SPRING 2023

RUMINANT NEWS

AT THE HEART OF THE BEEF & LAMB INDUSTRY

Don't underestimate the importance of grass

How much is ewe mastitis costing you?

Red meat advertising campaign **REACHES 32 MILLION**

AHDB's We Eat Balanced advertising campaign returned to screens and social media and has reached over 32 million adults

Contents

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WELCOME

Sam Charlton, Beef & Lamb Head of Engagement

We're thrilled to share the results of our most recent red meat and dairy marketing campaign, We Eat Balanced. We're sure you've seen it on screens, in store and on social media as we reached 32 million people with our positive messaging about beef, lamb and dairy. Read the full results on pages 6–7.

As our strategy shifts slightly to focus more on consumers' attitudes towards red meat, we constantly challenge incorrect assumptions and messaging in the media. Our CEO has written to The Lancet to formally request that a flagship study on human disease is removed from publication due to a potential lack of accuracy. Our response was widely covered by the media, advising consumers there are benefits to eating red meat and showing farmers AHDB will always ensure defending the reputation of red meat is a priority.

As we turn out attention towards summer and the grass-growing season, we would like to share what AHDB is doing to support farmers during this important production period. We also highlight the results of two on-farm trials looking to improve the efficacy of worm treatments while also tackling the real problem of anthelmintic resistance. We acknowledge that mindset is key, but it's often overlooked. In this issue, we discuss how important it can be to support sustainable suckler production.

Finally, don't forget to make sure your contact details are up to date so that we can share more information about what AHDB are doing to support you and your business. Our field teams are busy planning our activities in the regions for the year ahead, so sign up to join us (details on the back page).

STANDING UP FOR RED MEAT health claim accuracy

Our CEO, Tim Rycroft, has written to the editor in chief of The Lancet to formally request that The Global Burden of Disease Risk Factors Study 2019 is removed from publication due to a lack of appropriate procedures to ensure accuracy.

The study is an extremely influential dataset used by policymakers all over the world to shape dietary and health guidelines, which is why we feel it's important to challenge it for the red meat sector.

Despite multiple requests from AHDB and others, it comes after a lack of clarity from The Lancet on whether the 2019 update was scrutinised by peers and conducted in line with appropriate procedures to ensure its accuracy.

Concerns were first raised by esteemed nutrition and health academics in late 2021, followed by another group, with links to the World Cancer Research Fund, in early 2022, who expressed their concerns over the reliability of the jump in deaths related to red meat consumption.

The authors of the 2019 study published a carefully considered response to AHDB's letter on 4 March 2023, nine months after it was first sent. Despite this, AHDB is still unclear on whether the data underwent independent scrutiny and whether its new evidence review process was carried out in accordance with relevant intellectual protocols.

Of significant concern is that the authors of the study published another study, independent of The Lancet, in late 2022, which found "weak evidence of an association between unprocessed red meat consumption and colorectal cancer, breast cancer, type 2 diabetes and ischemic heart disease. Moreover… no evidence of an association between unprocessed red meat and ischemic stroke or haemorrhagic stroke". Despite this, The Global Burden of Disease 2019 continues to be used to support claims that red meat consumption is a cause of higher health risks.

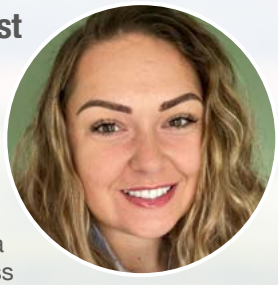
It is reviewed every two years, and like most good science, its methodologies and review criteria are constantly evolving to ensure continued improvement and accuracy. However, between 2017 and 2019, the authors developed and implemented a new review analysis in, it appears, isolation of competent scientific practice and international protocols.

As an evidence-based organisation, we are particularly concerned about the lack of transparency around how this data has been analysed and the way in which the new evidence review criteria have been determined. Therefore, on behalf of our levy payers, we will continue to push for transparency on this to ensure the health impacts of red meat consumption are accurately depicted in science, policy and, indeed, society.

AHDB hopes the health benefits red meat consumption brings to a balanced and healthy diet are reflected correctly in the study's 2021 update, which is expected imminently.

Don't underestimate THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASS

Grass plays such an important role in UK agriculture, AHDB's National Specialist for Grass, Forage and Soil, Katie Evans, explains what AHDB is doing to help farmers improve their grassland management.



The reputation of the UK's agricultural industry is closely tied to the quality of its grassland production. By maintaining high standards of grassland management and promoting sustainable farming practices, the UK can continue to enhance its reputation as a producer of high-quality and environmentally responsible agricultural products.

AHDB continues to support projects and produces tools and resources that help farmers improve their grassland management by providing the information they need to make informed decisions about grazing management, environmental impact and operational effectiveness.

Forage for Knowledge

Forage for Knowledge is an AHDB database providing weekly updates on grass growth and quality from farms across the UK.

The data collected on farm is then shared in a weekly email newsletter which provides useful grazing management notes and recommendations based on the quality and growth rates collected that week. The newsletter includes technical updates, articles and links to important tools and resources that will help to improve grass utilisation and management. It's available to farmers, consultants and industry.

