

SHROPTALK



The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association

Spring 2012

SPRING OPEN-DAY PROMOTES SHROPSHIRE FOR ORCHARD GRAZING



The Clays' Shropshire ewes and lambs grazing a Standard cider orchard at Yarkhill in Herefordshire.

THIRTY farmers and growers attended an open-day in Herefordshire on 20th March to find out more about grazing Shropshire sheep in cider orchards.

The event was kindly hosted by the Clay family who run the Showle and Swallows pedigree flocks at Showle Court, Yarkhill near Ledbury. Shropshires have been part of the enterprise mix on their 450-acre farm for eight years. Starting with nine ewes, the Clays have gradually expanded their sheep and now run 115 ewes, managed alongside their 150-cow organic dairy unit and a beef enterprise.

Two established cider orchards close to Showle Court were purchased by the Clays in 2010. Shropshires have been used successfully for the past two seasons to graze the herbage between the trees, which would otherwise have to be mown, or sprayed off with herbicides several times a year.

Local cider growers attended the open-day because there is growing interest in the idea of using sheep to graze orchards. What's more, the concept is being seriously considered by cider manufacturers, such as Bulmers, which supports sustainable apple production systems.

Shropshires are the obvious choice of breed for this task because of their proven track record as "tree safe" sheep, used widely for

grazing conifer plantations throughout northern Europe.

Additionally, a study at Lake Constance Research Centre for Fruit Growing in Bavendorf, Germany showed that Shropshires could be used successfully in semi-dwarf apple orchards, where the lowest branches of the trees were around one metre above the ground. This view has been borne out by French farmers who have imported Shropshires from the UK to graze in a range of different fruit tree plantations. The sheep have performed well to date.

THE SHOWLE COURT APPROACH

The Showle Court Shropshires are managed by Harvey Clay, while her husband Tom and father-in-law, Jim, concentrate on the other farm enterprises.

Harvey grazes the Shropshires in a Standard orchard during the spring and summer: "The branches are well out of reach of the sheep, so there is no danger of them eating the fruit while it is developing, and thereby affecting the yield," she explains. Last season the Clays achieved yields of around 25 tonnes of apples per acre.

"The orchards are not organic and they are
Continued on page 3

AMENDMENT TO THE SSBA'S CONSTITUTION

THE Charity Commission has confirmed that the amendment to the proposal agreed at the 2011 AGM, concerning an appeals process for the new "Removal of a Member" Clause, is acceptable and may be adopted by the breed society.

However, because of the importance of this issue to all members, the SSBA's Council decided to take formal legal advice before amending our Memorandum and Articles of Association (our constitution).

Burges Salmon, a law firm that advises several leading UK breed societies, has duly been consulted. They have advised that it is not necessary for the SSBA to introduce an appeals procedure for the Removal of a Member Clause because, under Company Law, the SSBA already has a mechanism for members to appeal any Council decision by convening an Extraordinary General Meeting.

To make it clear to members how they may appeal a decision using this procedure, we have been advised that we need to amend Clause 7 of our Articles of Association, which deals with General Meetings.

The Council has decided to put a new proposal, encompassing this legal advice, to breed society members later this year. Voting on this matter will take place at the 2012 AGM. No amendment will be made to our constitution at this point in time.

**A new trophy for
Shropshires!
Turn to page 2 to
find out where it
will be awarded.**



Shropshires are "tree-friendly"!

PAT GROVERMAN

IT is with great sadness that the SSBA's Council reports the death of Pat Groverman, the wife of American Shropshire breeder and overseas member of the SSBA, Fred Groverman. Many of us had the pleasure of meeting Fred and his daughter Judy last year when they attended our Sale at Shrewsbury.

Pat had been seriously ill for a number of years and passed away in early March. As a mark of respect, the SSBA sent formal condolences to Fred and a donation to the Sonoma County 4-H (similar to young farmers), an organisation that Pat had supported for many years during her lifetime.

