

CENTURION NEWS

NOTE FROM THE CHAIRMAN (KEITH MAY, NEWTONCOOMBE FLOCK)

I said in our first newsletter that 2023 would have challenges, we've all had to endure another extreme year of adverse weather conditions, with a wet summer and a heatwave heading into Autumn!

A very big thank you must go to Tim (Deben/Staverton flock) for hosting Centurion and Eastern area members. Unfortunately, I was unable to go but all the feedback I have had points at an excellent trip for everyone.

Our sale at Exeter was well supported. Prices were good and seem to have set a trend which the other sales have tended to follow throughout the year. Congratulations to all our members who have had so much success in the show rings and at the various sales.

The methane project is now up and running, it will involve a lot of work for those participating. Hopefully there will be positive outcomes from it, both for our group and the wider sheep industry. Emily has kindly done an update in this newsletter.

A few people have asked me about the how to join the Centurion group and the cost of membership. The cost is a one off £50. This has always been very informally collected, more of a donation to help pay for any advertising etc. No invoices sent, just payment to David (Huish flock) our Treasurer. Speak to Alex our Secretary for more information.

As harvest season comes to an end, lambing season is now in full swing.

SALE REPORT FROM THE CENTURION SALE APRIL 2023 (RUSSEL STEER, KIVELLS AGRICULTURE)

The annual sale of pedigree, MV and recorded Dorset sheep on behalf of the Centurion breeders group met with much interest, especially for the rams and a pleasing trade and clearance rate was seen. The Hydes Flock of Jeremy Durrant, Essex led the way in both males and females with a Ram lamb claiming Champion amongst the boys and selling at 1600gns, whilst its pen mates realised 1050gns, 1000gns twice and 850gns as well as the Champion female being a ewe lamb and realising 650gns and selling via Marteye to Thomas Wright of Northern Ireland.

Other notable rams at 1200gns and 1150gns for Fooks Bros of Bridport with shearlings and 750gns twice for Richard & David Rossiter of Kingsbridge with ram lambs.

Further females selling to 320gns & 260gns for shearlings from AP & L Brookin of Ceredigion and 320gns & 250gns again for ewe lambs from Hydes Farming and S Alderson travelled down from Bolton to sell their best ewe lamb at 280gns. Overall averages of £788 for rams and £267 for females.



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#BREED FOR CH4NGE (EMILY GASCOIGNE, PROSPECT FLOCK)

The red meat industry is increasingly being asked to justify its environmental credentials especially as the UK aims to reduce methane outputs by 30% by 2030.

Efficiency of production is known to be a key driver of the carbon footprint of sheep production with fertility, growth rates, ewe lamb performance and concentrate input known to be especially important for flock efficacy. But what about individual variation and can this be selected for?



BREED FOR CH4NGE

BREEDING LOW METHANE SHEEP

The Centurion Group is delighted to have been asked to participate in an industry-wide, successful bid for a DEFRA Innovate Grant looking at “breeding low methane sheep” in collaboration with other sheep breeders (Innovis, Exlana, Performance Recorded Lleyne Breeders) and other industry stakeholders including Pilgrims Pride and Waitrose, the National Sheep Association, Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL), Signet Breeding Services and AHDB. SRUC and Harper Adams University will provide the scientific input, technology and genetic expertise. In total 13,500 sheep in 45 flocks will be included in the study spanning three years, and Dorsets will be at the forefront of this work.

Flocks participating in addition to their regular recording will also be looking at regular body condition scoring (giving us further insight into the Dorset’s utilisation and requirement for condition), IgA blood testing for worm immunity (giving us an insight into variation of immunity across our breed) and perhaps most interestingly, lambs included in the study will also have measurements taken using Portable Accumulation Chambers (PAC) to predict methane emissions (measuring gas production from these lambs over a short time window). Lambs will also be genotyped- a first for Dorset sheep on such a scale.

Further measurements, including rumen size and microbiota, will improve understanding of the underlying biology and ensure that reductions in methane emissions positively contribute to sustainable genetic improvement of ewe productivity on UK grass and forage.

The ultimate aim of the project will be looking to identify tools to compare the breeding value of sheep in the flocks, identifying breeding stock that will contribute to improving farm carbon footprint- pertinent for all breeds within our industry.

