

Lleyn - Making Financial Sense

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Farmers of the 21st century are entrepreneurs required to put a flexible and



workable setup in place on their farms. The success of their farms rests squarely on their shoulders and more and more success is measured in terms of profit and loss. Working by day in financial services Joe Nolan is more than aware of the numbers game in modern farming. Joe is an extreme version of what is becoming the norm in modern Irish farming working a full time job with a bit of 'hobby farming' in

his spare time. Though in this case the 'hobby farm' consists of 800 ewes on 250 acres which is more than a lot of full time farmers manage. So how is this possible? Nostalgia has no place in Joe's business plan which involves constantly looking for something new, new breeds, new techniques, and new forages. Anything that can alter profits and reduce workload is sought out and tested.

This thirst for knowledge brought Joe and Lleyn sheep face to face in 2011. He purchased foundation stock at the society sales in Tullow and Ballymena and added to these over the years with privately purchased sheep from well-known local breeder Simon Brown. A lot of the challenges facing modern sheep farmers seemed to be met by this breed which was now becoming common place in Ireland. The lleyns longevity, high lambing percentage and the ability to keep a closed flock have encouraged Joe to shift his allegiance towards the breed, which now makes up one-quarter of his flock. And it is testament to the breeds longevity that some of the original females are still here seven years after they arrived. The first batch of Lleyn ewes were put to a Charollais ram, He found they were good to manage and produced smart, tight-skinned prime lambs, just what the market wants. With more ewes/acre, a lambing percentage of over 190% the Lleyn is in a category of its own.

Keen on keeping a closed flock Joe paid €1120 for a Ballyogan ram sired by Incheoch Moral at the society sale in Roscommon in 2016 to breed his own pure bred replacements. The lleyns are lambed outside in late March-early April with minimal intervention. Lambs have rings applied to their tails and males are castrated before being moved onto better grass at a day old. Ewe lambs are tagged for traceability and recording purposes, these lambs will not be handled again until about 6 weeks old when they receive their first dose. A couple of weeks later they are treated with Klik to prevent fly strike and also receive a bolus supplied by mayo health care while the ewes are being clipped. At ten weeks lambs are weaned and divided into 3 batches, all males and Charollais x ewe lambs above 35kgs are moved straight onto redstart,

below 35kgs are dosed and moved onto after grass and replacement ewe lambs are dosed and kept on older lays. With redstart being used for the final push lambs are finished with meal given only given to the back end lambs.

In recent years Logie rams have been introduced as a bridge between the terminal Charollais and maternal Lleyns. Logies originate in Northern Scotland and have been a fixed breed for over 10 years originating from a F1 cross of the Durno and Lleyn. Lleyn bloodlines provide an easy to manage medium size productive ewe with good prolificacy, excellent mothering and milking ability. The inclusion of the Durno provides increased growth rates and conformation whilst still retaining lambing ease and vigour to suit a low input system. This year 3 Charollais, 3 Logies and 3 Lleyn rams have been put to the 800 ewe flock and it is hoped that mixing and matching these rams to ewes will help meet market demands for factory lambs while also keeping the maternal traits of the flock at where they need to be.

David Oliver.