rooting festulolium performs better than a standard hybrid ryegrass.

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The farm demonstrates sheep and beef production driven by thoughtful grassland utilisation and management. They have been early adopters of new technology such as EID and have tried out different forages and emerging grass varieties to help maximise efficiency and the contribution made by grass.

For more information about the SUREROOT project visit www.sureroot.uk