WEBSITE UPDATES

THE SSBA's website is updated once a month by the breed society's Secretary, Simon Mackay. The deadline for sending news, pictures and any amendments required for Sales Register entries is the 5th of each month.

SALES REGISTER

STOCK for sale can be advertised free of charge on the SSBA's website. If you would like to use this service, please complete a Sales Register form and return it to the SSBA's Sales Officer, Claire Jakeman (address on the form). You can update your entry as many times as you like during the year. Sales Register forms were sent out to all members by email in January. Copies can also be downloaded from the SSBA's website. If you do not have access to the internet but require a form, please contact the SSBA's Secretary, Simon Mackay. Please keep your entry on the website up-to-date by informing either Claire or Simon of any significant changes to the stock you have for sale.

SCRAPIE MONITORED FLOCKS

IF your flock is Scrapie Monitored, please ensure that you adhere to the current rules of the Scrapie Monitoring scheme when buying-in stock. Up-to-date rules can be downloaded from www.sac.ac.uk/consulting.

REGISTRATION REMINDERS

ALL female Shropshires entered in our National Shows & Sales must be registered with the SSBA **two weeks before the closing date for entries**. All females over four months old must be registered before being sold either privately or through a recognised auction sale. If you are selling Shropshires to someone who is not a member of the SSBA, the sheep must still be registered. Please inform our Secretary of any new Shropshire owners who may be interested in joining the SSBA.

PEDIGREE CERTIFICATES

WHEN selling registered Shropshires, please ensure that you complete the SSBA's Transfer Form and send it to the Registrar, together with the Pedigree Certificate(s) within 10 days of the sale. Vendors are responsible for paying the transfer fees to the breed society (£3/head). If, however, you are selling at one of our National Shows & Sales, please hand Pedigree Certificates to the auctioneer before the start of the sale with clear notification of the Lot Number of the animal(s) concerned. There is no need to pay the transfer fees as these will be collected automatically by the auctioneers.

NATIONAL SHOWS AND SALES

National Show and Sale (West) Shrewsbury

Saturday 30th June

Closing date for entries: 27th May

Schedules available from: hallsgb.com

and RAS-online.co.uk

National Show and Sale (East) Melton Mowbray

Friday 7th & Saturday 8th September

Closing date for entries: 27th July (paper)

3rd August 2012 (on-line)

Schedules available from www.grassroots.co.uk/melton.html

THE Breed Society's two National Shows and Sales are annual highlights for Shropshire breeders. The events take place at Shrewsbury and Melton Mowbray livestock markets. Both are good opportunities to sell and purchase high quality sheep that meet the breed standards, as well as a great chance to meet fellow breed enthusiasts.

If you are considering buying or selling stock at these events, please be aware of the following:

Restriction On Entries Per Flock

Each flock can enter up to two males and 15 females at each show and sale. Numbers are limited to ensure that only good quality stock is offered for sale. All females must be fully registered with the SSBA before the sale, and males must be birth notified and eligible for registration.

Minimum Weights For Lambs

Ram lambs and ewe lambs entered at Shrewsbury must weigh at least 45 and 35kg, respectively. The weights for lambs entered at Melton are slightly higher, as the sale takes place later in the year: 50kg for ram lambs and 40kg for ewe lambs. Lambs will be weighed on arrival and must meet the minimum weights in order to be offered for sale.

Upset Prices

The minimum upset prices for both show and sale venues are as follows:

Ewe lambs: 100gns

Shearling ewes 150gns

Ram lambs: 140gns

Shearling rams: 200gns

Older ewes and rams: at vendors' discretion.

Vendors may set higher reserve prices for their animals if they wish. **Halls, the auctioneers at Shrewsbury, reserve the right to charge the full commission on the reserve price for any animals not sold. This is to ensure that realistic reserve prices are set.**

Transfer Fees And Registration Fees

The vendor selling a ram or ram lamb to a society member will be required to register the animal with the SSBA. Transfer fees for all stock (£3/animal) will be charged to buyers and collected automatically by the auctioneers.

