

THEME REPORT

LOCHABER MONITOR FARM

Is Lamb Finishing Worth It in Lochaber?

THE CHALLENGE

The vision for the Hills Lochaber Monitor Farm meeting in February 2018 threw down a challenge to the group to produce a better product than a small store lamb marketed through the store ring.

If the store price is poor, is that the only marketing route available?
Is it possible to add value and finish small hill lambs profitably in Lochaber?

The group had virtually no recent experience of lamb finishing. It had not been done in the area for many years and any data available was out of date. The only group member with any experience was Ewen Campbell from SRUC's Hill and Mountain Research Unit.

Chris accepted the challenge and agreed to trial finishing all his 2018 born male lambs.



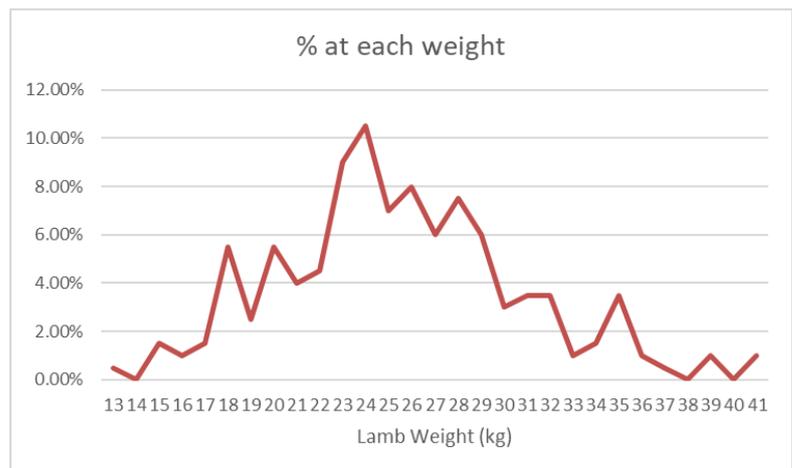
The objective of the trial was to challenge the existing store lamb strategy on the West coast by attempting to finish lambs in a shed profitably.

Other options such as moving the lambs to grass keep and selling as forward stores or finishing off grass, were discussed, but in the end, it was decided that lambs would be finished in the shed.

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WHAT WE DID ON FARM

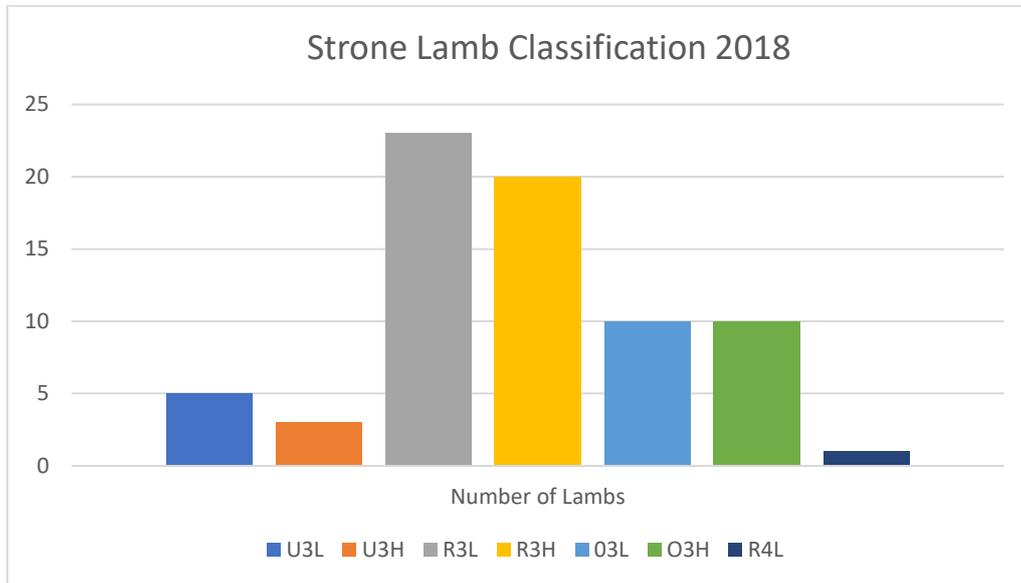
- Total 227 Llyen x Cheviot lambs put through an intensive indoor finishing system
- Lambs were kept entire.
- Lambs were weighed for the first time on 1st August 2018 with an average weight of 25.6kg/hd – the graph below shows the distribution of lamb weights on 1st August.
- Lambs were given access to lamb creep at grass from early June
- They were weaned and put into shed early August
- Weighed every 2 weeks from August onwards
- Finished lambs sold both dead weight and live weight.
- First sale 27th Aug, last sale 4th Dec