Summer 2022 had long spells of dry and warm weather leading to reduced grass growth. The yields submitted over the season were below the five-year average growth rates until September and October time. This data gave insight into how the drought was affecting grass quality parameters such as ME, protein and dry matter. Farmers could use this information to decide how to meet the dry matter intake requirements and balance nutrient requirements on facts, not just assumptions.

Sign up for Forage for Knowledge at **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/forage-for-knowledge**

GrassCheckGB

AHDB sponsors GrassCheckGB, a project run by CIEL, AFBI and Rothamsted Research, with support from HCC and QMS, and further sponsorship from industry partners.

The project measures the growth rates of grass and assesses its nutritional content. The network is made up of 50 collaborative farms around Great Britain, and their information is shared on the GrassCheckGB weekly bulletin, Farmers Guardian and social media pages. The data for the 2022 grass growing season showed dairy farms recorded higher average yields than beef and sheep farms (10.27 and 7.37 t DM/ha, respectively), with the difference in 2022 being 2.90 t DM/ha. Despite the difficult grass-growing conditions, GrassCheckGB farms averaged a very high grass utilisation rate of 77.8% above a 1,500 kg DM/ha standard residual.

The project has also developed a grass growth model, with regional 7–14-day grass growth forecasts published within the weekly bulletin updates. This enables farmers to plan and make informed decisions on grassland management for the next grazing week.

There are also three on-farm research elements to the project. This year, GrassCheckGB will be assessing the value of clover on commercial farms, the impact of different rotational grazing management strategies on animal performance and grass utilisation and examining blanketed and targeted fertiliser regimes in rotational grazing systems.

For more information on all things grass, visit **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/ahdb-grass**

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HAVE YOU SEEN THE LATEST AHDB GRASS PUBLICATIONS?

- **Grazing & Forage Year Planner**
- **Improving pasture for better returns manual**
- **Making grass silage for better returns manual**

View online at **ahdb.org.uk** or order in hard copy at **ahdb.org.uk/ahdb-beef-lamb-order-form**

USA RED MEAT EXPORTS **MISSION A SUCCESS**

An AHDB mission to the USA with red meat exporters to explore opportunities for UK beef and lamb has been a success. International Market Development Director, Dr Phil Hadley, explains below.

The visit, which centered around the Annual Meat Conference in Texas, and included visits to local retailers, a beef ranch and a sheep farm, resulted in a number of valuable connections with US buyers, all of which have the potential to boost red meat exports.

The event exceeded expectations, and while there are challenges in exporting to the USA, such as raising awareness of brand Britain and competing with countries already well-established and well-regarded by US consumers, the opportunities are plentiful.

The reception we received from US buyers was very encouraging. Most gave positive feedback on the taste and high quality of our red meat and even arranged meetings with our exporters to discuss possible orders.

The Annual Meat Conference took place in March, allowing AHDB and exporters to network with more than 1,500 meat professionals from across the states.

AHDB shared a stand with Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC); we served up samples of beef, pork and lamb and hosted a butchery demonstration with master butcher Martin Eccles.

The mission to the USA, which also included visits to local retailers, a beef ranch and a sheep farm, was organised by AHDB to help boost exports to the USA, where demand for UK meat has increased over the past year.

According to data from HMRC, a total of 1,235 t of beef were exported to the USA last year, worth £8.2m. However, shipments were down on the previous year due to the beef import quota filling quickly as other exporting nations also targeted the market.

Also, in October of last year, the first shipment of lamb from the UK arrived in the USA after more than two decades. The first consignment was served at a gathering of US industry leaders at the Meat Importers Council of America (MICA) annual conference.

The USA is an important export market for our red meat, and it's vital that we continue to have a presence at trade shows and conferences to ensure that we make valuable connections with importers.

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Red meat advertising campaign **reaches 32 million**

AHDB's We Eat Balanced advertising campaign returned to screens and social media and has reached over 32 million adults.

The £1.5m TV-led campaign focuses on protecting long-term consumer attitudes to British red meat and dairy and aims to encourage more British households to continue eating meat and dairy as part of a balanced diet.

The campaign returned to mainstream TV (ITV, C4) and digital channels, including Sky Media, ITVDigital, C4Digital and YouTube. The ad secured top TV spots around Coronation Street and Emmerdale as well as blockbuster films, including James Bond's Spectre, Independence Day, and Angel Has Fallen.

The social media campaign appeared on Facebook and Instagram, achieving over 56 million views. It focused on debunking common myths around the role of red meat and dairy in a healthy balanced diet and the sustainability of UK farming.

There was also a suite of full-page adverts running weekly in the I-newspaper for the duration of the campaign covering health, welfare and sustainability messaging with supporting banner adverts on Guardian Online. Achieving over 7.5 million opportunities to see, the campaign aimed to showcase the UK's world-class standards in food production and sustainability.

The We Eat Balanced message was also seen in major supermarkets, including Sainsbury's, Tesco, Aldi, Morrisons, Asda, Lidl, Waitrose and Co-op. AHDB placed 8m on-pack stickers, supporting in-store collateral as well as online banner ads and in-store magazine adverts.

