



DIVERSIFICATION AND INNOVATION THE THEMES FOR SHEEP FARMING ENTREPRENEUR

David Eglin is renowned throughout the sheep industry as an innovator. He breeds award-winning Poll Dorsets, has the largest flock of Charmoise sheep in the country and is always on the look out for inventive ways to add value to his diversified farm enterprise.

Nearly half a century of farming at Bramcote Mains, Bulkington in Warwickshire and a shrewd eye on alternative business opportunities has enabled him to transform the former aerodrome purchased by his father in 1962. The 100-acre site now boasts two pedigree sheep flocks, two carp fishing lakes, winter storage facilities for 600 caravans, a 4x4 track and 2,000 trees planted by the Woodland Trust, overseen by his wife Susan.

Always the early adopter, his entrepreneurial flair led him to install solar tubes 15 years ago and convert his vehicles to LPG, which he now also sells to caravanners alongside home-produced lamb. What's more, through a relatively new business relationship forged with AW Hainsworth & Sons, David hopes to treble the return on his wool.

"In 2009 I was asked at short notice by the RASE to bring two Poll Dorsets to Stoneleigh for the National Funeral Exhibition, where I met Rachel Hainsworth. That started our association with their coffins business. They have a big market in America, which insists on British wool – and Poll Dorsets produce the best for the job. Some people find wool a bit itchy, but our customers have made no complaints!" David says.

But David Eglin is a sheep producer at heart and is always looking to innovate in this arena too. He backed EID very early. "I thought the technology could help us manage the business better and it has." And he is convinced the Charmoise breed has the potential to improve Welsh hill sheep.

"I started with two Charmoise and now have over 200. I'm the sole importer and have supplied every Charmoise flock in the country with a ram. The breed is very hardy, requires little attention and can adapt to most conditions. And, like the Poll Dorset, has good aptitude for natural off season breeding," he points out.

With a steady stream of caravanners and others looking to take advantage of the variety of leisure pursuits on offer at Bramcote Mains, David was quick to spot the opportunity to retail his own boxed lamb. "It was obvious that we needed a year-round supply, which we have been able to meet with the flexible breeding characteristics of both the Poll Dorset and Charmoise."

Sheep start lambing as early as September and lamb in groups through to May. With so many other distractions, David is looking for minimal intervention and lambs to be

up quickly and sucking well – something he believes he has achieved superbly through the use of Rumenco Lifeline Lamb & Ewe buckets.

“I first started using Lifeline about five years ago. I’d heard about its ability to improve ewe nutritional status and boost colostrum quality a number of times, but frankly I was a little sceptical. Then when we hadn’t got room to bring 110 cross bred shearlings inside one year I gave it a try. The results were fantastic. All lambed outside with little help and we only lost two lambs.

“The following year we had a scanning hiccup. Thinking we didn’t have any triplets I only fed Lifeline, but when the ewes lambed we had plenty yet the nutritional status of the ewes and their lambs wasn’t compromised at all. Ever since I’ve been a complete convert and always feed it in the run up to lambing. In fact, I’d go as far as to say that Lifeline has been the most significant sheep nutrition innovation I’ve seen in 50 years of sheep farming. It’s also backed by science and I know an SAC study has shown that feeding it pre-lambing can significantly increase immunoglobulin levels in the colostrum. Ewes fed showed a 25% increase in colostrum immunoglobulin content.”

David Eglin will soon usher in a sixth decade of farm diversifications at Bramcote Mains, but remains enthusiastic about the future and renewable energy, in particular. He’s currently waiting for the delivery of a wind turbine and will soon introduce photovoltaic solar panels so that he can produce his own electricity.

“We’re already pumping lake water – fed by springs – into a header tank for the sheep and I’ve also buried an 800-litre water tank in the garden to harvest rainwater from the roof.”

He’s also passionate about educating children about food and farming. He used to let out a small spare building to a local children’s theatrical company, as well hosting parties of school children to acquaint them with modern day farming a rural stewardship. David Eglin is a remarkable farming entrepreneur and our industry needs more of his like.

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