



Sheep issues on the Monitor Farms

SAC manages 6 of the current 8 Scottish Monitor Farms. These projects are funded by QMS, SEERAD, Scottish Enterprise Borders and Highland Council. The Monitor Farm Project involves selecting one typical farm in an area to act as a focal point for regular meetings and discussions one a three year period. The aim is to improve the financial performance of the Monitor Farm through adoption of new ideas or best practice. Key lessons can then be picked up by others at group meetings or through press coverage.

This note provides a flavour of some of the main issues tackled on the Borders (Rob and Kath Livesey, The Firth, Lilliesleaf), Perthshire (Messers Steele, Pitroddie, Perth), Wigtonshire (Robert and Eileen Parker, Drumdown, Kirkolm), and North Argyll (Billy and Caroline Ronald, Saulmore, Connel) Monitor Farms.

Improving Scanning Results - Getting the Lambs into the Ewes

By Seamus Donnelly, Wigtonshire Monitor Farm facilitator

In 9 out of the last 10 years Robert has scanned over 200%. How does he consistently achieve above average figures across the 511ewe flock? Robert puts it down to 3 P's - "Planning, Preparation and Plenty of Power in the tups". This year the flock scanned at 215% - How? About 5 weeks (7th September) before tups due to go in, all 511 ewes were shut up in a bare 7 acre field. Over the next fortnight they had their feet pared and were dosed with Combinex. On 27th September all moved into a 20 acre field that had been shut off (grass height 5-6") and 3 teaser tups were added. 2 weeks later (11th October), ewes split into 3 tupping groups, 14 tups put in (1 tup/36 ewes) and each group moved to fresh grass. After the first cycle only 45 ewes had not been tupped (<10%), so not only

is this "fasting/feast" approach before tups go in helping to put lambs into the ewes, but improves how quick they come to the tup. Another secret is probably how Robert conditions the tups, he builds body condition starting 6 weeks before tupping, not by feeding concentrates, but by giving them good grazing. How many farmers leave the tups shut up on a bare paddock until a week before they are needed - "fit off grass is the aim". Worth pointing out that no minerals/tupping licks are used and ewes don't get any concentrate feed until a few weeks before lambing.

Drumdown	Yield	Singles	Twins	Triplets	Scan
2002	5%	10%	50%	35%	216%
2003	3%	11%	56%	30%	214%
2004	1%	14%	63%	22%	206%
2005	2%	11%	58%	29%	215%

Tupping policy for ewe lambs

By Iain Riddell, Borders Monitor Farm facilitator

Rob and Kath Livesey decided to tup their ewe lambs for the first time in 2003 in order to boost lamb output. It has been proven that mating ewe lambs does not affect overall productivity, and in fact might improve lamb survival, since a gimmer that has already reared a lamb is more capable of dealing with twins than one lambing for the first time. However it those mated as ewe lambs need to be given preferential grazing in the subsequent summer if they are to hit target weights for mating as gimmers.

As a rough rule of thumb a ewe lamb should only be put to the tup if it has reached the normal weight of a finished lamb of that breed a month before mating. Rob Livesey runs his lambs through his automated Racewell sheep handler, which quickly drafts out lambs weighing over 38 kg in mid September. Anything lighter is held back from the tup.

Success through **K**nowledge



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



A vasectomised tup is first introduced to the ewe lamb group for 11 days and withdrawn for 2 days before the tup is put in. The ewe lamb mating is timed to start one week after tups go in with the main group of ewes, and lasts for only one 21 day cycle. This reduces the risk of difficulties lambing large single lambs from ewe hoggs. Choice of tup is also important and the Liveseys use Lleyn tups which produce lighter lambs that are born easily.

This policy has produced good results for the last 3 years producing extra output without greatly increasing labour requirement. Ewe hoggs have scanned at 117% in 2004 and 131% in 2005.

Tackling footrot

By Iain Riddell, Borders Monitor Farm facilitator

Footrot is a major problem in many housed sheep flocks. SAC had developed guidelines for best practice ideas to control footrot, funded by SEERAD, which had been tested on a few of farms. The Monitor Farm was considered an ideal venue to confirm the effectiveness of the guidelines and to get control techniques accepted by farmers.

Our Borders Monitor farmers repeated the successful footrot control policy used in 2003 – 04.

Identify ewes requiring treatment in mid December – draft off visibly lame sheep in the race, run rest of flock through footbath with 3% formalin, run through race again (those with scald or mild footrot will usually limp after going through formalin. Repeat again if necessary.

Diagnosing lameness problems – the lame ewes were then individually inspected in the turning crate and inspected for 4 conditions

- Problems between the toes – scald
- Problems between the toes with underrun of the hoof and smelly – footrot
- Problems not due to specific disease – white line disease
- Problems at the top of the coronary band (hoof hair junction at the top of the foot) – CODD.

