



Easy Care Sheep Systems

We know that sheep are profitable but the work involved with them is too high, if it were closer to that of cattle more farmers would keep sheep. Sheep are an ideal user of marginal cereal land and make a great enterprise for young farmers with restricted capital.

Many farmers are already keeping sheep on systems with some components of easy care such as lambing outside on grass but they can make their year-round labour effectiveness even better through selective animal breeding and cutting out futile tasks.

With easy care systems farmers can keep enough sheep to get a living and also have a lifestyle! Systems feature:

- Dependence on low cost grazed forages with minimum supplementation.
- Less human intervention particularly at lambing.
- Use of sheep selected for performance and easy care traits.
- Heavy culling pressure on problems and diseases together with a health plan.
- A critical look at returns from wool.
- Use of labour saving mechanical aids.
- High delivery of public goods such as welfare and environmental benefits.

There are many frequent misconceptions about easy care systems.

Easy care systems are not no care; in fact they are extremely caring and can produce both high margins per worker and high welfare. Sheep in easy care systems are not treated like extensively kept hill sheep that tend to get upset when visited and run off during lambing. Easy care sheep should be visited frequently at lambing and should show the typical signs of intensive shepherding – indifference. They do not get mismothered at lambing or have their grazing patterns upset when you visit, provided you use ATV at constant revs so they get used to you, and do not feed daily supplements. Easy care systems are about cutting out futile labour and are generally applicable to upland/lowland intensive farms with high quality grass and reasonable stocking rates.

- Easy care systems are not about ranching sheep on extensive farms
- Easy care systems are not about total year-round dependence on grazed grass, if you try this on most UK farms there is not enough grass to eat in the spring when you need it most. Inwintering is necessary on many farms for optimum pasture production and to get high quality feed for late pregnancy/lactation diets. SAC trials showed Lifeline blocks pre lambing have a place in correcting min/vit deficiency and improving colostrum quality.
- Its not about leaving animals ‘to get on with it’

Use of sheep selected for performance and easy care traits.

Crossbred sheep do well on easy care systems but the farmer is dependant on the breeder of his replacements to put performance and easy care traits high on the selection priority list. Many farmers on easy care systems are now closing flocks. Selection pressure can quickly reduce incidence of problems like lambing difficulty, dagginess and footrot.

Breed	Ewe Weight (Kg)	Carcass Weight	Lambing % Reared	Comment
Lleyn	55	19 kg @R3L	180	Prolific
Easycare	65	20Kg @R3L	160	No shearing
New Zealand Romney	75	21 kg @R3L	150	5Kg Wool worth £3.75

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