



**Leaving Cert Agricultural
Science**

Free Notes

Animal Production - Sheep

Topic: Sheep Production

Sheep facts: At birth, a lamb weights:



- ✚ 3 – 5 kg at birth
- ✚ 30 – 40 kg at slaughter
- ✚ Gestation period – 149 days (5 months)
- ✚ Length of oestrous cycle – 17 days
- ✚ Duration of oestrous – 36 hours

Mixed farming

- ✚ This is where sheep and cattle are grazed together
- ✚ **Growth rates increase by 10-15%**
- ✚ Tilling- a denser sward & increased DM production
- ✚ Flush of grass around dung is eaten by sheep. This is unpalatable to cattle.
- ✚ Even recycling of nutrients with presence of sheep

There are three locations suitable for sheep farming;

- ✚ Mountain Region
- ✚ Hill Region
- ✚ Lowland Region

Mountain Farming:



- + Ewes and rams of the same mountain breed are usually mated.
- + Ewe lambs are kept for replacements within the flock or sold onto other farmers for the same purpose.
- + Ewe and ram lambs can be fattened and sold for slaughtered for their meat.
- + Lambs can also be sold as stock in the autumn i.e. sold to a lowland farm where they are further fattened.

Note:

- + Ewes do not thrive in harsh environments and after 4 to 5 years approx; they are sold to hill/lowland farmers where they can continue lambing. These are called “**Cast Ewes**”.

Hill Farming:

- + **Cast ewes are bred with a prolific ram breed**
- + The ewes should have:
 1. good mothering ability
 2. prolificy from the ram



Lowland Farming:



- ✚ Importance here is on the **production of lambs for slaughter** i.e. for their meat.
- ✚ Galway only Irish native lowland breed
- ✚ Most lowland breeds such as Galway and Border Leicester are more fertile due to ideal environmental conditions i.e. have more multiple birth (twins, triplets) whereas mountain and hill breeds are more prone to having single lambs.

Note on Belclare Improver:



- ✚ Developed by crossing a Galway breed with other breeds.
- ✚ Cross between Galway & Finnish Landrace –to improve prolificacy
- ✚ X & Llynn –to improve conformation

Characteristics of Belclare Improver:

1. improved prolificacy
2. improved confirmation

Breeding Strategy in Ireland

- 1) Cross breeding is ideal situation see breeds above.

- 2) A three breed system is practiced in Ireland, see below:
- 3) The ram is considered “**Half the Flock**” as half of his excellent traits are spread further onto the flock on a greater proportion than compared to the ewe.
- 4) In Ireland purebred rams are used to improve prolificacy, growth rates and carcass quality are higher.
- 5) Crossbred ewes show greater hybrid vigour (having best characteristics of both parents).
- 6) Cross breeding a mountain ewe with a Belclare ram increases the litter size that the crossbred ewe has.
- 7) A crossbred ewe is crossed with a **terminal sire** (**ram that produces lamb with high growth rate and good carcass quality for slaughter**).
- 8) The lambs produced from this breeding system are sold in early or mid season lambing market.
- 9) Texel ram better for a mid season lamb or Suffolk ram is used for earlier lamb as it has genes for faster growth rates.

% kill out of an animal: The weight of the dressed carcass in relation to the weight of the live animal before slaughter. A dressed carcass will have head, feet and internal organs removed.

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