A PR campaign to support We Eat Balanced featured celebrity doctor, Dr Ranj Singh, on a morning milk round advising Britain to "Wake up to B12". Dr Ranj endorsed the positive role of meat and dairy in our diets with a key focus on the benefits of B12, naturally found in milk and red meat and not naturally present in a plant-based diet. The campaign secured coverage in over nine national and regional press outlets, including BBC Asian Network, Daily Mail and Metro.

Research has shown the success of last year's We Eat Balanced campaign, with purchase intent for meat (on the next shop) rising five percentage points to 77% among 34 to 49-year-olds. And dairy saw a six-percentage point increase to 84% among 16 to 34-year-olds. An incredible 90% of consumers said AHDB's We Eat Balanced TV advert communicated that meat and dairy could be part of a balanced diet.

The next We Eat Balanced campaign burst will commence on 8 September and run until late October 2023.

LOOK OUT FOR OUR BBQ CAMPAIGN IN MAY

HERE'S TO ANOTHER GREAT BRITISH BEEF WEEK

Great British Beef Week (GBBW) returned for its thirteenth year to celebrate naturally delicious British beef, renowned around the world for its quality and sustainability.

The week launched on St George's Day and encouraged the nation to enjoy one of our most iconic meat dishes – the delicious British beef roast.

Families were invited to celebrate with a different take on a Sunday roast and make the most of their leftovers. Running from Sunday 23 April until Sunday 30 April, GBBW saw farmers, processors, retailers, butchers, and chefs united once again to share recipes, real-life farming stories and infographics on social media and in the press. Plus, there were also plenty of industry promotions on beef packs, on counter, on menu and in store.

The brainchild of Ladies in Beef, a voluntary organisation of female beef farmers co-founded by Devon producer, Jilly Greed and NFU President, Minette Batters, GBBW brings everyone together to champion Red Tractor assured British beef in a week-long celebration of quality, taste and our world-leading farming credentials.

The week-long celebration was supported by AHDB, Red Tractor, the NFU and RABI.

FOCUS ON FINISHED, NOT FAT LAMBS

With consumer research reporting that lamb is tasty but can be fatty, National Selection Specialist for AHDB, Steve Powdrill, discusses what we can do about it on farm.

© AHDB

Improvements in breeding and grassland management have led to animals being ready earlier than in the past, which is great news for profits. However, bearing in mind no one year is the same, the key is to sell lambs when they are ready and not to wait for that special date when, historically, the first draw was made.

While there are many market specifications for lamb, including maximum and minimum weight bands, more than 80% of meat buyers are looking for animals that classify as R3L. While weight is vital, sending animals of the right conformation and fat score is just as important. Driving for heavy weights can be counterproductive as lambs weighing over 21 kg usually

> More than 80% of meat buyers are looking for animals that classify as R3L

attract a penalty when sold deadweight, and the carcases can become overfat. When taking sheep to higher weights, feed costs also increase per kilogram produced.

Selecting lambs to market

Weight and visual appraisal are general guides to an animal's readiness for market, but handling the live animal is essential to ensure accurate selection.

Key handling points

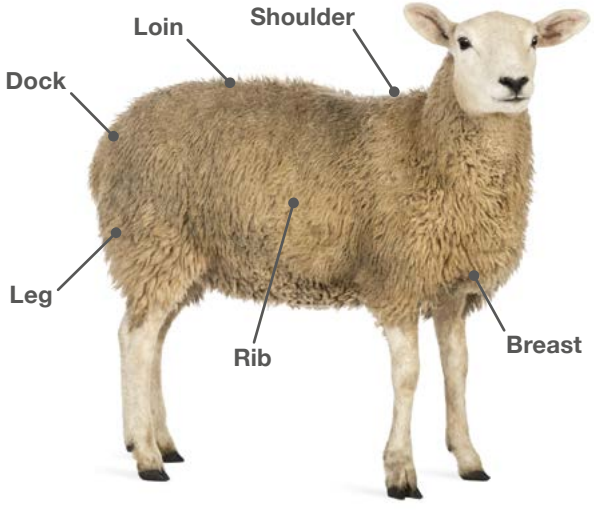
There are five key points that give the best indication of conformation and fat class. For conformation, assess the animal at the leg, shoulder and loin. To assess the fat level, feel the animal at the dock, loin, ribs, and breast.

Classification R3L

An 'in spec' R3L carcase

Classification R5

An 'out of spec' R5 carcase



TOP TIPS

- Understand your market outlet and specification
- Think about genetics and nutrition and what's achievable for your farm
- Handle lambs regularly, ideally weekly, feeling for conformation at the loin and checking fat class
- Sell lambs as soon as they are ready, so they don't grow more frame (ideally when they have reached their genetic potential)
- You're a meat producer – always keep the consumer in mind. It's all about reputation

How to achieve R3L

There's a fine balance between genetics and nutrition for animals to have the potential to hit specification. Conformation is predominantly affected by genetics and breed, so farmers must recognise when the optimum period is for selling their particular breed. In contrast, fat cover can be affected by breed but quite often as a result of nutrition.

