

THEME REPORT



NITHSDALE MONITOR FARM Lamb Finishing – Creep Feeding and Castration

The Clonhie community group thought it important to look at various options for lamb finishing so trials were set up in 2017 to compare different options.



THE CHALLENGE

Monitor Farmer, Andrew Marchant, was keen to improve lamb daily liveweight gain and to reduce time to sale of the lambs born into the early lambing flock in 2017. It is important that lambs grow quickly enough to attain the higher prices offered in the early part of the season. A combined objective was to look at the viability of lambing earlier at Clonhie as it is dependent on efficient lamb finishing.

The trial was also designed to help with decision making on the future of the early lambing flock.

WHAT WE DID ON FARM

1] To determine the best approach for Clonhie, some of the early lambing flock were split into three groups, including twins and singles for a creep feeding trial which ran from May to early July.

- Control group- 15 ewes + 22 lambs - no creep
- 14% crude protein creep – 46 ewes + 66 lambs
- 18% crude protein creep – 49 ewes + 71 lambs

The performance of the lambs was recorded using the electronic recording system installed at Clonhie.

THEME REPORT



2] A proportion of the single male lambs were left entire to compare with the growth rate performance of castrated single lambs in the same group.

THE RESULTS

The creep feed comparison showed that a 14% CP creep feed led to an increase in daily liveweight gain (DLWG) from 230g /hd/day without creep, to 280g/head/day while an 18% CP feed increased DLWG to 300g/hd/day. For this exercise this was valued at £2.00/kg. This trial led to increased returns of 2.25p/head/day and 4.04p/head/day for the 14% and 18% CP feeds respectively (after feed costs).

1] Table showing the Creep Feed comparison trial results

	No Creep Feed (control group)	14% creep feed @ £235/t	18% creep feed @ £250/t
No of lambs in group	27	64	68
Amount of feed used	none	1.350t	1.625t
Cost of feed used (£/hd) (p/hd/day)	0.00	£4.96 (7.75)	£5.97 (9.96)
Av DLG* (g/hd/day)	230	280	300
Increased DLG (g/hd/day)	n/a	50	70
Value of increased DLG @ £2.00/kg (p/hd/day)	n/a	10.0	14.0
Trial gain (p/hd/day)	n/a	2.25	4.04

*DLG = Daily Liveweight Gain

2] There was little or no difference in the growth rates recorded for the castrated and entire male lambs up to weaning. It was decided that Andrew would continue to castrate male lambs in future to retain flexibility for sale.

WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM?

The 2017 year's sale price was higher for these lambs, so the actual benefit was higher than estimated above.

However, the benefit depends on both the cost of concentrate and the sale price, which can be volatile and unpredictable unless there is a secured contract in place. The financial benefit depends on the relative feed cost and lamb price at the time.

THEME REPORT



It was calculated that the extra costs and labour involved in lambing ewes early in February was only going to be worthwhile if the number of ewes lambed early was tripled. Andrew and Aileen decided that doing one lambing in April would be preferable to doing two lambing's. It was decided to discontinue the early flock and the whole Clonhie flock is now lambed from early April.

Creep feed could still be considered on a year by year basis now there are some figures on which to base the decision. Creep feed may be used if it is desirable to get lambs away more quickly than would be possible on grass alone.

FACILITATOR CONTACT DETAILS

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