Proof Of Health Scheme Accreditation

Please note that this year all vendors selling animals from Maedi Visna and Scrapie Monitored flocks at Shrewsbury will need to send copies of their membership certificates with their entries.

Breed Inspections

All animals will be inspected by a breed society inspector prior to the showing classes. Inspection cards will be displayed on the pen fronts after inspections have taken place.

Showing Sheep

All males entered in the show and sale MUST be shown. For females, the show classes are optional.

Show Classes

The following show classes are available at both S&S events. Ram classes may be amalgamated if entries are insufficient to run two classes:

Senior Ram (2-shear and over);

Shearling Ram;

Ram Lamb (born on or after 1st Dec 2011);

Breeding Ewe (to have reared a lamb or lambs in 2012, shorn bare on or after 1st May 2012);

Shearling Ewe;

Ewe Lamb (born on or after 1st Dec 2011).

Trophies And Rosettes

SSBA rosettes and prize cards will be awarded to 6th place in all classes. At Shrewsbury, the Champion Shropshire is awarded the Morley Perpetual Challenge Cup and the Reserve Champion receives the Roydon Shield. The Southworth Shield is awarded to the best prepared pen of two or more Shropshires. Halls have generously donated a new trophy (pictured on page 1) to be awarded to the highest priced Shropshire from a small flock (25 ewes) sold through the auction ring. At Melton Mowbray, there is an attractive trophy for the overall Champion of the Shropshire breed.

Inspections By Trading Standards

Please be aware that the SSBA has been advised that Trading Standards' officials are very likely to inspect ear tags of animals entered in the sales, so please ensure that all animals entered are tagged correctly according to DEFRA's requirements. Movement licences and transport authorisations are also likely to be checked.

Social Events

At Shrewsbury, there will be a barbecue or hog roast at the livestock market the night before the show and sale (29th June). At Melton Mowbray, there is a buffet supper open to all exhibitors at the market on Friday 7th September. **Please note, you must have a ticket, purchased in advance, if you want to attend these events. Details of the cost of tickets will be circulated in due course.**

SHOWS AND EVENTS WHERE THE SSBA'S BREED STAND WILL BE EXHIBITED

Balmoral Show, Belfast
16th to 18th May

**NSA South Sheep, Lambourn,
Berkshire**
13th June

Cheshire County Show
19th and 20th June

**Traditional and Rare Breeds Event,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire**
(The SSBA's National Show and
Sale West) 30th June

NSA Sheep Event 2012
Malvern, Worcestershire
4th July

**Traditional and Rare Breeds Event,
Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire**
(The SSBA's National Show and
Sale East)
7th and 8th September



"AT A GLANCE" GUIDE TO GRAZING SHROPSHIRE IN XMAS TREES

THE SSBA has recently produced "*The Ten Commandments for grazing Shropshires amongst Christmas trees*".

This is a small, A4-size laminated wall chart, designed to remind tree growers about the most important elements of managing Shropshire sheep in plantations. It has been produced with the help of SSBA members, Adrian Morgan and Pat Delaney, who have both used Shropshires successfully in their own Christmas tree plantations for many years.

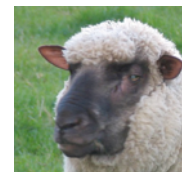
The Ten Commandments will be available on the SSBA's show stand at various events this year and all SSBA members will be sent a paper copy for their own information in due course.

The technical booklet "*Two Crops From One Acre*", which is a comprehensive guide to grazing Shropshires in trees, is still available free of charge from the breed society. So if you know anyone who is interested in keeping Shropshires for use in trees, please ensure they receive copies of both these important publications.

BREED STANDARDS: THE HEAD

THE SSBA's Council has decided that every edition of *ShropTalk* will feature one component of the Official Breed Description, to remind members of the standards they should be striving to achieve. Please note that the breed society's booklet entitled "*Critical Selection of Shropshire Sheep*" provides a comprehensive guide to all traits.

