

Lamb Briefing



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UK Studies Confirm Forage Chicory Potential

Separate ewe and lamb performance and lamb eating quality studies have confirmed the potential of forage chicory in UK sheep production, reports EBLEX, the industry body for beef and lamb levy-payers in England.

The latest on-farm trial in West Sussex used EID technology in the collection of data from 600 Southdown cross, Suffolk cross and Lleyn lambs finished on clover swards with either chicory or Italian ryegrass over the past season. It showed lambs on the chicory sward growing an average 20% faster than their contemporaries, mainly as a result of a two point D value advantage (*Table*).

Table: West Sussex Lamb Finishing Performance on Chicory

	Liveweight Gain (g/day)	D Value
White clover, red clover & chicory	180	74
Red clover & Italian ryegrass	150	72
Improvement	30 (20%)	2 (3%)

These results echo those of a University of Cumbria study at Newton Rigg in which North Country Mule ewes and their Texel-cross lambs were grazed for six weeks on plots planted with a standard grazing mixture with or without chicory.

Here the lambs on the chicory mix gained about 20g/day more than their contemporaries to end the trial nearly 0.5 kg/head heavier. At the same time, the chicory-grazed ewes lost noticeably less weight than those on the non-chicory sward and maintained their body condition better, suggesting a worthwhile improvement in their nutrition.

Although faecal eggs counts were too low overall for any significant differences to be recorded, the Newton Rigg results also tend to support suggestions of a round worm control benefit from chicory grazing in both ewes and lambs.

Preliminary results from parallel work investigating the eating quality of lamb carcasses at SAC in Edinburgh further indicate that chicory grazing does not appear to negatively effect the quality of the lamb produced. Indeed, they suggest it may even increase the juiciness of female lambs.

While these studies add to the growing body of evidence that UK sheep producers may be able improve the performance of their stock by including chicory in their swards, EBLEX stresses that the crop has to be managed carefully to maximise its persistence and nutritional value.

In particular, it is important to appreciate that small chicory plants are susceptible to up-rooting by grazing stock, established plants can bolt and become unpalatable if not grazed sufficiently well, and hard grazing can damage plant crowns.

Practical guidance on establishing chicory and managing its grazing for maximum value is provided in a special Lamb Action for Profit sheet available free of charge to English levy payers through the interactive EBLEX website resource at www.eblex.co.uk.

Feel free to use these comments as quotes from EBLEX Sheep Scientist, Dr Liz Genever who can be contacted on 02476 478823.

Alternatively, ring your EBLEX Regional Manager or the Press Office on 02476 478835. Information is also available at www.eblex.org.uk