

Producing high quality lamb in the heart of Herefordshire

Whyte House Farm in Puddlestone, Herefordshire, specialises in producing high quality lamb and selling it directly to the public.

Andy and Frances Offer have been keeping sheep on the farm for nine years, having originally set up the flock as a hobby. The business has grown significantly to keep up with demand and the flock now numbers 180 Welsh Mule, Mule Cross and Lleyn ewes, from which around 300 lambs are produced each year.

Almost all the lamb they produce is now sold directly through their “Whyte House Lamb” meat business, which has proved so successful that they now offer tailor made courses focusing on lamb production and distribution. They also run a bed and breakfast and always welcome visitors to the farm.

“Our business is about producing local, good quality food and we’re proud of what we do,” Andy said.

“We use the best possible standards of husbandry and ensure stock are well looked after, making sure they have comfortable and productive lives.”

The flock begin lambing indoors in March and are turned out as soon as enough grass is available. Lambs are weaned at around 12 to 14 weeks, when they are all brought home, weighed and sorted into groups according to weight. From then on, lambs are managed in these groups, with the heaviest given access to the best grass.

Every Monday, a group is taken to the abattoir and hung for a minimum of 10 days post-slaughter, before being distributed to direct customers and the various local markets. The Offers aim for a minimum weight of 38 kilograms for new lambs, rising to around 40 kilograms from around September. The final selection from the target weight group is always done by touch, with the aim being to achieve R2 or R3L.

Carcase characteristics a priority

The Offers use a Texel ram on their ewes, as it’s important for their business that the sire produces progeny that have a good carcass size and growth rate, according to Andy.

They are also trying to produce their own female replacements to reduce the risks from buying in stock and thought that a Texel first cross on the Lleyns or Welsh Mules would give them a decent replacement ewe.

When choosing a ram to purchase, it was important to the Offers that it was performance recorded for quality control reasons.



“My background working for ADAS means I have a good understanding of breeding and genetics, and I wanted to be able to control the quality of the lambs we produced,” Andy said.

“Most people around here still buy rams by eye at the sales, which has major drawbacks as far as I’m concerned. When you buy by eye, it’s impossible to measure female traits and you have no idea what the growth performance of the offspring will be.”

Andy researched Texel breeders in his area on the breed society website and noticed Paul Phillips, of Kimbolton. He contacted Paul with an idea of his requirements and was sent a wealth of information which enabled him to pick out a selection of three shearlings.

“We wanted a performance recorded ram that was priced at a fair commercial rate and would make economic sense for our business,” Andy said.

“We like to buy shearlings that have worked as ram lambs and hence proven themselves through experience and progeny figures.

“Buying a recorded ram gives peace of mind due to their history and the lambs sired in the past.

“We attend farmer markets throughout lambing, so it’s important to minimise the amount of time that the ram spends with the ewes, as we need the lambing season to be as compact and well-managed as possible.

Having done his research, Andy visited the farm and, being impressed with the advice Paul gave him, decided to make a purchase. The ram they bought from Paul has so far yielded good results – having been in with a group of 50 yearling ewes for a couple of weeks, they ended up with a crop of 29 twins, 50 singles and one barren ewe in the first cycle.

The Offers are now drawing lambs from this year’s crop. From the first batch of 37 lambs, almost 60 per cent have come from yearling ewes sired by this tup and have growth rates in excess of 350g per day.

“Paul has a good reputation in this area as being a skilled and knowledgeable Texel breeder,” Andy said.

“Our experience supports that view - we’ve been very happy with our choice of ram and we’ll certainly be buying more tups from him in the future!



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