

The Modern Malling Flock uses Lleyn Gold and Twitter



The Malling flock of Lleyn sheep was established in 1989. With us then both working full time, myself as a lecturer in agriculture and Christine as a primary school teacher, ease of management was a very important consideration, in addition operating on all rented permanent pasture, with no buildings available, made an outdoor lambing flock the obvious option.

Whilst a student at UCNW Bangor in the 1970's I tagged along with the shearing gang. During the season we would start shearing on the Lleyn Peninsular and it was here that I first encountered Lleyn sheep, a breed that left a long and enduring impression.

Over the years the flock grew and developed, as time and resources permitted, reaching a peak of about 150 ewes, one of the key aspects of the flock has always been to produce quality, hard-working sheep; sheep that we were always able to find a ready market for in our own corner of the country, tucked away in Kent. Our breeding ewes have established a significant number of Lleyn flocks, both commercial and pedigree, in Kent and East Sussex. Our rams have produced Lleyn but also thousands of Kent half-bred (Lleyn x Romney) ewes, with some buyers sourcing rams from us for more than 20 years.



We have always maintained a lot of records, birth weights, 21week weights, ewe condition scores, lambing difficulties etc. so when Lleyn Gold came along it was an easy decision to sign up to the scheme, we had all the information, it was simply a matter of recording it in a slightly different format. Lleyn Gold is now one of the main criteria

informing the selection of flock replacements, the first being that they must be good, sound sheep. With a significant part of our permanent pasture overlaying ironstone we do tend to dry up very quickly in the summer, so early lamb growth rate, from good milky ewes is vitally important to us. The beauty of Lleyn Gold is in its simplicity, making more effective use of data that we were already collecting.

Our target has always been to get as much performance as we are able off grass but appreciate the limitations of our system and the need at times to supplement grazing with concentrates. We have as far as possible avoided

the temptation to increase ewe body weight, our ewes are still a nice medium sized sheep averaging 65kg to 67kg, in order to maximize lamb output per hectare. Our attitude to hard feeding has always been strategic, as far as possible our aim is to all grass winter, as a result we look to build up a decent grass wedge going into the autumn, this together with access to a neighbour's hay ground will generally leave us with a decent bite of grass at lambing. Lambing performance is normally around about 200%, with a very high proportion of twins. Triplets will normally be left on the ewe as they are milky enough. The ewes all lamb outside, the "Beast from the East" arriving in the middle of lambing 2018 was interesting, but not as challenging as I thought it might be, both ewes and lambs coped very well. Once a ewe has lambed and cleaned her off-spring we will generally walk them up into a mothering pen for 24 to 48 hours. Housing them does make executing routine tasks, weighing, navel dipping, tailing, tagging, worming the ewes etc. much easier and ensures a good ewe lamb bond before they are turned back out to grass. All mothering pens are cleaned out and disinfected between ewes, no lamb will ever go into a dirty pen, we do consider attention to detail and good hygiene an essential part of our lambing routine.



Supplementary feeding is phased out post-lambing, the rate at which this is done depending on quantity and quality of grass in front of the ewes. Creep feeding is used strategically and is very rarely fed ad-lib. Grass availability is always the determining factor. Ewe body condition scoring (BCS) is an ongoing process in order to monitor ewe condition throughout

the production cycle, not just at strategic points.

Any crossbred lambs i.e. Suffolk cross and surplus ram lambs will generally be sold finished (47kg to 48kg live weight) at or before weaning. There will be a second draw of Lleyne ram tegs in the spring as those that show faults or have not realised potential are drafted out, normally to coincide with one of the Muslim festivals. We also now have a small, but growing, demand for Suffolk x Lleyne ewe lambs, generally sold through Ashford Market at the first of the catalogued autumn breeding stock sales.

Ewes at weaning are weighed, have teeth, feet, udders and BCS checked, with these plus lambing scores and any significant veterinary problems providing for informed culling decisions. Age is not a significant consideration when selecting culls, a good sound ewe with a good breeding history will stay with us, we regularly have ewes lambing and rearing a good set of twins at 12 years and above.

We have always been keen to fly the flag for the breed. We view shows as an opportunity to promote the Lleyne, hopefully to sell a few sheep but, just as

importantly, to have the opportunity to communicate with the general public. 2019 proved a good year with breed championships at both the South of England Show and the Kent Show. Something that we consider to be our finest achievement this year was first with a pen of five ewe lambs at the Society sale at Exeter.



We all have the opportunity to help fly the flag for the breed, even those that may not feel comfortable with face-to-face contact. The electronic age has provided excellent opportunities for quick and easy communication through Social Media with a global audience. I am a regular user of Twitter, it is so easy to post a photograph, Tweet a comment or even simply forward a comment from another Lleyn breeder. It takes seconds and all helps to raise the profile of the breed. Marketing success is frequently the result of sowing a little seed, which will eventually come to fruition. For us the seed was sown when I first sheared a few Lleyn sheep 50 years ago, a seed that grew to realisation 20 years later.

Alan West