As lambs are getting nearer to being finished, they should be handled at least fortnightly or, if possible, weekly. Lambs which are not sold as soon as they are ready will start to grow more frame again. If you find a lamb with a big dock and raw on the back, you have missed an opportunity and will have to wait until it is finished again, at a bigger weight and at a greater cost to you.

Remember, prices tend to drop week-on-week in the summer, and quite often, the first margin is generally the best. For example, a 16 kg lamb can be worth more than a 19 kg lamb a few weeks later. We tend to see a glut of over-fat lambs at the end of the summer when farmers have been busy with other jobs, and lamb selection is not a priority. Some of these would have been fit to sell many weeks earlier, potentially for a better price. Returns can also be improved by making sure lambs are clean and empty-bellied when selling and batched according to size/finish.

Virtual Selection Tool

For more information about lamb selection, see the AHDB Beef & Lamb Virtual Selection Tool, which shows how real and virtual animals look at different points in the classification grid, available at: **ahdb.org.uk/virtual-beef-and-lamb-programmes**

For more information, see the AHDB Marketing prime lamb for better returns manual online or order your hard copy here: **ahdb.org.uk/ahdb-beef-lamb-order-form**

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MINDSET IS KEY TO SUSTAINABLE SUCKLER PRODUCTION

Senior Knowledge Exchange Manager for Beef & Lamb, Amy Hughes, reflects on a recent visit from Canadian suckler producer Arron Nerbas and how this has impacted British suckler producers.

Sustainability. This is a word we hear all the time now, isn't it? The question is, what does sustainability mean to you and your business? If you look the word up, there are three pillars to sustainability: social, economic and environmental. But the balance of those three things is very personal to each person and farming business.

Everyone who farms, wants to make a profit. A business is not a business if it doesn't pay the bills. But what about the lifestyle that you and your family want to lead? What about the environment? And by that, I don't just mean your carbon footprint. A recent visit from Canadian suckler producer, Arron Nerbas of Nerbas Bros. Aberdeen Angus, highlighted all these issues to the hundreds of British suckler producers that came to listen to his experience. AHDB Beef & Lamb, the British Cattle Breeders Club and the Aberdeen-Angus Cattle Society put together a week-long programme for Arron that included the 75th British Cattle Breeders conference and three on-farm events. We heard about, saw and discussed all things suckler production. Arron farms with his brother, Shane, and his parents, Cynthia and Gene. They are a third-generation ranch, farming 5000 acres of perennial forage. They have a herd of 550 cattle, selling breeding bulls and replacement heifers along with direct-to-consumer beef. Using regenerative and holistic principles, the ranch supports three households.

So how is this relevant to me and farming in the UK, I hear you say? Well, it isn't all relevant. But, instead of focusing on the parts that aren't relevant, the farmers that joined us focused on what they could take away from Arron's experience and, above all, the family's mindset. Having travelled and taken time to 'grow up', Arron returned to the farm, and his whole family decided to take a course in holistic management. They wanted to change the way they farmed and become more in sync with nature, putting back into the land what previous practices had taken out.

By changing their grazing practices, the family has doubled their forage production on the same area of land using animal impact, rest and recovery. And, no artificial fertiliser has been used for 20 years.

> "Love what the cow can do more than you love the cow itself"

Are we guilty of loving our cows too much?

The consensus was a resounding yes. We've got into the habit of fitting the system to the cow rather than breeding and managing the cow to fit the system. Using strict system selection pressure, Nerbas Bros. Aberdeen Angus was achieving and, in most cases, exceeding our industry KPIs for animal performance. Calving in less than an eight-week period with 94%+ in calf rates, there was no question that his "momma cows" were fertile and doing the job they were supposed to do, producing one marketable calf every 365 days. His heifer selection was based on using his "cow goggles" to select animals built for functionality and removing any outliers.

Arron wanted forage-efficient animals that held their body condition score (BCS) in the harshest of winters and thrived in his system. A herd-first mentality was taken – no splitting into groups and managing them separately. If the cow didn't thrive, it went. I asked Arron if he thought they could be this strict because of the number of cattle they had. After all, if suckler farmers over here culled everything that didn't fit, they'd end up with hardly any cows left. His response was yes, to some extent. But this is not a quick process, nor should it be. Make your rules and stick to them. Set your non-negotiables and remove those cows. Then the next year, remove a few more. The result, over time, will be a herd of uniform, functional and profitable cattle. For anyone questioning the welfare of the cattle at Nerbas Bros. Aberdeen Angus – don't. After seeing multiple videos of the cattle and how they're managed, I can assure you they look great. Fit, healthy and functional.

For more information on maternal performance and profitability in the suckler herd, see **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/maternal-matters**

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Reduce your days to slaughter using RamCompare data

Grazing, feed, and vet and med costs can be saved by reducing days to slaughter, but can we quantify other benefits? Sam Boon, Senior Animal Breeding Manager for Signet Breeding Services, investigates.

In sheep breeding programmes, we are often asked to value the genetic gains in enhancing growth rates and carcase attributes. But while it's easy to value an increase in carcase weight or conformation, it's much more difficult to assess the impact of reducing days to slaughter.

When finishing spring-born lambs, there are direct costs and savings associated with reducing forage and/or concentrate consumption and a potential reduction in vet and medicine costs.