"Naturally clean, soft black face, with a covering of wool on the poll. Rams should possess a bold masculine head. Ears are soft black in colour, of medium length and well set on"



The Ideal: The head of the Shropshire should be strong and butt-nosed, not long and thin.

Undesirable traits: Ear size, head colour and horn stubbs (bony protrusions) are a visual reminder of the origins of the breed and their influence.

Medium-sized ears should be well set on at the side. They should not be overly long or pendulous or pricked.

The soft black (liquorice black) head should have a good covering of wool which extends to the cheeks.

Pale tan faced sheep are not desirable.

Occasionally a black area devoid of wool may develop between the ears of rams and this should not extend any further back than the ears.



X Pricked Ears



X Drooping Ears



X No wool on head

FIRST AMERICAN LAMBS ARRIVE IN THE UK



THIS is a landmark year for the Hayne Oak Flock of Liz Bowles and Mike Bray, with the arrival on their farm of the first lambs in the UK to be sired by American Shropshire rams.

Liz purchased semen in 2011 from two rams bred by Fred Groverman in California. Following a "hair-raising" battle with bureaucracy and red tape, the semen arrived in Devon in the nick of time for use on the programmed ewes last August. Ewes were artificially inseminated and the breeding performance was good with 80% confirmed in-lamb. The lambs duly arrived in mid-January with all but one safely delivered and 1.75 lambs produced on average from 16 ewes.

"I am delighted with the overall good Shropshire type of the lambs, and all were eager to get on with life, which is always a good sign," comments Liz. She explains that she decided to introduce a new strain to her flock because she was impressed with the quality of Fred's sheep from pictures and information provided during the World Congress in 2007, and from subsequent conversations with Fred and his compatriot, Cody Hiemke. "Finding unrelated rams for use in the Hayne Oak flock is proving tricky with so many animals in the breed originating from Sidedowns bloodlines, hence importing semen was a logical step," Liz adds. She is looking forward to recording the group of lambs with Signet, to see how they compare with the progeny of other stock rams on the farm. A group of lambs sired by the American rams is pictured above. The lambs can be accepted into the SSBA's flockbook because they have a five generation Shropshire pedigree verified by the American Shropshire Registry.

SHROPSHIRE IN ORCHARDS

Continued from page 1

sprayed as required to control fungal diseases such as apple scab. The sheep have to be removed for up to 10 days when this takes place as a precaution. They must also be removed when trees are pruned. This is mainly because we use a contractor to carry out this work and we don't know exactly when he is going to arrive.

"Luckily we have pasture adjacent to the orchards where the sheep can be grazed. To comply with the Bulmers' contract, we also have to remove the stock completely two months before the apple harvest in mid to late autumn."

The Clays' Standard orchard covers around 6 acres in which Harvey runs around 15 ewes and their lambs through the grazing season. The sheep are set stocked, although lambs are gradually removed as they reach finishing weight. This fits in well with the supply of grazing, which diminishes in quantity and quality through the season. Harvey stresses that it is important to ensure that the sheep have enough to eat at all times: If grazing runs out, the sheep must be moved on before they start taking an interest in the trees.

The Clays' second orchard has Bush cider apple trees, with branches much lower to the ground. Harvey does not use the Shropshires in this orchard during the summer or early autumn in case they eat the fruit. The sheep are put in after the cider apples have been harvested, and they remain there until late spring. The stocking rate is around 1.5 ewes per acre, although it is again important to ensure that grazing is adequate. Sheep may require additional fodder in the winter. Both orchards have a water supply for the sheep and minerals are also provided.

The Shropshire sheep have caused no tree damage in the Clays' orchards and are considered a valuable additional income stream.

The SSBA would like to thank the Clays for hosting the open-day. It was organised by EFP (European Farming and Food Partnership) and HONE (Herefordshire Orchards Network of Excellence) - supported by the Bulmer Foundation.

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP AWARD

AT the Annual General Meeting last November, the breed society bestowed the very special award of an Honorary Life Membership on Claire Jakeman, in recognition of the outstanding contribution she has made to the SSBA.