Over the duration of the project we will be hosting meetings to share with you our experiences and learnings as breeders along the way- watch this space. You can follow regular updates on our Facebook page or using the hashtag #BreedforCH4nge



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CENTURION AND THE EASTERN REGION BREEDERS CLUB MEETING REPORT JULY 2023

The Centurion Breeders Group held a joint meeting with the Eastern Region Breeders Club of Poll Dorsets, with a tour around the Deben/Staverton Flocks at Wantisden Hall Farm courtesy of Tim Pratt. Visitors were treated to a farm tour looking at both the Poll and Horn flocks as the weather behaved, with a mix of pasture types on display including herbal lays. Topics discussed were broad including breeding policies, management, breeding selection and performance recording. Emily Gascoigne (Sheep Vet from the Prospect Flock) held a workshop looking at the importance of body condition score for the commercial flock with the audience challenged to identify the fittest and leanest animals in the group presented.

A big thank you to Tim and the team for hosting us with a fantastic display of sheep on display.



Body Condition Scoring Facts

Body condition scoring is done on a scale of 1-5 with half scores commonly used.

This is best performed throughout the year it can help make decisions and target food for those who will benefit the most. It can be especially useful when resources are limited and targeted feeding.

A thin ewe (body condition score 2) will eat 30% more forage than her flock mate at a body condition score 3.

Body condition score loss releases a modest amount of energy for the ewe to use- but a lot more energy is required to put the condition back on- condition loss is inefficient.

It takes 6-8 weeks to put a condition score on a ewe.

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FLOCK FOCUS- THE HUISH FLOCK (R & D ROSSITER)

When asked to write this article, I thought most of you would have read where we are today in the Society's newsletter, so perhaps I should go back in time to see where we have come from.

Recognising in the late 70s, the Poll Dorset ewe was an exceptional animal with its ability to lamb out of season and milk through the harsh winter months, my travels suggested that there was an opportunity to enhance its commercial attributes. At the time, carcass weights were 16-18kgs and the breed struggled to go heavier. A scholarship to New Zealand opened my eyes to larger numbers of Poll Dorsets run with little assistance and showing carcass potential of 20kgs plus.

Back in the UK, I had the opportunity to work with the late David Mathews, who was also interested in increasing carcass weights.

At this time, importations were restricted to live sheep from New Zealand or semen from Australia (the home of polling the Dorset Horn). Between us, we brought in Harpsden 406 from New Zealand and Malkay semen from Australia. Initially, we were seen as destroyers of the breed, but the younger and more commercially minded breeders started to accept what we were doing as meat yield potential increased.

Having stabilised these imported links in the Huish Flock, the next step was joining forces with William Carson and bringing in the successful Windermere sire from New Zealand, which gave us some strong framed ewes and matched the carcass attributes of Unique. During this time we have tried to add in the best of British, and through recording, identify and measure our progress.



The latest piece in this programme was having the opportunity to go to Australia in September 2019 to see the start of their selling season. Having talked to Jim at Gooramma for over 12 months, it was a chance to shake hands on a deal. A few days there convinced me of the next positive step; the recording details they hold transferred into high-performance sheep here at Huish. Thoughts for the future: My belief is to improve and reduce costs; the lamb carcass weights will have to increase hence stabilising slaughter and butchering costs. Can today's Poll Dorsets achieve this? Firmly, Yes. Through Richard and Alice's Huish Meat, they have proved you can get a carcass of 22-25kgs without excess fat and many satisfied customers of quality meat.



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Pilgrims Dorset Lamb Scheme



Looking for a market for your Dorset breed lambs?
We purchase 'New Season' Dorset breed lamb from December to May each year.

We offer longer-term pricing with different pricing options that all reward quality. Our producer group has been well established for over 20 years, forming a successful supply chain serving a large retailer.

This includes crossbred Dorset lambs – only the sire or dam must be pedigree registered Dorset.

Please contact us on 01834 869043 for further information.

The Centurion “Ram of the Year and Select Sale”
Spring 2024 – Date TBC

Exeter Livestock Centre
www.kivells.com

Premium performance recorded rams and ewes
available from member flocks



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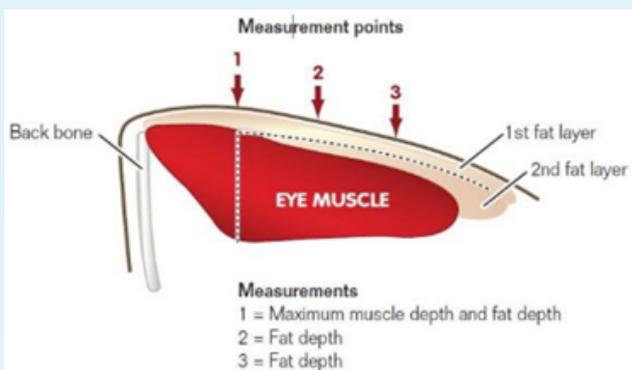
HOW DOES ULTRASOUND SCANNING ENHANCE DORSET SHEEP? LAURA EYLES, SIGNET BREEDING SERVICES

In recent years there has been an increasing number of Dorset breeders have had their lambs measured using Signet’s ultrasound scanning service as part of their breeding programmes. It is a great tool to identify sheep with superior muscling, while avoiding those likely to be excessively fat. This is the best way of identifying animals with superior genes for muscling and this data is used to produce Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs).