Forage costs are usually based on the cost of producing grass for grazing in situ. But a more significant saving arises from reducing the grazing pressure on the flock when lambs are slaughtered, lifting the performance of the remaining lambs and reducing the competition between lambs and ewes for grass at mating time and over the winter.

Grass costs currently range from 5p/kg DM for hill grazing through to 12p/kg DM for lowland winter grazing. Assuming lambs eat 1.6 kg/day (about 5% body weight), typical grazing costs are 8–16p per day. Concentrate costs and consumption vary tremendously between flocks, but easily add another 3–5p/lamb per day if the supplementary creep is provided. For early-season production, costs are considerably higher. A further complication arises if farms resort to feeding concentrates to late-finishing lambs when grass growth has reduced, as their feed conversion rate is lower.

Fast-growing lambs may require one less drench for internal parasites and potentially less preventative treatment for fly strike and lameness. But as many of these treatments are applied at a flock level, savings tend to be small.

Indirect benefits are harder to calculate:

- Labour does reduce as lambs leave the farm, but savings are initially small to the point that large draws of lambs leave the farm
- The longer lambs are on the farm, the greater the risk of mortality or the chance they encounter factors that may limit performance, such as drought or worm challenge
- The early sale of lambs will free up land for other purposes, such as the finishing of store lambs or overwintering extra ewes

One of the major benefits of breeding lambs that have the genetic potential to finish more quickly is the ability to sell them early on a falling market. Where prices are falling at 2p, 4p or 6p/kg a week, a 38 kg lamb is losing 11p, 22p or 33p per day.

So, what is the value of faster finishing?

While the direct benefits are hard to put an exact figure on, feed and forage costs for a largely grass-based flock are typically 10–20p per lamb per day, while selling earlier onto a falling summer market can be worth an extra 15p per day.

However, these are just the economic benefits. The environmental benefits are also very important and must be considered. The more quickly lambs leave the farm, the less methane they produce over their lifetime. By increasing lamb growth rates, we can also reduce lamb's carbon footprint.

How can I reduce days to slaughter?

Nutrition, health and genetics will all influence the speed with which lambs finish. Genetics are arguably the easiest aspect to change by selecting rams that will produce fast-finishing offspring.

Data from RamCompare has consistently shown that rams with high Scan Weight EBVs produce progeny that finish more quickly. And this summer, new information is being released to aid commercial ram buyers.

In May, AHDB will use data from the RamCompare project to publish a series of new breeding values on **signetdata.com** to aid commercial producers seeking genetically superior rams.

Breeding values for Days to Slaughter, Carcase Weight and Conformation will be publicly available as we head into the next ram buying season, making it even easier for farmers to find the most profitable rams for their flock.

Case study: H L Nelless, Morpeth, Northumberland

Speed of finishing is vital for Duncan Nelless, whose Lleyn cross lambs are finished on organic cover crops. Data collected for RamCompare often shows big differences between seemingly similar rams. For example, two Hampshire Down rams have been used across the flock, and both have performed well. Lambs from Ram A (with a High Scan Weight EBV) finished five days quicker than those by Ram B and weighed 0.8 kg more, which shows that fast-finishing lambs can still weigh well.

For Duncan, this increase in carcase weight was worth around £4/lamb, with an additional £1.50/head generated from faster finishing. Which we can all agree are very positive results for the bottom line.

More information on Signet and RamCompare can be found at **signetdata.com**

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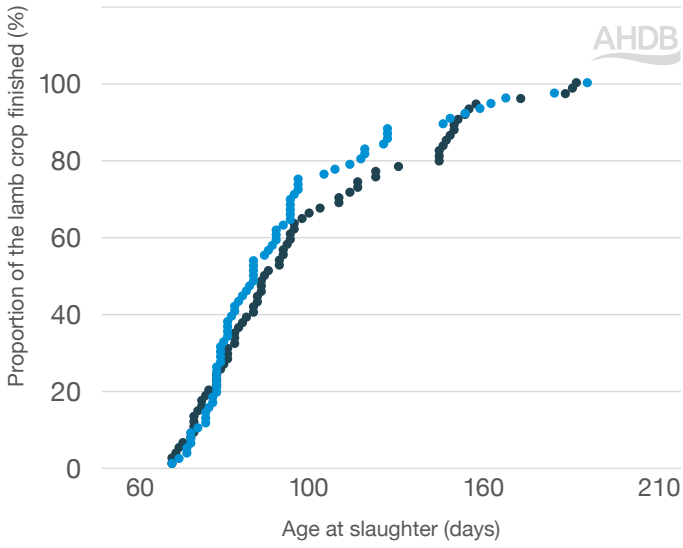

Source: AHDB

Ram A = High Scan Weight EBV

Ram B = Low Scan Weight EBV

Figure 1. Speed of lambs finished by two Hampshire Down Rams H L Nelless, RamCompare Flock 2022

Make monitoring body condition **A TOP PRIORITY THIS YEAR**

Dr Nerys Wright explains how monitoring the condition of young ewes can optimise flock performance with increased scanning, heavier lambs at weaning, and overall increased flock longevity.