Claire (pictured on the right) joined our society in 1994 and quickly made her mark as a breeder of Shropshires. Together with her husband, Graham, Claire runs the Morley Flock based at Thornton Le Moors, near Chester. Morley Shropshires have achieved numerous show wins and produced top quality breeding stock that has been purchased by many other flocks in the UK and abroad.

Claire's breeding programme specialises in retaining old and rare bloodlines. But she is also keen to adopt the latest breeding technology and is currently a member of the Shropshire Breed Improvement Scheme.

In her first season of Signet recording, she bred Morley Malik, a high genetic merit ram that is now available to all Shropshire breeders through the EBLEX Ram Linkage Programme (see page 6).

Claire is also a well-respected sheep judge and has received plaudits for her judging skills from "Premier League" agricultural events, such as the Great Yorkshire Show. She has judged Shropshires, lowland, and Interbreed classes at many shows around the country.

FIRST SALES OFFICER

It is, however, the work that Claire has done to help other members of the breed society that the SSBA acknowledged by giving her an Honorary Life Membership.

Claire became the society's first Sales Officer in 2001 and soon afterwards introduced the Sales Register system for matching buyers with sellers. Thanks to this, sales enquiries are dealt with efficiently on a year-round basis and many new flocks have been formed as a result of her efforts. To help new members and potential buyers, Claire has produced a number of useful guides to the breed standards and what to look for when selecting sheep. In the 1990s, she was instrumental in reintroducing an annual show



and sale for the Shropshire breed - an event which has now grown into our two successful national sales at Shrewsbury and Melton Mowbray.

As Sales Officer, Claire has been a long-standing member of the SSBA's Council and her contributions to various areas of breed promotion and to other important activities of the breed society are too numerous to mention. Here's a summary of some of her main achievements:

- She has helped to standardise sheep inspection procedures at shows and sales, and also for export sales to overseas buyers;
- Claire has helped to organise several overseas trips to view Shropshires in countries such as Germany and Switzerland, and she also keeps in regular contact with overseas breeders, to the benefit of all in the SSBA;
- She has recently helped the breed society to become better established in Northern Ireland and Ireland, travelling there on several occasions at her own expense to train Irish members as breed inspectors and to help out on the breed stand at shows;
- For the past few years, Claire has assisted the Export Officer by handling most of the written communication between overseas buyers and breeders in the UK supplying stock;
- She has salvaged many old documents, books and photos that record the heritage and history of Shropshire sheep, and donated these to the society's archives for the benefit of us all.

Speaking at the AGM, the SSBA's President Pippa Geddes said: "Claire has shown true dedication to the society through all the work she does to promote Shropshire sheep, and the assistance she provides to new and existing members.

"She is a true ambassador for the Shropshire breed, and a worthy recipient of this award."



Harvey Clay with a group of shearling ewes grazing in a "bush" orchard.

SHROPSHIRE SHEEP SHOWING NEWS

TRIMMING OF LAMBS

SHROPSHIRE lambs have traditionally been exhibited with their wool carded and trimmed. The SSBA's Council would like exhibitors to continue the tradition, because it believes this to be in the best interests of the breed, putting our sheep on the same footing as mainstream lowland breeds at shows: Most other Downland breed lambs are exhibited with trimmed wool, as are most of the main terminal sire breeds with which the Shropshire has to compete.

All shows running Shropshire breed classes have therefore been asked to amend their schedules to emphasise that ram lamb and ewe lamb classes are for trimmed lambs. Additional classes for untrimmed lambs will continue to be held at four shows: The Three Counties, The Cheshire County, Burwarton and Oswestry. These classes are open to all breeders, but offer a good opportunity for new exhibitors to gain some experience.

