



GrassCheckGB farmer case study

Glyn, Eleri, Dewi and Ifan Davies, Penlan, Llanrhystud.

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Farm Facts

Penlan farm, Llanrhystud is home to the Davies family who manage the coastal holding to produce quality finished lambs. The grazing platform of 35 hectares (86 acres) is rotationally grazed with a flock of 250 mixed lowland crossbred ewes and lambs which are sold largely finished on a deadweight basis from mid-June.

Maximising grass growth utilization is a key goal for the farm, and they pay close attention to soil nutrients and grass ley mixtures used for any reseeding of underperforming fields in order to take account of the soil type and grazing needs. Integrating grazed forage crops into their lamb production system is key to managing forage supply all year around.

The south facing land has shallow soil that can present challenges for grass growth in dry summer months. They are developing nutrient application strategies through soil analysis and nutrient planning for pH. Indices correction is a priority to strategically select underperforming swards for reseeding and improve input use efficiency.



Glyn Davies explains: “We have very shallow land and part of it is very coastal with about 8 ha (20 ac) facing the sea. The weather is our biggest challenge. We burn easy here and getting grass to grow at the right time can be difficult. If it is a dry summer, we will run out of grass and that’s when we need to decide what to do with the lambs. It is difficult to manage sometimes, until recently, ensuring we had grass at the right time was difficult.”

GrassCheckGB involvement

Understanding that a change in tactic was needed to tackle the challenging and changing weather patterns, whilst remaining profitable and sustainable, Glyn Davies worked with Dewi and Ifan to find a solution to their grass problem and the farm joined GrassCheck GB in 2022.

Benefits to the business since joining GrassCheckGB

Glyn explained that when he first started farming Penlan in 1998, he followed on from what he had been taught and used to block graze everything at the same time.



“We have been in GrassCheck now for 2 years and I’ve let the boys carry on with the project. I didn’t think it was going to work but after seeing it now in the second year, we are growing more grass. For the first time in 15 years, we have managed to cut one small field of silage out that was getting ahead of the sheep. Fertiliser usage and input costs are down and we’re selling more lambs at a better weight for a better price.

“We are also using less fuel on the farm and manage to get more silage. That means there is less feed being brought on to the farm. We are getting more self-sufficient and sustainable. By grazing cells rather than the whole field, we can manage the grass better and can work on that. By growing more grass, we can do a better job of it,” explains Glyn.

The family now manage their fields as quarters depending on the shape and size of the field. “Sometimes just half the field has had an application of fertiliser just to catch up and decisions on where to apply fertiliser is very targeted. Our fields aren’t huge, so it tends to be two electric fences and you split it. They get grazed for a few days and then rotated,” says Dewi.

Whilst this means a new way of working, the benefits are tangible. “Last year we managed to get our first lambs away in the 3rd week of May, which is ahead of time. We also usually see a drop after that, but we just kept on selling. The ewes and lambs were getting fresh grass every 2–3 days and they just kept on going. There wasn’t a pinch point for forage at all.

“The ewes themselves are probably in the best condition they have ever been. They looked good in the autumn when they went to the tups, scanning percentage was up with much more twins than usual and we’re seeing about 65 extra lambs than previous years and the ewes themselves are healthy,” adds Ifan.

A further change is the introduction of a field of stubble turnips and plans for reseeding are underway, with all decisions made based on data. Dewi explains: “We use that block of turnips as an energy source and protein for the ewes and lambs following lambing at turn out and means not needing to feed concentrate. All that adds to the sustainability story of the farm as well.



“We are now looking at a reseeding programme too and the plan is to put a bit of forage in – forage rape for the summer to fatten the lambs, stubble turnips will go in after and then we will reseed in the spring and go back to grass. Nothing has been reseeded here for about 20 years. Now we can identify the top performing fields and pick out the right ones in need. The data is there, and we make our decisions based on that data.”

Key learnings since joining GrassCheckGB

Dewi is clear that whilst there is an element of work involved, the return on investment is worth it. He says: “You have to measure the grass and put in some time to record your data. Mainly you must commit to managing the land. However, it’s an investment in time that will save in other ways at the other end.”

Ifan adds: “We have a weather station and a plate meter, which were supplied as part of the project. It’s interesting to follow the weather pattern, and that feeds into the GrassCheckGB model at the end. The WhatsApp group is also helpful, and you can pick up new ideas.

“This way of farming also means budgeting and seeing what you’ve got in front of you. It means changing how you manage the land to suit the weather but also making sure you have enough grass in front of you.”