After a mixed year, 2022 ended as the warmest year on record with 90% of average rainfall (predominantly due to the wetter-than-average autumn), followed by a warmer and drier start to 2023. Young ewes are especially vulnerable to seasonal changes, with limited dry matter covers and feed availability, because they are still growing as well as producing a lamb – or even two.

With some exceptions, scanning results were generally down 5–10% prior to lambing 2023. Anecdotally, young ewes did appear to be more affected in certain regions. Some of these were a result of the warm, dry summer. However, some of this could also be attributed to the wetter autumn reducing dry matter intake and limiting the amount of BCS and weight ewes could regain prior to tupping.

Ewes put with the rams at optimum BCS (3 to 3.5) have increased ovulation rates. However, ewe nutrition and BCS in the six months prior to tupping may also affect the ovulation response. This is because this is when ovarian follicles begin their journey and commit to growth and the subsequent release during the mating period.

Therefore, there is a potential longer-term effect for ewes in poor condition or with their nutritional requirements not being met during lactation in the subsequent year to have fewer eggs, poorer scanning results and fewer lambs born. This was reported as a key finding from the AHDB Sheep KPI project. The management of young ewes was also identified as a key area of consideration for farmers who want to optimise their flock's performance with better scanning percentages, heavier lambs at weaning, and overall increased flock longevity.

Ewe lambs and shearlings are still growing, only reaching mature weight at three years old. Milk production can also be lower in ewes lactating for the first time due to mammary tissue development. Peak milk yield occurs around 3–4 weeks post lambing and will naturally decline thereafter, having produced 40–50% of total milk production during those first weeks. Therefore nutrition (energy and protein) is crucial during late pregnancy but is just as important in the first 3–4 weeks of lactation. If the diet cannot meet the increased energy and protein requirements of lactation, or ewes have limited fat reserves, this will decrease milk yield and reduce lamb growth rates. The Sheep KPI project found that shearling ewes lambing for the first time and rearing twin lambs produced lighter lambs at eight weeks post-lambing, lighter lambs at weaning and had a greater proportion of 'light lambs' (weighing 15% less than their target of 20 kg at 8 weeks). So you can see the significance of the end result.

To reduce the impact of limited feed and/or ewes in lower than target BCS, assessing ewe and lamb performance six to eight weeks post-lambing will provide you with information on lamb growth rates, lamb survival and ewe condition. This information can be used to determine the timing of weaning, which could be sooner. This can help avoid ewes and lambs competing for feed and reduces the risk of ewes losing too much condition and struggling to gain the condition back again prior to mating later in the year.

For more information, visit:
ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/lambing-ewe-lambs

TOP TIPS

- Assess ewe and lamb performance eight weeks post-lambing. Aim for 18–20 kg lamb weight and ewe BCS >2.5
- Use this information to decide when weaning should take place – work around the industry target of 12 weeks
- Decide on any interventions required. For example, additional feeding for thin ewes or light lambs and consider managing them as a separate group until weaning
- Prioritise feeding for these younger ewes to ensure BCS and weight targets are achieved prior to the next tupping season. Shearlings should be at 80% mature ewe liveweight at mating and BCS 3.5 for lowland ewes (3 for upland and 2.5 for hill ewes)

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Challenge Sheep shows promising progress

Challenge Sheep, an AHDB-funded research project looking at the longevity of 7,000 ewes entering the flock as ewe lambs or shearlings in 2017 and 2018, is currently in its sixth year of a seven-year programme. The project follows the replacement ewes over their productive lifetime, measuring the impact of ewe management during their first pregnancy and lactation.

At weaning in year five, 24% of ewes enrolled have either been culled or died. Where we have a known reason for ewes leaving the flock during the first five years, the most common reasons are mastitis, barren (at scanning or after lambing), poor performance (particularly poor body condition) and prolapse. This is interesting as we currently don't have much data in this area, so we would be estimating how many ewes would be left at this stage. The project does have one more year to run, but with 76% of ewes still on farm at the end of year five, this suggests the replacement rate is less than we would have expected at this stage.

For more information, visit:
ahdb.org.uk/challenge-sheep

Save time and money by changing your wormer usage

With the reduction of effectiveness and rise of resistance in anthelmintics (wormers) on many farms, two of the Beef & Lamb monitor farmers, Ian Farrant and Harry Sordy, share their changes and results with Sarah Penrose.

Beef focus

Sam Farrant and Sons farm 600 acres in Herefordshire, producing finished cattle. Between 750 and 1,000 head of cattle are finished each year. The farm comprises 300 acres of grass, 130 acres of wheat and 15 acres of hazelnuts. Aberdeen Angus cross calves are grazed for one season on a low input grazing system before being housed and finished between 16–21 months and sold deadweight. Follow the farm's progress through Ian Farrant's Instagram account @herefordhazelnuts