What is ultrasound scanning?

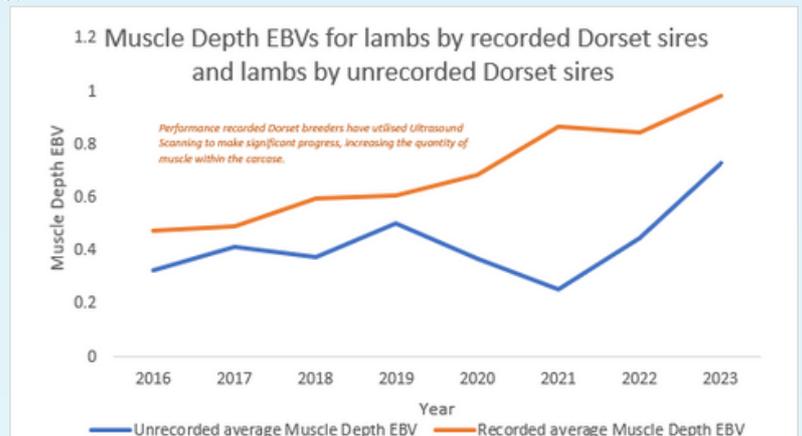
The UK sheep industry were pioneers in the use of ultrasound scanning technology to assess muscle and fat levels across the loin in live animals.

In fact, the ultrasonic measurement of muscle depth, taken over the third lumbar vertebrae, along with a measurement of weight, is a highly effective predictor of muscle yield. Studies have shown a high correlation between the prediction of meat yield obtained by on-farm ultrasound measurements and the highly accurate “real” amount as determined using Computed Tomography (CT) scanning. Additionally, work completed as part of the RamCompare project has highlighted strong correlations between Muscle Depth EBV and Carcase Conformation EBV. This provides clear evidence that on-farm ultrasound scanning is doing an excellent job in identifying breeding stock with the right attributes for the modern consumer at a very effective cost to the breeder and the industry.



The Muscle Depth EBV takes into account measurements collected on all known relatives and is by far a better predictor of genetic merit than the animal’s own measurement, which can be influenced by age and feeding. Breeders have made significant progress to increase muscling within the carcass and as a result of selective breeding, we see larger differences between breeding lines by recorded and unrecorded sires, which can be attributed to increased uptake of ultrasound scanning technology and a recent change in the way we assess carcass traits to identify the higher yielding animals. Historically carcass traits were adjusted for age, however, this meant that increases in muscling were confounded with growth rate. The bigger sheep, unsurprisingly, tended to have larger muscles at a fixed age. In the UK, whilst lamb growth rate is important (and EBVs for this trait are readily available), lambs tend to be slaughtered at a fixed weight (and ideally a similar level of finish). For this reason, Signet changed the Terminal Sire Evaluation in 2016 to highlight genetic differences in lambs when killed at a similar slaughter weight.

This change was important for a maternal breeding programme as it enabled producers to breed lambs with a better yield of meat in their carcasses without increasing ewe mature size. This is an important consideration in breeding programmes that aim to enhance the efficiency of the breeding ewe.



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MEMBER FLOCKS

Please do feel free to contact our members. Pedigree, performance recorded stock available.

Cornwall

J01 Kerlow: Meakin & Body- 01579320334 treweathaxx@hotmail.co.uk

A21 Newtoncoombe: May & Son, J B- 01208 872417- 07773 191 633 gkeithmay@hailmail.net

Devon

H46 Gortleigh: C H Trace & Son- 01409 231291- trace.gortleigh@btinternet.com

A26 Huish: Messers R & D Rossiter- 01548 561210- rossiterburton@gmail.com

E04 South Ham: Mr R D Huxter- 01363 775570- wellandown@hotmail.co.uk

ZD80 Woodburn: J & J Rendle- 07791 171771- daverendle@me.com

Somerset

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ZA40 Prospect: DWG Smith- 07825 556 112 (Emily) 07814 595 232 (Adam)- d.smith2346@btinternet.com

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Essex

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Scotland

S77 Bennachie: Mr J Royan- 01361 882991- 08876150637- j.royan@sky.com

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