



Food Animal Initiative

ENVIRONMENTS FIT FOR ANIMALS FIT FOR THEIR ENVIRONMENT

FAI 5 Overview - Sheep Development - August 2005

Physical data

- Flock of 900 ewes and followers, established from autumn 2001. Lambing 350 March and 550 April. All lambs not kept as replacements are sold fat direct to slaughter.
- Mule type ewes are being used to breed up to the Coopworth as this female line has good mothering ability and is relatively easy to look after as it has been selected in New Zealand for the past 40 years for traits relevant to farming extensively in lowland Britain i.e. good foraging ability, able to rear twins easily, lambs outdoors efficiently.
- All rams are of known scrapie status and Suffolk rams are used as a terminal sire.

FAI Projects	'.....Results so far'
1. Provision of dietary fibre for finishing sheep to enable normal gut function. (See TDS C2, Total mixed ration feeding for ruminants).	Lambs have been successfully finished for 2 years running on total mixed ration - 95% lambs in spec. With the move to grass/clover leys most lambs are finished of forage which is the most cost effective route.
2. Dry lying areas for sheep outdoors (See TDS S5, What is a dry lying area for sheep?).	This is a requirement under assurance schemes and studies at FAI have quantified what this means to sheep.
3. Removal of the need to castrate lambs (See TDS S4, Do we need to castrate lambs?). The short scrotum technique of castration is being studied 2005.	Early lambs have been left entire and finished successfully. All those not finished by weaning must be kept separately from ewelambs.
4. Respiratory disease in housed sheep (See TDS G4, Reducing antibiotic use in farm animals).	Respiratory disease losses are below national averages but still higher than desired.
5. The practical application of science to the treatment of lameness in sheep (See TDS S3 What can we do about lameness in sheep?). A DEFRA funded project under Warwick University is now underway at FAI to look at alternative methods of treating lameness.	Lameness levels in the flock have dramatically reduced over the past 2 years due to implementation of individual foot paring of lame animals, culling of persistent lame animals and improved overall management of the sheep and the swards.
6. Removal of the use of confinement techniques for fostering of lambs (See TDS S1 Fostering techniques in sheep).	This has been successfully achieved.
7. Provision for easy weaning of ewes and lambs systems (See TDS G6, Easy weaning systems for farm animals).	Studies have been undertaken and initial results indicate that best management outdoors is to wean abruptly after settling ewes and lambs in new pasture for a few days.
8. Mixing of sheep. (See TDS G2, The importance of maintaining animals in peer groups).	The management of the flock is gradually reducing the need for mixing both of ewes and lambs.
9. The use of Fecpak (See TDS S2 Farmers in control of internal parasites in sheep).	The kit has proven successful in allowing control of most endoparasites with minimal use of anthelmintics.
10. Sourcing and management of rams (see TDS S6 Best practice in sourcing rams).	The risk of disease transfer through ram purchase is potentially increasing and rams of 'high genetic merit' require different management to the ewes.

Further developments for 2005

A DEFRA funded project looking at stocking densities and welfare for sheep during transport had just begun with Oxford University. This aims to understand whether sheep prefer to stand independently or brace against each other during transport.

Priority for the future

1. To progress the breeding programme with the Coopworth and to demonstrate that closing the lowland flock and moving to outdoor lambing is a viable alternative to current systems. There has been criticism of 'easy care' systems from some sectors but if carried out well this system has the potential to improve the welfare of animals and man.
2. To progress removal of the need to tail dock and castrate lambs.