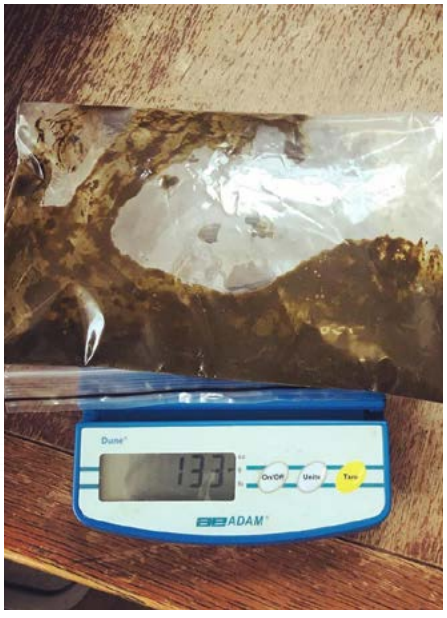
Prior to joining the AHDB Monitor Farm program, Ian would routinely worm calves every two months while out grazing with an Ivermectin-based pour-on. Attending meetings and reading about anthelmintic use coincided with the launch of the Monitor Farm programme when the farm was offered the use of a FECPAK machine with Techion. The FECPAK enables routine testing of faeces to count the number of adult worm eggs present. It's a good indication of the number of adult worms inside the animal. Ian said: "I gather as many individual dung pats as possible to get a representative sample. We move cattle daily, so we know the samples are fresh when collected. We run the samples and usually have the results within an hour".

Over the past two years of utilising the FECPAK, the farm has been taking samples every two months and, as a result, has not used any wormer. Ian added: "Our vet sees a copy of the results, and we discuss them. We also weigh our animals monthly and can look at daily liveweight gain as another sense check".

So far, the highest egg count hasn't come close to the threshold for treatment. About half the samples have been 0 epg (eggs per gram), and the maximum count has been 100 epg. The farm has successfully reduced wormer use, utilising herd-specific information without any negative impact on herd performance.

Sheep focus

G Sordy & Sons farm 1,450 ha in the Northumberland National Park, and around three-quarters of the farm is on hill ground. The farm comprises 80 ha of arable land, 15 ha of kale mix, and approximately 100 ha of temporary pasture (ryegrass and herbal leys), with the remainder permanent pasture. The farm has 240 spring-calving Aberdeen Angus x Simmental cows, finishing cattle at 18–20 months, and a 3,000-head flock of hill and upland breed ewes.



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Producing over 4,000 lambs each year, reducing wormer use at Alnham Farm was identified as a useful way of saving money while ensuring that the wormers available remain effective for as long as possible. A small trial on a batch of lambs enabled the farm to reduce anthelmintic use by 50% using target-selective treatment (TST).

Alnham Farm is currently operating at 85–90% effectiveness to white and clear drenches, a common occurrence on many livestock farms. TST looks to leave a portion of the mob undrenched so that some of the worms are not exposed to the drug, thus slowing the rate of resistance.

Within a mob, there will be a portion of lambs that, despite the challenge, are performing well and are unlikely to show a response to wormer treatment. These are the ones we want to leave untreated, instead targeting treatment to those lambs that will benefit.

A total of 158 EasyCare lambs were involved in the trial at Alnham Farm. Joe Henry, the farm's vet, said: "To make it easy, we ran the first 30 lambs through the auto drafter and recorded their weights. This gave us an average weight for the batch, which was 27.6 kg. Those below this weight were wormed. In total, out of the batch of 158 lambs, only 71 were wormed".

He added: "Ideally, TST should be done based on growth rate rather than actual weight because this reduces any effect of birth date or litter size". Therefore, this year, G Sordy & Sons plan to weigh lambs at tagging to ensure growth rates can be calculated.

The exercise was repeated six weeks later when lambs were weighed again, and only approximately half of the lambs needed to be wormed. To boost confidence in the system, anything left untreated had a blue mark put on its back. The shepherd could then visually identify if any poor-performing lambs had been treated. The trial finished in September, and all lambs were mobbed up after weaning. Data showed growth rates of the batch of lambs in the TST trial were no different from those not involved.

> "In total, out of the batch of 158 lambs, only 71 were wormed"

Joe Henry added: "It's important that we protect the effectiveness of the wormers we have available by reducing selection for resistance. This small trial has demonstrated we can move away from whole-group treatments without compromising performance. I'm looking forward to seeing this trial repeated next year, and as we gain confidence, we should hopefully be able to roll this out across the whole flock".

For more information, visit **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/parasite-control-guide**

For more information, see **scops.org.uk** and **cattleparasites.org.uk**

SCOPS – Sustainable Control of Parasites

COWS – Control Of Worms Sustainably

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How much is **EWE MASTITIS** costing you?

With ewe mastitis thought to cost the industry more than £120m per year, Dr Bethan John, Animal Health & Welfare Scientist, reviews the causes of mastitis to reduce preventable culling.

In some parts of the country, lambing may feel like a distant memory, but whether you're still lambing or not, now is a great time to review the past few months. Mastitis in sheep is one of the most important diseases affecting ewes and a major reason for premature culling, with 4–6% of ewes culled because of udder problems.

A recent webinar with Dr Dawn Bowness of Clevedale Veterinary Practice outlined the causes and risk factors for mastitis and management practices to manage and reduce the incidence of mastitis in your flock.

Mastitis is predominately caused by bacteria, with research showing over 30 different bacterial species linked to mastitis. Other causes include viral infections, such as Maedi Visna. And subclinical infections (infections with no visible signs) can affect over 50% of the flock resulting in reduced milk yield and quality and poor lamb growth rates.