Advice about how to prepare Shropshires for the show-ring is published in the SSBA's booklet "Critical Selection of Shropshire Sheep". All members should have received a copy of this from the SSBA. It can also be downloaded from the Publications Page of our website. If there is sufficient demand, the SSBA will organise trimming workshops to demonstrate how to trim sheep for the show ring. Please contact the SSBA's Secretary, Simon Mackay, if you are interested in attending a practical workshop event. Simon's phone number is 01744 811124, or you can email him on shropshire_sheep@hotmail.com.

NEW TROPHY FOR BURWARTON

THE Clinton Cup which was previously awarded at the Royal Show, will now be presented to the Reserve Champion Shropshire at the Burwarton Show. The perpetual trophy was generously donated to the SSBA by council member, Yvonne Clinton Palmer, and this change takes place with Yvonne's approval.

SHROPSHIRE CLASSES ADDED AT TENBURY SHOW

NEW classes for the Shropshire breed will be introduced at this year's Tenbury Countryside Show in Worcestershire on Saturday 4th August. The event features a range of showing classes for farm livestock, horses, horticulture and rural arts and crafts. Now in its 153rd year, the Tenbury show attracts thousands of visitors and is a welcome addition to the list of events that offer classes for our breed.

SHOW SUBSIDY

THE breed society will continue to offer a subsidy to breeders exhibiting their Shropshires at shows that run for two or more days. The subsidy rate agreed for 2012 is £5/head for two-day shows and £10/head for longer shows. The Cheshire County Show is considered a two-day event, provided that exhibitors' sheep are shown on at least one of the days and the same sheep remain on the showground for the whole duration of the show. Subsidy claim forms can be downloaded from the SSBA's website and must be completed and returned to the SSBA's Treasurer by 31st August 2012.



Sue Farquhar with a beautifully trimmed Piddington ewe lamb that won the Shropshire breed championship at the Royal Welsh Show in 2005. The lamb is pictured in the Interbreed Class, with the champions from all other breeds at the show.

SHOWS RUNNING CLASSES FOR SHROPSHIRE IN 2012

SHOW	DATE	ORGANISERS' CONTACT NO
Shropshire County	26th May	01743 289831
Stafford County	6th & 7th June	01785 247111
Three Counties	15th to 17th June	01684 584900
Cheshire County	19th-20th June	01565 650200
The SSBA's National Show and Sale (West), Shrewsbury	30th June	01743 462620
East of England	6th to 8th July	01733 234451
Royal Welsh	23rd to 26th July	01982 554403
Burwarton	2nd August	01746 787535
NEW! Tenbury	4th August	01584 810818
Oswestry	4th August	01691 654875
Denbigh & Flint	16th August	01352 712131
Minsterley	18th August	01743 242559
Poynton	25th August	01625 890183
The SSBA's National Show and Sale (East), Melton Mowbray	7th & 8th Sept	01664 562 971

A more comprehensive list of shows, including some without Shropshire classes that have been recommended by members, is to be found on the SSBA's website.

WESTWOOD WINS “MOST IMPROVED FLOCK” AWARD

THE Shropshire sheep breed winner of the EBLEX Improved Flock Awards for 2012 is the Westwood Flock, run by Clive Davies who farms near Kidderminster in Worcestershire.

Organised through the Sheep Better Returns Programme, this award is presented to the performance recorded flock that has shown the most impressive improvement in genetic merit over a 12-month period, within the breed.

Clive Davies is the third generation to farm at Westwood. First rented by his grandfather in 1939, the now 40 hectare (100 acre) farm is mainly permanent pasture and particularly suited to traditional breeds run on low input systems. Along with the Westwood Hereford Herd of 35 breeding cows, which the family established in 1945, Mr Davies formed the pedigree Westwood Shropshire Flock four years ago with 25 ewes.

Managing the farm mainly on his own, with the help of son Tom and freelance shepherd Will Price, the Shropshires were chosen as they are thrifty and easy to manage on a grass-based system. They are also a traditional local breed with a good heritage.

Mr Davies wishes to prove that the Shropshire breed can produce good returns for commercial producers. He is using performance recording and Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to determine and develop the practical attributes of the sheep.

