



Hybu Cig Cymru
Meat Promotion Wales

Making the most of EID recording

Practical ways to maximise the benefits of EID recording
in your flock



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Contents

Introduction	1
What EID recording can offer you and your flock	2
Lamb growth rates	5
Pregnancy scanning results	8
Levels of disease and losses	10
What are your most profitable sheep?	13
Making the most of your investment in EID technology	14

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Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales
Tŷ Rheidol, Parc Merlin, Aberystwyth SY23 3FF
Tel: 01970 625050 Fax: 01970 615148
Email: info@hccmpw.org.uk

www.hccmpw.org.uk
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Introduction

Electronic Identification EID is a well proven technology and many flocks are now benefiting from being able to collect data quickly and efficiently. Many complementary software solutions have been developed alongside the actual EID tags and there are commercial packages available which are suitable for each farming situation. Individual ewe performance can be monitored and evaluated. Lamb growth rates can be understood and the incidences of diseases recorded.

More than 1700 sheep farmers took part in the EID recording project which was delivered by Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) and funded through the Rural Development Plan for Wales 2007-2013. Only 100 of these had any experience of using EID recording before. Once the project farmers got to grips with the technology, feedback indicated that they were ready to look at more ways to use their equipment so that they can maximise the benefits from it. This booklet shares some of their feedback and provides information to help you further develop the use of EID to help manage your flock.



What EID recording can offer you and your flock

EID recording offers the opportunity to improve on-farm management and productivity by letting you collect information much more accurately and easily than you can achieve by manually recording information on paper.

This means you can more easily identify those sheep which are making the greatest contribution to your farm income and profitability, and those that are costing you money.

EID recording can deliver better profitability for your sheep business by:

- Improving the selection of stock for breeding;
- Improving the selection of stock for slaughter;
- Enabling the more effective use of veterinary medicines and leading to improved flock health;
- Helping you to achieve an economy of scale by managing a bigger flock, as well as the ability to assess the performance of individual animals;
- Enabling you to record more information, more easily, for example lamb performance from different areas of your farm. This can help you to identify pastures where sheep are performing poorly. It can also help your reseeding plans and help to reduce reliance on bought-in feeds;
- Offering you the ability to use information that can help you to market your stock.

The combination of automated equipment with EID also offers the ability to automatically identify animals as they come through a handling system, so that more animals per hour can be weighed and sorted. This can be a major benefit to extensive farming systems.

For a large-scale flock this also means that relatively small changes in management can have a big impact on the bottom line.



EID is working on many sheep farms in Wales

The improved information flow that is possible using EID enables you to make more objective and timely decisions that can improve the performance of your flock and business.



“ The ability to look up individual ewe records ‘in the field’ has paid dividends for my flock and moving to a more sophisticated reader and recorder has been a fantastic decision. ”

Jack Foulkes, Marchynys



“ The information recorded now is a true reflection of the actual situation so we can now make decisions based on facts rather than opinions and in-turn we can monitor how the sheep respond to the management changes so it does help avoid potential arguments! ”

Rhys Edwards, Hendre-Ifan-Goch



“ We put a black tag in any ewes which cause problems, but now with the reader we can make sure that the reason for the problem is also noted. I am still getting to grips with the software programme which is used with the reader but I have already identified that I can look up the performance of individual rams or ewes over a period of years. This will give me the information necessary to identify the lines which might be causing the problems and I can now work out which animals are adding to the performance of my own flocks. ”

Llew Thomas, Llygad-Yr-Haul

How can EID work for you?

Drivers of flock performance which can be improved using EID recording

Lamb growth rates

Lamb growth rates matter. Faster growing lambs use the feed more efficiently, they require fewer treatments and their early sale means that they reduce the costs and labour requirements.

Visual assessment of growth rate can be misleading and often, by the time a reduction in performance is detected, significant weight gain has already been lost.

1. When do lamb growth rates begin to drop – should lambs be weaned earlier?
2. Are lambs achieving the desired level of performance – are undetected worm burdens reducing growth rates?
3. What is the cost of lame lambs to the business – how much slower do they grow compared with others?

“ We are weighing the lambs anyway so recording this information is not a problem. It’s really easy to record the tag number on the EID reader without having to restrain the lamb or clean the tags. ”



Do you know how fast your lambs are growing?

Checking lambs against a target weight helps to select lambs which fit the processors specification.