RESULTS

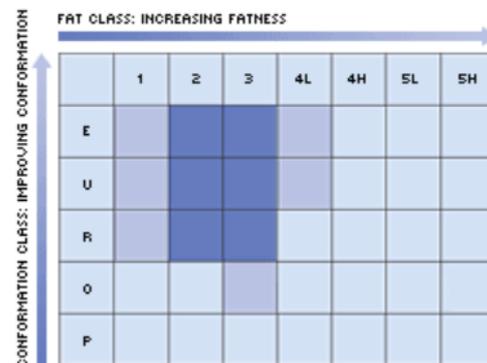
- 206 Lambs sold at £70.17/hd average
- 4 lambs died (3 attributed to a late Heptavac-P dose)
- 17 lambs retained
- 22.4t feed used at £275/t on average
- 12 bales straw used
- Average growth rate was 234 grams/head/day
- Carcase grades for the 72 lambs sold deadweight are shown in the graph below

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EUROP carcass classification explained

The shaded areas represent the grades of stock preferred by the major processors in Scotland. The darker areas show the core classifications that all buyers identified as meeting their requirements. The graph above shows that the majority of the Strone lambs fell into the desired classification. The better the carcass, the higher £/Kg deadweight.



Financial Result

The partial budget below shows the margin produced by this system. All costs are actuals except the value of lambs at start and lambs retained at the end which are based on average market prices.

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Revenue Lost	£
227 lambs at £35	£7,945
	£7,945

Extra Revenue	£
Lambs sold 206 @ £70/hd	£14,454
Lambs Retained 17@ £67/hd	£1,142
	£15,596

Extra Costs	£
Feed 22.4t @ £275/t	£6,162
Straw 12 bales at £36/bale	£432
	£6,594

Costs Saved	£
	£0

Total Losses	£14,539
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Total Gains	£15,596
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Extra Benefit	£1,057
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Extra Loss	£0
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Sensitivity Analysis

If Chris could have got an average of:

£39.66/hd

in early August for all his lambs, then finishing the lambs would have broken even.

Return on Labour

Has it been worth it for the labour required to manage the system?

Partial Budget Benefit	£1,057
Labour required (6 hrs/week for 18 weeks) (hrs)	108
Return on labour (£/hr)	£9.79

WHAT HAS CHANGED ON FARM

This has been a very interesting trial and well worth the effort due to the learning experience for Chris and for the group.

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There were other benefits of lamb finishing which became obvious during the trial

- Lambs weaned off ewes earlier and so ewes are in better condition
- Lambs off grass earlier, so more grass available for other livestock on farm.
- It gave more marketing options – Chris sold some direct and some through the ring
- It dispelled some of the myths of finishing – lamb mortality was low
- It added huge value to the tail end lambs

Would Chris finish lambs again and if so, would he do anything differently?

Chris has gained in confidence with the system and would finish lambs again. He also enjoyed the experience. But tweaks could be made to the system to improve returns

- Lambs would be castrated to increase flexibility in marketing
- First draw lambs would be sold store, to allow the system to focus on and add value to the tail end lambs.
- Lambs could be stored on rough grazing until mid/late autumn, then put into the shed with a target to finish into the spring market as prices climb (castration would be essential if this option was chosen).

In summary – a successful look at lamb finishing in Lochaber. It has shown that producers do not necessarily need to accept the store price offered. They could, if they chose, add value by finishing batches of lambs on farm.

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