

Report on Farm Innovation Study Trip to Wales – November 2019

The Group was led by Senan White

Day 1 – 25/11/2019

Travelled Belfast to Bristol by air and onwards to The Royal Welsh Winter Fair at Builth Wells by coach.

Show Highlights:

Numerous trade stands and opportunities to make contact with farming industry personnel.

Excellent carcass demonstration of over 178 lamb carcasses identified by grade, weight and breed. Sponsored by Randall Parker Foods mainly and Dunbia.

Many opportunities for participants to speak to various EID (Electronic identification) companies about sheep EID and various other technologies on display.

Day 2 – 26/11/2019

Farm Visit 1

Stuart Hammond, Upper Dollywynhir, Llanwrtyd Wells, Powys. 6D1 6ET. This 900 acre farm is farmed as a partnership between Stuart, his brother Eddie, mother and uncle.

Enterprises/ Income Streams:

- 3 broiler chicken units producing 850,000 birds /year.
- 3 Biomass boilers
- Fodder crops
- Indoor Play Centre managed by Stuart's spouse. 27,000 visitors per year.
- 120 suckler cows
- 400 dairy calf to beef in partnership with Dunbia.
- 1700 Romney ewe flock & 600 ewe lambs mated.

The sheep Enterprise

- Ewe flock lambs outdoors on grass with minimal assistance.
- No meals fed over the last 10 years except to pet lambs.
- Weaning rate of 135% (Losses about 11%)
- Barren rate is about 4%
- Rams bought on EBV's.
- 1 ram per 100 ewes use.
- Ewes lambing at 7 and 8 years old.
- Average lamb carcass weight of 19.2kg.with 85% 'In Spec' (3H)
- 2 people do the lambing 6.00am until dark.
- Main issue is big single lambs
- Any ewe needing assistance is culled by crossing with an Aberfield ram.
- Any lambs needing assistance are culled
- Also culls for Footrot which is not an issue now – just 1%-2%. Footrot had been an issue with the previous breeds of Beulah and Mules.
- There is OPA (Ovine Pulmonary adenocarcinoma) in the flock.
- Culls worth about £70-80 in the mart.
- The Beulah breed is local to that area centred on the town of Beulah.
- Lambing starts on April 1st [Previously it was March 20th]
- Ewes fed on Fodder Beet from Christmas to March – this might be 1 month earlier in 2019 due to wet autumn and grass scarcity.
- Ewes go to rested grass for lambing in groups of 60 – twins stocked at 3-4 per acre and singles stocked heavier. Ewes and lambs left in same fields for 3 weeks post lambing before moving.
- Selection Strategy is to 'remove the problem stock'
- Untupped ewe lambs are retained
- Romney is shorn twice per year.
- Ewe liveweight is 75-80kg.
- Lambs are tagged in May and castrated using a Bordizzo [6 weeks]
- No lamb weighing done until weaning.
- Pratley autodrafter on the farm
- Heptavac P used on ewes
- EAE and Toxo vaccinations given
- Ewes also Bolused for Selenium and Cobalt.
- Low Selenium issue identified.
- In 2018 they had a high incidence of intestinal prolapse due to overfeeding during pregnancy on roots/rape etc.
- Reseeding carried out using 2kg Clover /acre and rape as a 'nurse crop'
- About 150 lambs sold as unfinished stores annually
- No grass tetany and no Mg buckets fed

The Suckler Herd – not visited

- Had been autumn calving in the past but now spring calving from May 1st on over 12 weeks. Heifers bulled for 8 weeks. Replacements are home bred and calve down at 2 year old.
- Selling as stores
- Using stabiliser bulls for the past 3-4 years. Progeny sold as store bulls (good buyer)
- Bulls bought on EBV's.
- Vaccinations: BVD, Leptospirosis and Rotavirus

The Broiler enterprise

- Best paying enterprise but good management is essential
- Risk is shared with poultry company.
- Open book policy used with other poultry farmers supplying the company
- All stats are shared.
- FCE is down to management capability
- 7 batches per house per year
- Windows are present - 4% of the floor area – welfare issue

Dairy Calf to Beef Enterprise

- Calves get Rispond 3 on arrival
- Minimum weight of 150 kg. but ideally they should be 180kg. or even 200kg.
- Batched over 7 days maximum
- Husbandry on the rearing farm is key – some farmers are much better than others. There are some farmers that he will no longer accept calves from.
- Forced air ventilation system installed in existing slatted cattle houses.
- Wrap around rubber installed on old slats. Resulted in improved animal performance and less lameness and more settled cattle.
- Aim is 14 month finishing.
- Target ADG is 1.5kg./day
- Animals over 520kg. are sold if performance drops below 1.3kg./day.
- Farm Wizard software used to track performance
- Once batches are formed they are never mixed again.
- Mortality is 2.4% below 400kg. and 2.04% above 400kg.
- Fed on ad-lib meal (high maize) and straw (no silage used anymore)

Other Take Home Messages

Aim for a good work life balance

Farm Visit 2

Huw Davies, Llandre Farm, Pumpsaint, Llanwrda, Dyfed.