Where necessary a light trimming was carried out with footrot shears to identify problems and correct major foot abnormalities. Treatments were as follows.

- Chronic footrot – ewes with chronic footrot were given an antibiotic injection, stood in zinc sulphate footbath.

- Severe footrot/swollen feet – antibiotic injection, pared once antibiotic took effect, zinc sulphate foot bath
- Scald – stood in zinc sulphate bath
- White line disease – foot trimming and zinc sulphate footbath.

Most ewes were housed but lame ones were kept in a separate group outside to prevent any spread of infection. Very little evidence of lameness was seen in the sheep house as a consequence.

Accounting for Losses at Lambing

By Seamus Donnelly, Wigtonshire Monitor Farm facilitator

The Wigtonshire Group asked if lamb deaths could be recorded during 2005 lambing season.

Potential Number	1086	% of Scan Total
Less:	92	9%
Re-absorbed		
Still Born	45	4%
Lain on etc.	14	1%
Watery Mouth	4	½%
Losses at Grass	16	1½%
Losses from Scanning		16%
Sold	893 (172%)	

The figure for re-absorbed has been arrived at by deducting lambs produced (976) from original scan potential (1068) - at 9% this seems rather high. Interesting to compare a similar exercise done this year at the Borders Monitor Farm. Not only did they also arrive at a figure of 9%, but their losses from scanning to end April after turnout are also identical at 16% (note as a percentage of scan total). This exercise will be repeated again this year. 14 lambs lain on - is the design of the lambing pens a factor?

	2002/2003	2003/2004	2004/2005	Your Figures
Scanning %	216%	214%	206%	
% Lambs Sold/Reared	175%	171%	171%	
Difference	41%	43%	35%	

Wormer Trial

By Niall Campbell, North Argyll Monitor Farm facilitator

The North Argyll group requested that the project assess the sheep at Saulmore for signs of anthelmintic resistance.

Ten animals were tested for each drench, samples were taken by the Oban Vets and analysed by the SAC accredited lab to check all three drenches: white, avermectins and yellow/clear. Results are as follows:

Drench	Egg Counts (eggs/gram of faeces)		
	Valbazen (White)	Noromectin (Avermectins)	Levamisole (Yellow/Clear)
Pre Dose Average	480	568	770
Post Dose Average	290	5	0
% Reduction	40%	99%	100%
Max Count	1650	50	0

The white drench came back with resistance identified (it was only 40% effective) while the yellow/clear drench was 100% effective and the avermectin 99.12% effective. Therefore it was confirmed that Saulmore has resistance to the white drenches but not the other drenches.

This is quite a major development. This means that Saulmore should not use white drenches but should use yellow and clear instead. Billy Ronald did mention that perhaps this was the reason for the poorer lambs this year and hopefully this discovery would improve the quality of the lambs on the ground for next year.

Note: This is a key issue for the industry as a whole. A 2001 Moredun survey estimated that around 50% of hill flocks had some resistance to the White drenches and resistance is steadily increasing.

Resistance is also prevalent on lowground farms. Both Borders and Perthshire undertook similar drench resistance trials and found no resistance to any of the wormer groups. However this is an extremely worthwhile exercise that could save a lot of money in the longer term.

Benchmarking sheep enterprise profitability

By Iain Riddell, Borders, and Mary Munro, Perthshire Monitor Farm facilitators

All of the Monitor Farms benchmark the relative profitability of enterprises to both gross and net margin (deducting fixed costs) level. This allows us to assess the profitability of each enterprise and identify how this can be improved.

Now that subsidies are unrelated to production we have noticed that lowground sheep are one of the few enterprises that can be profitable without subsidy.

The most recent results, 2004 production year, for Perthshire and Borders Monitor Farms are shown below. Figures exclude Sheep Annual Premium payments but include LFASS.

	No to tup	% lambs reared	Gross margin per head	Fixed costs/hd	Net Margin/hd	Flock margin
Perthshire	720	172%	£49.55	£32	£17.55	£12,440
Borders*	1312*	151%	£46.80	£38	£8.80	£11,545
QMS LFA upland * Flocks (average)	545	143%	£42.54	£39	£3.54	£1,929

- Borders includes 1197 ewes and 246 ewe hogs to the tup.
- QMS LFA flocks – estimated LFASS of £5/head added back in.

The Perthshire result shows the sort of margins that can be achieved with good technical efficiency, and lambs hitting market specifications. This farm also benefits from fixed costs that are well below average. It is harder to get high lamb rearing figures and margins on larger conventionally lambed flocks, but positive margin can still be generated as demonstrated by Borders Monitor Farm.

The key message here is to measure how your enterprise is performing and use the information to make further improvements.

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