

Ram Workshop

The industry situation

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Where we are



- Rams are costly to buy and are expected to work for three to four mating seasons on commercial farms
- But an excessive number die or are culled while still relatively young and the average working life of rams is likely to be closer to two seasons
- Ram to ewe ratio is 1:40- well below capability

Why ?



- Rams are sold in overfat condition following heavy concentrate feeding at ram fairs as the biggest ones tend to make the highest prices
- As a result rams are unfit for breeding in their first season and future performance is compromised

Whose fault ?



- Breeders of rams who have selected strongly on visual clues (breed characteristics without commercial value- size of heads, strength of bone and colour) have been better rewarded in an auction- based system than those who have selected on the basis of performance traits and lamb vigour at birth.

Unexpected consequences



- As a result they have been better placed to use expensive science-based technologies such as ET and AI
- Thus these technologies have failed to exploit their potential to increase genetic progress
- They have been more heavily used by ram breeders describing merit by auction price than by performance

More problems



Inaccurate assessment of lamb carcass value from a carcass classification system based on conformation and fatness is not rewarding breeders making progress in muscle traits eg better loins, but is rewarding farmers selecting for conformation

The introduction of Viascan may resolve this problem but could take years

Breaking the deadlock



- Buyers purchase rams on looks but are not happy with performance
- Sellers respond to buyers signals and overfeed to meet demands for size
- Can this workshop identify ways to break this deadlock to the benefit of the industry and sheep performance?

Potential returns



Ram cost per lamb (£)

| Seasons of work | Ewes per ram | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|------|------|------|
| | 40 | 60 | 80 | 100 |
| 1 | 9.17 | 6.11 | 4.58 | 3.67 |
| 2 | 4.58 | 3.06 | 2.29 | 1.83 |
| 3 | 3.06 | 2.04 | 1.53 | 1.22 |
| 4 | 2.29 | 1.53 | 1.15 | 0.92 |

This table assumes rams are bought as shearlings @ £550 and each ewe rears 1.5 lambs

Potential returns in context



- Increasing from 2 seasons @1:40 to 4 seasons @1:100 reduces lamb production costs by £3.66 (£2.14 if its from 3 seasons)
- A good terminal sire can add £2 per lamb
- A good maternal sire can add £6-12 /ewe lifetime
- So financially a terminal sire's serving capacity and longevity is at least as important as his genetics

Future carbon targets

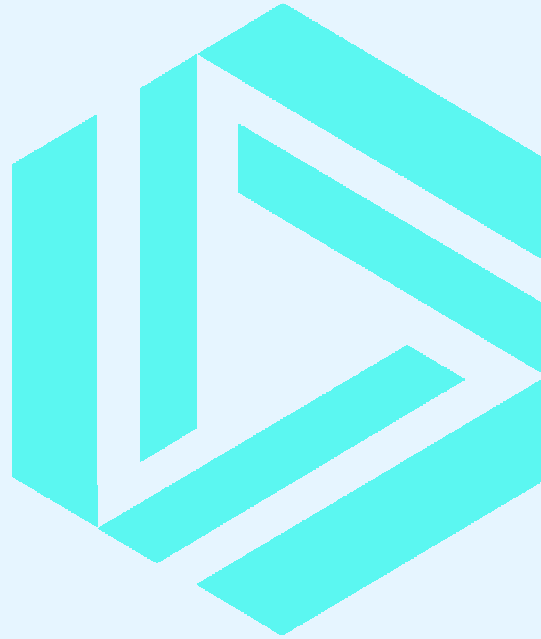


- Using a better ram production method that halves the number of rams needed and replaces them with ewes increases the potential number of lambs for sale by about 2.5 %
- Not a bad start in meeting future targets on efficiency and emissions from agriculture

Workshop program



- Session 1 Feeding
- Session 2 Breeding
- Session 3 Management
- Session 4 On –farm practices followed by discussion



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