

# Croft & Small Farms: Store Livestock - Adding Value in Presentation



Selling Store Lambs and Cast ewes is often an experience that can be stressful but rewarding for the seller. No matter the scale of your operation; crofter or farmer, the same principals apply in presenting stock in the sale ring. The preparation should take place before your stock reaches the sale ring.

## Why Sell Store?

Lambs are predominately sold store off upland and hill ground. The opportunity to sell lambs in preference to finishing lambs comes down to costs. For example, a store lamb will eat almost as much as a dry ewe on a grass-based system. This is costly and may also utilise grass land available for ewes and therefore interfere with recovery for a ewe that has a low body condition score. In this case, it could make more sense to sell lambs as stores.

## Store Lambs

When selecting stock for sales an awareness of markets is essential. Store lamb sales in Scotland start in early August. Early sales are, in the majority, selling continental, texel and beltex, and suffolk cross lambs; These lambs are nearer to finishing and will not be classed by the buyer as a “long keep” lamb. Many will head to slaughter in a matter of weeks from passing through the ring. As we move through the sale season blackface and cheviot lambs will be in the main and smaller continental crosses. These lambs will meet markets for Christmas and Easter finished by lowland farmers on grass and forage crops.

## Tagging Store Lambs

When tagging lambs for sale at the mart you have two options. A BATCH tag as shown here.



The batch tag is a single tag that can be used by the seller to sell stock without recording the individual tag No. There is a cost saving in not having to double tag, particularly if numbers are significant. The tag details the holdings flock number starting UK0 and six digits following. The individual tag No. is held on the electronic chip contained within the tag but is not visible. The UK No. and number of animals sold are the details to be recorded in the flock record book. If the animals to be sold are older than 12 months they must be double tagged.

Alternatively, particularly if numbers are small, then it is simpler to double tag and avoid having to purchase two sets of tag types.



**Note: The Yellow, electronic tag, is always inserted in the left ear.**

## Batching Lambs

The term “Batching” refers to grouping animals. For example if you have bred Cheviot lambs pure and a batch of Blackface Cross Cheviot lambs it would be in your interest to sell them in their breed groups.

Factors in Batch selection:

- ◆ Breed
- ◆ Conformation (scale and weight)
- ◆ Ewe lambs v Wether (male) lambs -a premium may well be gained from separating Cheviot ewe lambs and selling in a batch on their own.

In doing this you are making it easier for the buyer when he is selecting stock to bid on your animals at the ringside.

## Welfare – Healthy Lambs Sell Best-

Lamb presentation in the ring is so important but the preparation beforehand even more so. When stock come into a ring lame or dirty this takes the buyers focus away from the positive qualities of the remaining lambs. Keep lambs clean and handle them with care to avoid bruises. Check their general health and look for abnormalities before you present lambs to buyers.



Scouring Lambs



Lambs cleaned and presented for sale

## Go easy on the Keel

In many markets the sorting of livestock is left to the mart staff and over marking with paint (keel) can easily detract from their presentation. Given that they are often handling thousands of lambs per sale it is important to make this task easier for them as they aim to give you the best result in the ring. Often stock that are on the hill require a keel (paint) mark to ensure clear identification at gathers. Stock on in-bye ground are often not mixing with other stock and by forward planning and easing back on the marker in the run up to sales you will be able to present a cleaner looking animal in the ring.



Simplicity is key. A simple spot on the back of the head, middle or rear gives you 3 immediate batches and a cleaner look in the ring.

## Draft Ewes, Cull\Cast\Feeder Ewes – Added Value Option

**What is a draft ewe?** - a ewe too old for rough grazing on hill or upland and selected (drafted) out of the flock to be moved to gentler low ground grazing.

**What is a cast ewe?** A ewe no longer fit for breeding

Ewes at the end of their working life on your holding have the potential to provide financial value and breeding or fat value to a buyer at market. Draft ewes work hard on hill ground and are often drawn out of the flock having cropped lambs for 4 or even 5 years. (6 year old). These ewes, if fit, in good condition and correct – good mouths and udders, can go on and breed on lowland ground for further years. Even ewes that may have lost teeth but are fit and have good udders may continue to have a productive life.



Cull ewes and feeders may enter either the fat trade at prime markets or be classed as feeders, leaner ewes, that go on to quality grass and finish in a couple of months post sale. Taking time to draw off ewes from their lambs to allow condition to come on the animal can add value before selling. Rather than carrying them on the holding where they are not able to cope with harder hill conditions and more exposed weather conditions requiring costly inputs of feed and your time.

The principals of store lamb presentation apply to ewes sold for these reasons above. Taking time to look at feet, batching, suitability for breeding, minimum handling and good welfare can add to further premium been added on the sale day.

### Summary Key Points

- ◆ **Batch lambs – Size, Breed and Conformation**
- ◆ **Maintain Good Animal Welfare**
- ◆ **Keep an eye on markets trade**
- ◆ **Clear but light batch marking identification of stock attracts the eye of the buyer**
- ◆ **View ewes as having an opportunity for added value at the end**