

The Rise, Fall, Rise and Future of Sheep Sire Reference Schemes

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Charollais Sire Reference Scheme

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The Start



- Back to 1988
 - On farm back fat and muscle scanning started this year
 - First commercial AI for sheep
 - No blup analysis
 - Performance recorded flocks could only compare animals with their own flock.

What we wanted to achieve

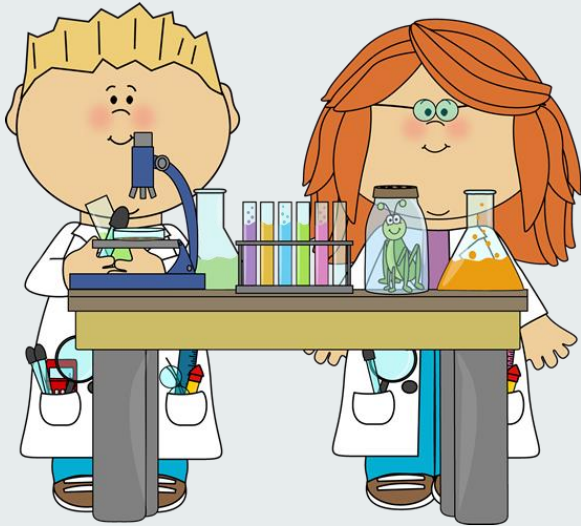


- To provide cross flock links and increase the potential genetic progress of the Charollais breed above achievable levels by any single breeder.
- The scheme should identify superior genetic material within the breed and to encourage the wide use of this material.
- To increase the total lean meat yield and to maximise the growth rate of Charollais.

How to make it work



Scientists



Computer wizards BLUP



Farmers and sheep

+3 carcass lean weight
and -1 carcass fat weight
Simm and Dingwall

Artificial Insemination

First Steps (Hurdles)



Reference Sires

- The initial reference sires
 - Any ram
 - Proven Stock Rams
 - Selected by the group
- Cost
 - AI
 - Purchasing semen
 - Scanning on farm



Charollais Sire Referencing Ltd



- Incorporated as a separate company in 1989 from the breed society, but always maintained close links. Mutual tax status, members were shareholders.
- Byelaws
 - Minimum Number of ewes
 - Commitment to record with MLC for a length of time
 - Use at least 2 reference sires on at least 10 but not more than 16 ewes in each breeding cycle
 - Scan all progeny, both male and female
 - Inform the company of any genetic defects or notifiable diseases.

Charollais Sire Referencing Ltd



- Selection of Reference Sires
 - Commitment to make available ram lambs for selection as future reference sires
 - Upon selection arrange for semen collection
 - Rights over semen for members of the scheme
 - Attract the very best progeny for selection.

– SELECTION DAYS

Selection Days



Selection Criteria

- Top 10% - must be presented
- 10% - 25% could be presented
- Physically correct
- Scrapie Genotype
- Stipulation on qualifying EBV traits
- Presentation



A Fall – The wrong flocks



Members at all costs

- Members at all costs
- Show flocks
- Must be enthusiastic for recording
- Understand figures
- Appreciate management of stock not to show standard
- Get rid of them



More Falls



Disease Outbreaks

- FMD 2001
- FMD 2007
- Bluetongue 2007
- Disruption of our selection procedure, semen freezing, movement of rams for trial work
- No CT scanning
- Difficult to maintain enthusiasm



Fringe Benefits Working Together



SBRT – catalyst for formation of CST Recorded Ram Marketing Group

- Joint meetings
 - Charollais Sires, Suffolk Reference Scheme and Elite Texel Sires.
- Discuss common issues
 - Conception rates
 - Ram usage
 - AI costs
 - Scanning on-farm
 - Publication of results – the figures
 - Promotion of flocks
 - Development within the schemes
 - Signet charges and delivery
 - Funding



RESEARCH PROJECTS

- High Low Hill Project, 3 year bolt on for sires
- Making Quality Pay – ASDA, Welsh Country Foods

Did it all work?



YES

- All the breeds who ran Sire Reference Schemes achieved significant and rapid progress in terms of genetic gains – www.signetfbc.co.uk
 - Charollais, Suffolk, Texel, Meatlinc
 - We instigated major changes to the index
 - Muscularity EBV
 - ATAN function
 - Alteration to the weightings for Terminal Sire Index
- WE WORKED TOGETHER FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE INDUSTRY**

A Fall on Its Way



- 2004 National Charollais Evaluation
- + 19 flocks became 63
- New bloodlines
- We could select from the entire recorded Charollais population.
- We took immediate advantage of this and purchased a reference sire from the wider group.

The Dream Team - 2004



At last the perfect team of sires

- Rutland Ensign – 1st prize winner at the Royal Show
- Lowerye Eric – highest index lamb that year
- Logie Durno Earl of Dunbar – top price at the breed premier sale



The Demise



- No need for reference sires
- No selection days
- No framework or function
- Broken the cohesion of the group
- We had given away all our years of work, expenditure, genetics.
- In 2007 the final team of reference sires

Missed Opportunities



Marketing Opportunities

- In 1999 Bulth Wells Sale offered a ring to SRS rams
- Too close to the Breed Society
- Ram marketing schemes such as Meadow Quality
- On farm sales

Kept our light under a bushel

- Rejected involvement from non-recorded flocks
- Wished to have the product right

DIDN'T PLAN FOR CHANGE

What Next? Rise or Fall?



Can we turn back the clock?

There is renewed interest in ram sharing in all breeds

- Help connectedness



Genes not breeds

- Ram Compare
- More emphasis on genes for performance not physical attributes
- Stronger role for recorded flocks
- Benefit for individuals and the whole.
- SBRT has always been a catalyst for change.
- Ideas please!