Why do I need to think about mastitis now?

Although mastitis may only feel like an issue at lambing, the time between lambing and weaning is your best lamb growth period, where mastitis will have a significant impact.

Some of the signs of mastitis may not be obvious when ewes are out at pasture, such as heat and swelling of the udder and watery or bloody milk with or without clots. But some signs will be more obvious:

- The ewe may hang back from the flock and not eat
- The ewe may not allow lambs to suckle
- Pain in the udder can cause the ewe to appear to be lame in the hind leg
- Lambs looking hungry

Remember that mastitis can have direct and indirect costs to your business. Treatment costs, labour costs and reduced lamb growth rates all add up. However, mastitis can be fatal for ewes and lambs, so don't forget about costs for fallen stock removal, replacement ewes and potentially hand-rearing lambs.

WATCH THE WEBINAR

To watch the webinar 'Is ewe mastitis costing your business?', visit **youtube.com/c/AHDBBeefandLamb**

If you spot mastitis in your flock, it's important to take action as soon as possible.

What can I do about mastitis?

When one ewe has mastitis, the flock is at increased risk of infection due to it being easily passed between ewes. Identifying and treating individual cases can decrease the risk of mastitis spreading across the flock. Observe the flock for any visual signs and treat any affected ewes promptly to prevent further damage to the udder. Prompt action will also minimise sources of infection for the rest of the flock. Remember that repeat treatments may be necessary for affected ewes, so it can be useful to mark or record which ewes have been treated. If you are finding a lot of ewes with mastitis, speak to your vet about testing individuals or flock-level testing to help identify chronic or subclinical infections.

Removing infected milk into a container and carefully disposing of it can help with recovery from mastitis. Infected ewes might lose function in the affected gland for the rest of the lactation, and these issues may impact future lactations. Dr Bethan John said: "Ewes that have had acute mastitis are 12 times more likely to develop intramammary masses than ewes that did not have acute mastitis. These masses and abscesses can rupture and become a source of infection, and so affected ewes should be culled after weaning".

The heritability for chronic mastitis is estimated to be about 10% which means it is highly heritable, so do not keep replacements from ewes which develop mastitis. It's best to keep replacements from ewes that have not had mastitis. Research has shown the shape and conformation of a ewe's udder can help reduce the risk of mastitis. Breed from ewes with a symmetrical, non-pendulous udder with teats at a 45° angle, which helps lambs suckle, reducing the risk of teat damage that could lead to mastitis.

For more information on mastitis, see **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/understanding-mastitis-in-sheep** and **ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/managing-ewes-for-better-returns**

For further information, contact:

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PREVENTING FUTURE MASTITIS

Mastitis is a multifactorial disease, so there is no effective single-control strategy. Managing risk factors is one way of reducing the possibility of ewes developing mastitis:

- Maintain ewes BCS at 3+
- Provide extra supplementation for thin ewes and old ewes
- Consider culling older ewes or those with poor udder conformation
- Check the udder for abnormal masses to make sure chronic mastitis is not overlooked
- Separate ewes with mastitis from the rest of the flock and manage as a separate group to reduce transmission between healthy and diseased animals
- Ensure there is shelter for the flock during bad weather
- Provide extra nutrition for ewes with multiple lambs
- Test for Maedi Visna
- Adopt good hygiene practices to prevent bacteria spreading from ewe to ewe
- Reduce the plane of nutrition of freshly weaned ewes for two weeks to make sure they dry off and to reduce the risk of mastitis post-weaning

NEWS & UPDATES

DEAR DIARY

Events

20 June – Northumberland Monitor Farm: The value of good nutrition

27 June – Creating and managing a dairy beef enterprise into an integrated arable and sheep business

Keep an eye on our events page, for the most up-to-date information and details on how to book your place: **ahdb.org.uk/events**

Webinars coming soon

17 May – Introducing a dairy beef enterprise into an integrated arable and sheep business

18 May – Talking Leaders: Leading in the new world

Recent podcasts

Did you listen to our recent podcast by Dr Nerys Wright on tackling parasites in sheep with SCOPS?

Subscribe to our AHDB Food & Farming channel to hear our monthly updates.

Have you seen our hard-copy publications?

In addition to our online information, tools and resources, hard-copy publications are available for beef and lamb levy payers in England. To order your hard copies, visit our website, **ahdb.org.uk/ahdb-beef-lamb-order-form** or get in touch at **brp@ahdb.org.uk**

Keep in touch reminder

Make sure you don't miss out by ensuring we have your correct contact details.

- Do this online by visiting: **preferencecentre.ahdb.org.uk**
- By phone by calling: 024 7647 8694
- Or by post: CRM team, Siskin Parkway East, Middlemarch Business Park, Coventry, CV3 4PE

DO YOU KNOW YOUR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE MANAGER (KEM)?

Your local (KEM) is your first point of call for any support or guidance you require to help you succeed and develop your farm business. The team is dedicated to improving the flow and uptake of knowledge throughout the supply chain in order to help you maximise your returns, understand the cost of production and react to the changing environment and legislation.

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To find out who your local KEM is and how to get in touch, visit **ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb**