

Lamb Crop 2022

Maximise lamb survival outdoors



Farmer Focus: Neil McGowan, Incheoch Farm

The Lamb Crop webinar series focussed on highlighting methods to maximise lamb survival for indoor, outdoor and hill systems. The last in the series focussed on outdoor lambing where we heard from Poppy Frater, SAC Consulting Sheep and Grassland Specialist, Cathy Dwyer, SRUC Animal Behaviour & Welfare Researcher and Neil McGowan, Incheoch Farm.

Neil and his family farm at Incheoch Farm, Alyth, where they run cattle and sheep breeding enterprises over 1,200 acres from 350 - 700 feet above sea level. The sheep enterprise comprises of 1,000+ Llyen ewes and 120 Texel ewes with on-farm sale of breeding rams, ewes, lambs as well as over 1,000 slaughter lambs. Focus is on using permanent grass, grass/clover leys and forage crops for the winter months. Most of the lambing is in May with focus on using data to make sheep management easier to minimise intervention and maximise productivity.

Using data to improve productivity

1. **Lambing scores** - every ewe gets a score at lambing time: Lambing ease, motherability, lamb vigour. These scores determine breeding lambs selected.
2. **EBVs** – using available EBVs for selecting rams to breed from. EBV that rewards optimum prolificacy rather than maximum prolificacy aiding them to have 65 - 70% twins, 20 - 25% singles and 10% triplets. Using lamb survival rate EBV shows 4% more lambs for Incheoch

	Survival Rate Bottom Three Sires on Lamb Survival EBVs	Survival Rate Top Three Sires on Lamb Survival EBVs	Difference
2014	90.05%	96.65%	6.59%
2015	91.79%	91.96%	0.17%
2018	79.29%	83.15%	3.86%
2019	88.55%	93.11%	4.56%



Key management strategies at Incheoch

- Making good use of data and EID.
- Lamb on good grass; ewes plan nesting site so ensure good grazing is available near this site.
- Observe lambing from a distance, by 2 hours old check lambs are sucking, mark lambs 24 - 36hours old, 17 days after lambing starts walk out any unlambed ewes.
- Stay calm and methodical, when checking sheep stay steady pace and take the path of least disruption.
- Ensure good predator management.
- 20 years of maternal behaviour scores allowing for good ewe selection
- Gimmers and older ewes share fields that are more sheltered and better grass



Key message is to develop a system that suits YOU and YOUR farm and sheep that suit the system.