



WOODCHIP

for Livestock Bedding Project

Ifor Owen
Hendre Arddwyfaen,
Cerrigydrudion, Conwy

The Woodchip for Livestock Bedding Project was initiated to investigate the potential of using woodchip as an alternative to straw as indoor bedding for sheep and cattle. From January to March 2006 cattle and sheep were housed on woodchip at three development sites, ADAS Pwllpeiran, IGER Aberystwyth and Glynllifon College. During this housing period similar groups were also housed on straw and comparisons were made of their feed intakes, growth rates, cleanliness and health. Assessments were also made of the time and labour requirements for using woodchip in comparison to straw.

An additional part to the project is to determine how best to utilise the woodchip after animals have been bedded on it. Composting studies are being carried out by Bangor University to investigate how the woodchip breaks down and the nutrient value of the end product. The project will also investigate the potential to reuse the woodchip as bedding after it has been composted. Glynllifon College will demonstrate this in February 2007.

Eleven demonstration farms have been set up across Wales to allow farmers to view the project on a local basis. Either cattle or sheep will be housed on these farms for an 8-10 week period on both woodchip and straw. Assessments will be made of the health, welfare, growth and cleanliness of the animals as well as the labour required for the two systems. Full costings will be

Farm Facts

- 560 acres of grassland which includes 60 acres of rough grazing
- 1400 breeding ewes made up of Beulahs and Mule crosses
- 45 Stabiliser cows and a Stabiliser bull

given, as the economies of using woodchip will be an important consideration for farmers. Ifor Owen is part of this demonstration farm network and below is a description of his farm enterprises and how woodchip fits into this.

Sheep

There are 1400 breeding ewes at Hendre Arddwyfaen made up of Beulahs and Mule crosses. All the ewes are home reared and a Blue-faced Leicester ram is kept for this purpose. For the last two years a Lleyr ram has been used instead of a Beulah ram to improve the conformation of the ewe lambs and ultimately the conformation of their offspring. Texel rams are used as the terminal sire.

Lambing takes place indoors from the beginning of March to mid April and the ewe lambs also lamb indoors in May. The majority of the lambs are finished off grass between August and October and any that are left are brought indoors to finish with the aim being to have everything finished by January. Ram lambs from the Mules and Beulahs tend to be sold direct to the abattoirs however better prices are achieved for the Texel lambs when they are sold through the local markets. Some of the Mule cross ewe lambs are also sold as replacements with a good demand seen for these in the markets.

Cattle

In 2001 Ifor began switching over to Stabiliser cows after purchasing his first Stabiliser bull. Now the majority of the 45 cows are Stabilisers with gradually less influence from the original Angus cross and Limousin breeds being seen. The reason for changing over to this breed was to improve the fertility and temperament of the cows. The principle purpose of the herd is to produce quality breeding heifers that are mainly sold at the moment to producers in the North of England and Scotland, where the Stabiliser breed is gaining in popularity as an ideal suckler cow replacement. The Stabiliser is able to provide all suckler producers with the chance to reduce production costs, maximise performance and introduce added value in the market place.



Ifor is also part of a dedicated marketing initiative called Givendale Prime. This is a UK wide scheme in its early stages and will mean that any Stabiliser steers sold as stores and fattened at designated fattening units, will attract premium prices from quality butchers, with this premium being distributed along the producer chain.

Woodchip

Currently all the animals at Hendre Arddwyfaen are housed on straw, which creates a major financial burden each year. Although there is no supply of wood on the farm there is plenty of local woodland where wood could be sourced. Therefore, Ifor is keen to investigate the potential for using woodchip and will be housing a proportion of his ewes on woodchip in the run up to lambing. If the woodchip performs well then he may consider lambing on the woodchip or alternatively some straw could be added to the pens just as lambing commences.