SA19 8UTFarm and dwelling leased from the National Trust.

Farm has no successor – they have 3 daughters who are not interested infarming

- 500 ewes
- 130 ewe lambs – best 130 kept
- 200 ewe lambs kept for winter. Away grazed from October 1st to April 1st. 70 of those slaughtered in February.
- Flock shorn in April and September
- Huntaway dogs used on the farm.
- The farm is operated by Hue and his wife with some student help annually for the final 2-3 weeks of lambing.
- Had been a Highlander only flock with lambing 5 pushed etc.
- Now moved to Aberfield x Highlander because both are in their sixties and Hue is away quite a lot on farm consultancy type business.
- Ewes are not culled for prolapse – harness used in subsequent years – these are picked up at scanning from the EID.
- Using Agriwebb software – but also promoting it.
- Hue's advice was to only record information that would be useful.
- Scanning about 180%
- Average carcass weight in pat was 19.0kg.
- Lamb Mortality – 5% at lambing and 2-3% thereafter
- Very little intervention at lambing. Little or no artificial milk fed.
- Heptavac P vaccination used
- Not vaccinated for Enzo / Toxo
- Orf to lambs in May
- White dose in May
- Clear dose in June
- Zolvix at weaning
- Nothing since in 2019
- Farm has a very good roofed handling unit adjacent to sheep house. Apart from the races and draining pens which have concrete floors all the other floors are hard-core. The handling unit is never cleaned out.
- Swim dipper 35ft. long ewes timed at 55secs. passing through but could be slowed to 60secs.
- Sheep accommodation is straw bedding over hard-core floor
- Walk through troughs for meal feeding
- A Bobcat is regarded as an essential on the farm for winter feeding

- Mating 500 ewes in one mob with 6 rams
- Whole farm is fertilised with a 'Humber Palmers' 20.10.10 type product in February. Silage ground fertilised again at closing.
- Land rental locally is about £100 /acre with no subs. or £150/acre with subs.
- And can be bought for £6000 - £7000 per acre.

Day 3 – 27/11/2019

Visit to Dunbia Lamb processing plant at Llandybydder, Lampeter, SA40

9QE. The following Dunbia personnel were present:

Jim Dobson, Paul Edwards (Site Manager), Wynn Williams (Procurement), Alison Harvey, Kenny Linton and Claire Windrum.

- This is the largest lamb processing in the UK and will process in excess of 980,000 sheep in 2019. Of these approx. 800,000 will be boned out.
- Capable of slaughtering over 600 per hour.
- Plant established in 1956 by Aerial family
- Jack and Jim Dobson purchased it in 2001 when the capacity was only 2000 per day.
- £30 million spent on rebuilding, modernising and incorporating 'Smart Intelligence'. Constant monitoring now of all aspects of the operation.
- 2017 Dunbia set up as a joint venture with Dawn Meats
- Now exporting all over the world including New Zealand.
- China is seen as a huge growth market but the plant is not approved for export there yet.
- 3500 lambs come in overnight mainly by hauliers
- 95-130 farmers per day.
- Lambs sold under multiple banners including: British or Welsh Country of origin; West Country PGI; Quality Meat Scotland (QMS – Killed in Scotland) Red Tractor
- 100% farm assured
- 200 farmer suppliers
- 32,000 lambs/week
- 25,000 of those / week delivered in overnight
- 400 staff – 60-70% are foreign nationals.
- 100 seasonal
- Graduate recruitment programme
- Engineer Apprenticeship Scheme
- Butcher Academy Programme

- 100 field officers sourcing stock and advising farmers on husbandry etc.
- Work closely with YFC

- 2025 Targets: '0' to landfill achieved, Reduce CO₂ Emission by 50% and water use by 40%
- Recently completed a £1 million waste treatment plant.
- Working with a low margin but with very few bad debts
- Average ewe flock size in Wales is 500-600 ewes.
- Use collection centres to transport lamb. Reduces transport time issues.
- Lambs in lairage looked very clean.
- Narrow 'belly strip' cut from lambs belly early in the line.
- Fifth Quarter issue – in the past the 5th quarter paid for the killing costs. Now lamb skins only worth 49P and it costs 10p to salt them
- "No money in the system now for the farmer or the processor"
- Lamb price are at an all-time high in New Zealand currently.
- BREXIT is a major cloud on the horizon – UK need certainty and free access to Europe.