Lamb performance can be related back to ewes to help identify the most productive stock for breeding. This can also be extended to identifying fields where sheep are performing poorly which can help with reseedling plans and help to reduce reliance on bought-in feeds.

EID enabled equipment and associated software can not only record the weight of the animal but can also analyse and provide feed-back on growth rates.

“ We weigh the lambs at about 8 weeks of age when they are first handled. This tells us how the lambs are growing and whether they are on target. By using the reader to record the weights of lambs I have already saved 3 hours of my time. Normally I spent the following evening entering all the data into the software but now all I have to do is attach the reader to the computer and it's all done. From there I can generate reports which will give me average weights and growth rates for the groups as well as individuals. I will repeat the weighing process throughout the season so I can see that the reader is saving me a considerable amount of time.”

Gethin Jones, Heol Feiniog



Increasing Lamb growth rate by only 20g per day will increase weight at weaning by 2kg.



+2kg weaning weight

Increasing weaning weight from 32 to 34kg will reduce the number of days to slaughter by two weeks.



14 days fewer on farm

“ For our system to work we have a target of selling 90% of lambs by the end of July. I am therefore interested in making sure the right type of terminal sire rams are sourced and this autumn some groups will be individually mated so that I can monitor the performance of their progeny. Lambs which grow but fail to put on sufficient levels of fat are expensive on a creep feeding system. If I need to pay for EID tags in lambs then I want to get the most from the cost by getting more information on the performance of individuals before they are sold.”

Jack Foulkes, Marchynys

“ I am now keen to use EID to help assess individual grazing field performance based on liveweight gain.”

Dafydd Davies, Pontargamddwr

“ Our farm is sheep-only so we can get quite high worm challenges. We have actually found that lamb growth rate is a good predictor of when lambs need worming so we have improved lamb performance as a result of using EID recording.”

Rhys Edwards, Hendre-lfan-Goch

Top tips for recording lamb growth rates

- Weigh lambs when they are being handled – every 2 to 4 weeks will give the most valuable information;
- Set target growth rates for lambs at the start of the season;
- Check underperforming groups of lambs for worm burdens or trace element deficiencies;
- Consider changing their management – would lighter lambs benefit from being runner in a smaller group?

How did your lambs perform this year?

Pregnancy scanning results

The optimum level of prolificacy will vary between different flocks and breeds but achieving the desired scanning result has a significant impact on flock profitability.

1. Are there any particular groups which are scanning above or below the target?
2. Is any particular age group showing higher than expected rates of barren ewes?

Using an EID reader and associated software means that individual ewe performance can be recorded and analysed. Her scanning results throughout her lifetime can also be recorded and interrogated.

“By recording ewe performance I have found significant differences in the output not only of individual animals but also the average performance of ewes sourced from different flocks. I have looked at the scanning results and number of live lambs produced from ewes sourced from different flocks and the range in performance is 25% so for every 100 from the poorer batches I have 30 fewer lambs available for sale. I source replacements from autumn sales and I can now look at the entry catalogue before buying to identify from which flocks ewes should be purchased.”

This ewe looks good but my records show that as a yearling she was empty and as a 2 year old she lost her own lamb and had the lamb with her adopted on so she will be culled once she has reared the lamb. She is also one of a group of ewes none of which performed particularly well so I won't buy more replacements from the same flock.”

Jack Foulkes, Marchynys



Reducing the barren ewe rate at scanning from 6% to 3% could lead to an extra 5 lambs at scanning per 100 ewes

“Every ewe is now on the database, and the initial work setting this up has really proved its worth. I was concerned that using EID would create work for me, but it is the exact opposite; I get better quality decision making information, more quickly, and I'm using the reader to help me undertake batch control, record medicine treatments and capture scanning results,” says Mr Davies. He adds, “individual ewe data flashes up on the screen immediately, which means I can make instant, accurate decisions regarding culling and the use of a terminal sire.”

Dafydd Davies, Pontargamddwr

Top tips for recording scanning results

- Consider using software which can record and analyse individual ewe scan results;
- Carefully consider what the optimum scanning result is for your flock. Higher is not always better.

How did your ewes perform this year?



Levels of disease and losses

One of the biggest costs on sheep farms is disease. This does not just relate to money spent on treatments and vaccinations but also the hidden costs of various diseases on animal production and losses.

Lamb loss rate also varies considerably between flocks and typically range from 8 to 15% from scanning to sale. Each lost lamb represents a loss of income and increase in costs, especially if you have to pay for disposal.

