

Genetic Improvement



Penglas Bluefaced Leicester Flock

The Bluefaced Leicester (BFL) has been developed over the past 200 years to become the most popular Longwool crossing sire in the U.K. Most of the crossbred ewes in lowland flocks are Bluefaced Leicester-sired or "Mules" as they are known. While the breed was traditionally crossed with Swaledale ewes to produce the North of England Mule, it is now used on numerous hill breeds to produce a crossbred ewe lamb onto which it passes prolificacy and milkiness.

In the past, breed type was paramount in the minds of Bluefaced Leicester and Mule breeders alike, but over the last ten years more attention has been focused on the need to improve carcass quality without losing prolificacy and maternal ability. While the Bluefaced Leicester is not generally recognized as a carcass breed, it does have a major influence on carcass quality within the UK sheep industry since it is the sire of the dominant Mule ewes that form the backbone of the lowland sector. This changing emphasis led to the establishment, with strong support from the Breed Association, of the Penglas Bluefaced Leicester Breed Development flock at Aberystwyth in 1990, which was fully performance recorded. This now consists of 50 breeding ewes and 15 followers. The whole flock was also scrapie genotyped in 2001 as part of WEGS 1, and since then all lambs have been genotyped as part of NSP.

The Penglas flock proved the launch-pad for the establishment of the Penglas BFL Sire Reference Scheme, which now boasts some of the most prominent flocks in the country among

its members. The scheme has underpinned the Defra/MLC-funded Longwool project which is designed to provide a genetic index tailor-made for the breed to allow for improvement of carcass quality without jeopardising maternal traits while retaining breed type.

In 2000, the flock had its first attempt at competing at the Royal Welsh Show and won the breed championship with a yearling ewe that was one of the highest index animals in the flock. In 2002 a pair of high index ewe lambs took 1st prize in their carcass class at the Welsh Winter Fair. Another pair of high index ewe lambs was placed 2nd at the 2003 Winter Fair. Such achievements are a credit to the success of the Sire Reference Scheme and underline the benefits that selection based on Estimated Breeding Values can have for improving carcass traits in sheep, and also illustrate that this can be achieved while maintaining both breed type and resistance to scrapie.

The majority of yearling rams are sold at the second annual NSA ram sale held in September.

The main stock ram (1183:P033) has been used as a reference ram within the Sire Reference Scheme and is of extremely high quality. He is the top index sire within the Scheme, achieving 'Elite' status in 2003, and has been used extensively through artificial insemination by breeders all over the country. He regularly produces strong lambs of good breed type.



HCC supports genetic improvement through the Farming Connect Sheep and Beef Development Programme. For further details on this group, please contact HCC Industry Development team:

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