

## Geraint Powell, Nuffield Scholar

Shepherd Geraint Powell is soon to begin his travels as part of his Nuffield scholarship, which has been sponsored by AHDB Beef & Lamb. Managing large flocks across 16 units in the Cotswolds, most of which are in Higher Level or Entry Level Stewardship schemes (HLS and ELS respectively), has had a major influence on the title of Geraint's scholarship - Sustainable grazing strategies that meet ecological demands.

In 2004, upon returning from his travels across New Zealand and Australia, Geraint took up a position as a shepherd working alongside farm business owner Toby Baxter. Since then, the business has grown significantly with more than 4,000 breeding ewes currently on the ground. Emphasis has been placed on breeding ewe lambs with high maternal traits. To do this, Geraint has put Aberfield rams to flocks of pure Romney and Lleyn ewes, resulting in a ewe with a good constitution and ability to thrive off forage alone.



After scanning, single-bearing ewes are managed on grass. Twins and triplets are moved onto turnips, fodder beet or other cover crops, which are grown as part of a rotation on six arable units that are contract farmed in the area. Three weeks before lambing they will then be moved onto grass and supplemented with fodder beet if grass growth is not sufficient. All ewes are lambed outside and mobs are put together for grazing until weaning.

Unproductive traits such as poor mothering and bad feet have been bred out of the flock. Geraint runs a tight culling policy which is strictly adhered to. Given the size of the area that is grazed at any one time, a limited workforce and finite profit per ewe means the system must run as smoothly as possible with minimal man hours required. This has led to a low-input ewe with good maternal traits. Demand for this type of sheep has surged since Geraint sold the first group off farm in 2012; he now holds an on-farm collection day in the last few weeks of July where prospective buyers can assess stock. The relationship that has been built up with these buyers has been core to the development of the business, with regular buyers returning to purchase replacement breeding ewes on an annual basis. All ram lambs are sold as stores at 30 – 35kg.

The flocks he manages are on land owned by 16 separate landlords, with areas ranging in size from 4.9 to 809ha. Each of these has its own stewardship agreements. In total, there is more than 1,619ha of permanent pasture grazed at different times of the year, depending on what the HLS restrictions dictate.

**Geraint is due to start his travels in the next few weeks. He will visit Brazil, Chile, Canada, The Netherlands, Italy and USA on a series of trips over the next 18 months. Grazing Club newsletter readers can learn of Geraint's findings with a regular update in relation to grazing and grassland**