Using an EID reader means that any losses or incidence of disease can easily be recorded at the same time and a cause, if known can be attributed. Appropriate flock management software can help to analyse the incidence or number of losses each year due to a specific problem.

Recording treatments can be particularly useful with respect to drug withdrawal periods as lambs reach finishing. In some cases information can also be linked to your smart phone.

1. How many ewes are treated for lameness each year – is the current management system for footrot working or do changes need to be made?
2. How many times a year are lambs treated for worms – are the wormers effective and would having some faecal egg counts carried out be helpful?
3. Is there a likelihood of undetected diseases affecting the ewe flock – are there higher than anticipated numbers of cull ewes or are some ewes quickly losing condition?
4. How many lambs are lost between scanning and sale?
5. When do most losses occur and is there any pattern to the losses – would it be cost effective to introduce or change vaccinations strategies?

“Carrying out our own trials has also added extra interest in the use of EID and has given us better information on which to base decisions. For example, the farm suffers from trace element deficiencies and the problem is addressed by the use of boluses. We have tried various types of boluses and found that they don't all give the same response so we now know which are the most effective on our farm.”

Rhys Edwards, Hendre-lfan-Goch

“The flock is Maedi Visna accredited to help maintain a high-health status. “Every two years a proportion of the flock has to be blood sampled to maintain accredited status. Normally we have to read all the tags manually but this year we were able to scan the ewes with the EID reader. It made such a difference not to have to struggle to read an ear tag and making out the number.”

Llew Thomas, Llygad-yr-Haul

Top tips for recording disease levels

- Think carefully about the diseases which are likely to be present on your farm and try and record if and when they occur;
- Use your flock management software to help identify groups of animals are having the same problems – this might help identify the cause;
- Regularly review disease levels and look for changes that can be made to reduce their cost to the business.

What diseases are affecting your flock this year?





EID RECORDING

What are your most profitable sheep?

Understanding the output from the farm is the first step in reducing production costs. A 5p per kg reduction in production costs can increase the profit per lamb by £2 per lamb.

“With the EID reader I am now in an ideal situation to record and analyse the results and to further improve the genetics of my ewe flock. The sale of ewe lambs for breeding is an important part of the flock's output. We aim to produce genuine ewe lambs which will go on and continue to grow and improve on the farm which purchases them. This means that growth rates have to be carefully monitored. After weaning lambs are weighed every 4 weeks to ensure they meet the target weights for sale. By using the reader, I now have the information on their weight gain at my fingertips.”

Llew Thomas, Llygad-Yr-Haul

“With our size of flock, every ewe needs to be producing as profitably as possible. EID technology is helping us to identify ewes that aren't pulling their weight and remove them from the breeding programme. This means we can be quite fussy about what stock are used to breed the next generation without the cost of having to cull young animals from the flock.

Poorer performing ewes are mated to the terminal sire. They are given a little bit of an easier time with access to better grazing which means that we get a good level of performance across the entire flock. By recording we can get a better understanding of any changes in management required can also use the information to identify the role of performance recorded rams in the system and the difference they make to profitability.”

Gethin Jones, Heol Feiniog

What is your weight of lamb sold per ewe this year?

Making the most of your investment in EID technology

The examples given here are just a brief outline of the kind of flock information that can be easily recorded with EID technology.

Some other examples of information which can be recorded using EID are:

- **Ewe condition score for improving scanning and rearing results;**
- **Ewe weight for correct medicine use and feed budgeting;**
- **Ewe performance and breed selection for ensuring the right genetics are being used;**
- **Individual problems such as mastitis, lameness and prolapse**
- **Targeted treatment of lambs for worm burdens based on growth rates;**
- **Heritable problems such as dagginess or flystrike;**
- **Response to animal treatments such as trace elements boluses or drenches;**
- **Performance from forage crops versus grass based finishing systems;**
- **Recording of information on individual animals for the generation of estimated breeding values;**
- **Recording of ewe traits such as mothering ability and ease of lambing.**

The decision about what to record will depend on your individual business and what factors are the key drivers of performance and, ultimately, profitability in your flock.

Speaking to other producers who are using EID technology can be very useful in helping to identify the worthwhile information to record and by involving your vet or adviser at the start can help you to put the output of your endeavours to good use.

For more information about EID recording contact:
Hybu Cig Cymru on **01970 625050** or visit
www.hccmpw.org.uk/farming/electronic_identification_eid/