SOUTH WEST OPEN-DAY

BUILDING on the success of last year's event, SSBA Council Members, Liz Bowles and Monique Hustinx, are organising another open-day for Shropshire breeders. The likely date is 23rd June at a venue in Devon, although the details have yet to be confirmed. If you are interested in attending, please contact either Monique (07810 297886) or Liz (01884 32983) for more details.

MORLEY MALIK AT SHEEP 2012

THE record-breaking Shropshire ram, Morley Malik, will be exhibited on the EBLEX/Signet stand at Sheep 2012 held at the Three Counties Show-ground, Malvern on 4th July.

Malik is the first high genetic merit Shropshire to be selected for the EBLEX Ram Linkage Programme. Under this scheme, semen from the ram is available FREE to breeders in the UK. The ram was bred by Claire and Graham Jakeman and was sold for a breed record price of 800gns to Richard and Simon Spencer at last year's National Show and Sale West.

SHROPTALK

is edited by Pippa Geddes
psellwood@aol.com

01743 741689

and printed by Simon Mackay
Phone/Fax 01744 811124
shropshire_sheep@hotmail.com

The flock continues to establish itself, but Mr Davies is encouraged by the progress made so far on some of the bloodlines. While the number of breeding females is maintained at around 25, high quality rams are still bought in to introduce new genetics.

Up to three rams are used at tupping, with the ewes separated into three single-sire mating groups to make comparisons between them.

The 2011 crop of lambs were sired by Trenton Woodman, Stoke Gean and Westwood Archer who was a prize winning senior ram at the Society's July 2011 Sale. Woodman was selected for his exceptional fleshing qualities and has made a real impact on the flock.

All progeny is performance recorded. Clive feels that the data collected by Signet provides simple and believable information that helps him select animals for breeding and for sale. Two or three ram lambs are retained; used as shearlings to test their performance on the Westwood flock, and then offered for sale the following year.

All-Grass System

Lambing takes place during March and April, while the cattle are calving. The sheep are housed for as little time as possible and complications are rare. Ewes and lambs are turned out within a couple of days of lambing.

The flock is run on an all-grass system with very little supplementation. Lambs are weaned at 12 weeks and scanned at 21 weeks to provide data on which to select a shortlist of six rams to keep. A final selection is made just before Christmas. All ewe lambs born in 2011 were kept – the first year they all made the grade in terms of the flock's breeding goals. Retained animals have to be able to care for themselves, have good feet and legs and not be expensive to keep. As one of the main drivers for profit is production, prolificacy and lambing ease is vital. Westwood ewes have

a lambing percentage of about 170%.

Commercial buyers are also looking for animals that produce a high quality, saleable carcass with low inputs. Lambs not kept for breeding are finished and sold through a farm shop near Shrewsbury – offering useful feedback on carcass quality.

Mr Davies attends local shows and fairs and sees these as a good way of promoting the breed and the flock. In 2011 he was awarded the Breed Championship at the Three Counties Show with Westwood Archer, who went on to win a first prize at the SSBA's Western Sale.

“It is a great encouragement to receive the EBLEX award so soon after the flock has been started,” says Mr Davies.

“Two of the rams we used last year have undoubtedly helped us make the jump in the Signet figures.”

Superior Genetics

EBLEX sheep breeding specialist Samuel Boon believes that one of the major benefits of improving the genetics of any flock is the cumulative and permanent way it lifts performance.

“The time and effort involved will pay dividends for years, not just in the winning flock, but also in the flocks that buy rams from them,” he says.

“With lamb prices at an all-time high, the difference between choosing the right recorded ram for the farm, or an animal of average breeding merit, could be worth £1,000 or more. So there has never been a better time to invest in superior genetics.

“Clive's family recognised the value of doing this quite a few years ago with the cattle, and he has used the same principle with the sheep

“Meticulous breeding stock selection has produced impressive results for this year and contributed to the win. Congratulations to Clive and his team!”



Westwood rams, Adam and Archer (right) - the breed champion at Three Counties Show 2011.