

## Introduction

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Neil, alongside his wife Karen, farm 327 acres at Lymore farm near Montgomery. The majority of the farm (220 acres) is grazed grass, the remainder is cropped with fodder beat, swedes, stubble turnips and barley. The farm keeps 550 Highlander ewes alongside 200 pedigree Charollais ewes.

Neil relies on a low input system with minimal labour required due to Neil being the only source of labour on the farm. "The low input system allows me to control my cost of production. I need to be in control of all of my costs within a volatile market place".

## Genetics

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To ensure the most cost effective approach to rearing lambs, Neil chose Highlander ewes which he uses because they are a much smaller ewe than traditional lowland breeds, with lower feed requirements and are adapted to outdoor rearing and easy lambing. This means that Neil is able to lamb all of his Highlander ewes outdoors in April, which coincides with the grass growing season. Neil crosses the highlander ewes with Highlander and Charollais rams to produce a commercial lamb.

## Flock Health

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Whilst low inputs is the focus of the system, one area Neil does not compromise is animal health. There is a strong emphasis on prevention rather than cure at Lymore farm and to achieve this Neil works closely with the local veterinary group and follows a health plan which meets the specific requirements of his system. To maintain the health status of the flock Neil uses vaccination wherever possible, especially against abortion and clostridial diseases.

To ensure optimum growth rates, lambs are monitored closely for endoparasites. Faecal egg counting (FEC) is carried out regularly to assess the worm burden within the flock and to ensure effective use of anthelmintics. An FEC can help to determine the need to treat for worms, test the efficiency of past treatments and provide information of the contamination out on pastures. It also helps to reduce the risk of anthelmintic resistance, by treating only when necessary with the appropriate drench, therefore reducing the risk of a build-up of resistance.

## Rotational Grazing

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Utilisation of grass is the most crucial element of Lymore Farm's efficiency. Neil is particularly keen on rotational grazing and since taking on the tenancy at Lymore Farm has already begun dividing fields into smaller parcels, where grass can be better utilised through controlled grazing. Neil moves the sheep onto the next pasture every 4 days. This sequence improves grass growth and encourages a more even spread of nutrients from the livestock back into the ground. Rye-grass plants only

maintain three live leaves at any one time, so if the grass grows beyond this stage, leaves die off and the sward becomes less nutritious and less palatable. Rotational grazing also means that higher stocking rates can be sustained on the same number of hectares, however grazing needs to be closely monitored as over grazing pastures would result in a longer time required for the grass to grow back.



Another advantage of rotational grazing is that it gives a farmer control of where nutrients are deposited on the farm. However, to assist grass growth and nutrient requirements Neil applies small amounts of nitrogen, once early in the year and again prior to flushing the ewes to achieve greater grass yields. Neil selects his grass seed mixes on their suitability for all year round grazing and utilises arable crops as a break in the crop rotation to condition the soil prior to its return to a grass ley.

Retaining the grass quality eliminates the need to feed any concentrates to the ewes at lambing time by extending the grazing season. This also reduces the need for conserved forage. In preparation for tugging, ewes are flushed on the grass pastures and up until lambing the Highlander ewes are out wintered on the stubble crops, eliminating any housing costs and significantly reducing labour.

## Conclusion

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Using this system Neil achieves a scanning percentage of 192% of which over 170% (935 lambs) are sold at an average weight of 42kg through Welshpool livestock market. Lambs are sold from 10 weeks old steadily through the rest of the year up until December. The time taken for lambs to reach their finished weight adds to the efficiency of the system cutting costs, labour and reducing green house gas emissions from the animals. Finishing the lambs early assists the production system for the ewes allowing for the farm resources to support the ewes prior to next seasons lamb crop, again adding to the efficiency and low costs production at Lymore Farm. Throughout Neil's system he ensures that ewes have the correct nutrition, health and welfare management being able to produce lambs on a relatively low input system with minimal labour requirement.