

THE MAGAZINE FOR FARMERS & GROWERS IN WALES

FARMING connect

Our Farms Network

Take a look at the fifteen new farms who have joined the network.

How well is your wormer working? Test don't guess!



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
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FARMING
connect
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FFERMIO

CILTHREW

EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS



LOCATION:
Llansantffraid, North
Montgomeryshire



FARMER(S):
Marc, Wynn &
Bethan Griffiths



FARM:
Sector: Red Meat
Farm size (ha): 120
Livestock numbers:
520 ewes and 110 cattle

Drought tolerant grazing leys

Over the past 5 years, increasingly drier summer months have led Marc, Wynn and Bethan Griffiths, who farm at Cilthrew, to investigate improving the productivity of some of their sloping land which tends to experience reduced grass growth for prolonged periods over the summer.

By trialling various seed mixtures and treatments, it is hoped that we can establish which grass, legume and herbs species suit these fields and whether mycorrhizal fungi and rhizobacteria, can contribute to improving the quantity and quality of the forage grown which will ultimately drive improvements in efficiency.



One of the plots on Cilthrew Farm

For more information and to follow the our farm's project developments, please visit the Farming Connect website.

The mycorrhizal fungi and rhizobacteria used for this trial are a grit like substance which is mixed in with the seed at drilling. The grit contains arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi and plant growth promoting rhizobacteria (PGPR) and aims to increase N and P availability and also enhances drought tolerance.

Three seed mixtures were planted in September 2023 on different plots at Cilthrew, with and without the inclusion of mycorrhizal fungi and rhizobacteria.

Grass dry matter production and quality assessments will be monitored on a monthly basis throughout the summer.

TANYGRAIG

EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS



LOCATION:
Lampeter,
South Ceredigion



FARMER(S):
David, Eryl and
Daniel Evans



FARM:
Farm Size (ha): 121
Stock numbers: 350 ewes
and 45 suckler cows
Sector: Red Meat



Beef cattle

Will compensatory growth result in reducing feeding cost without impacting on overall performance?

Tanygraig, which is farmed by Daniel Evans and family, run a herd of 41 Belgian Blue suckler cows which calve in the spring / summer. The cattle are finished on farm between 17 and 24 months of age and sold to a local abattoir. The cattle are rotationally grazed during the spring and summer months and housed in cubicles over the winter. Whilst housed, the cattle are fed ad lib grass silage and a 14% Crude Protein coarse blend.

It is estimated that feed costs accounts for approximately 75% of total production costs in beef herds, therefore, small improvements in feed efficiency can have a large impact on farm profitability. Research has shown that live weight gains of 0.5–0.6 kg/day through the first winter for weaned youngstock are adequate for those which will return to pasture in spring. Due to compensatory growth over the summer, cattle that have lower daily live weight gain (DLWG) over the

first winter have the highest DLWG at grass, resulting in cattle weights 'catching up' with concentrate fed cattle by the end of the grazing season.

The project is underway and a group of weaned calves have had their concentrate feed removed for their first winter period. A close eye is being kept on the cattle's weight through the use of an automatic cattle weigher, whereby the cattle enter the beef monitor to drink water and their weight is monitored daily and reported back to the farmer via an app.

By the end of summer 2024, we will be able to quantify the benefit of reduced feed costs and its impact on overall cattle performance.

For more information and to follow the our farm's project development, please visit the Farming Connect website.



EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS



LOCATION:
Pwllheli,
Gwynedd



FARMER:
Ifan Ifans



FARM:
Sector: Dairy

Farm size (ha): 90 ha
grazing platform and 100
ha of external land for
silage and crops and
young / dry stock

Livestock numbers: 390
autumn calving cows

Streamlining the milking routine for greater efficiency

Tyddyn Cae is a 190-hectare dairy conversion with 390 autumn calving Friesian and crossbred cows plus replacements with emphasis on grass and forage production and utilisation. The herd is currently averaging 6,800 litres per cow with 3,000 litres produced from forage. Solids are the main production goal on the farm and the combined butterfat and protein levels stand at 580 kg per cow per year.

Since going into dairying 5 years ago, the business has almost doubled in terms of cow numbers. This has meant that the team has also grown to 6, including part time workers as new members have joined at Tyddyn Cae. This project will focus on team development and training at Tyddyn Cae as a method to improve milking process efficiencies and promoting greater consistency across the team.

Tom Greenham from Advance Milking will carry out a full farm evaluation including static and dynamic milking machine tests, review of udder health and environment plus examine labour

efficiency and come up with a plan of action for the team.

Project aims:

- Demonstrate how important people skills and management are for a profitable business
- Prescribe the tools to better manage the team to achieve business goals
- Evaluate the current milking routine across the team and identify areas for improvement, together with application of lean management
- Upskill the whole team to the same level of knowledge and understanding in terms of udder health, treatment protocols and efficiency
- Reduce clinical mastitis cases on the farm
- Calculate the potential economic benefit, taking into consideration veterinary and medicine costs, labour and electricity saving
- Integrate LEAN Management protocols into the farming business



Tyddyn Cae Milking Parlour.

For more information and to follow the our farm's project developments, please visit the Farming Connect website.

Addressing fertility indicators to improve dairy production efficiencies

RHYDY GOFAINT

- 120 Holstein Friesian cows
- 7500 - 8000 litres
- 4.25% butterfat and 3.4% protein
- All year-round calving

CLYNGWYN

- 151 Holstein, Swedish Red, Norwegian Red & Montbeliarde cows
- 7000 litres
- 4.5% butterfat and 3.4% protein
- Spring calving

Fertility is one of the major factors affecting the efficiency of any dairy herd. It can account for one of the major costs of production and also normally represents an area where significant improvements can be made. AHDB Dairy estimates that poor fertility costs £25,000 per year in the average performing 100 cow herd, which equates to 3.2 pence/litre as a result of lost milk production, fewer calves, higher culling rates and veterinary costs.

Maximising fertility in the dairy herd will improve annual milk production and reduce carbon footprint and is a focus for two of the Our Farms Network farms; Clyngwyn and Rhyd y Gofaint.

The project aims to provide action points to improve specific KPI's for both farms to improve reproduction efficiency. In particular, the aim is to make improvements to boost the 6-week or 100 days in calf rates on the spring calving and year-round calving herds respectively. Changes will prospectively be made to several management practices, as there is usually no single cause of poor



Dairy cow

fertility, aiming to tighten the calving block/calving interval, but without increasing the empty rate to more than 10%.

Some of the influencing factors that we will be concentrating on are:

- Increasing heat detection rate
- Calving the heifers well - youngstock health and growth
- Mating management and interventions
- Disease status

Fertility improvements will drive productivity and reduce carbon footprint. Every day added to the cow's calving interval postpones her next lactation and is replaced by an extra day at the end of her current lactation, when yield is lower. More milk per cow = less methane per litre.

For more information and to follow the our farm's project development, please visit the Farming Connect website.



EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS



LOCATION:
Aberaeron,
North Ceredigion

-
Clynderwen,
Pembrokeshire



FARMER(S):
Deryl and Francis Jones

-
Jeff, Sarah, Enfys and
Medi Wheeler



FARM:
Sector: Dairy and sheep
Farm size (ha): 100
Livestock numbers:
120 dairy cattle, 300 sheep
and 65 youngstock heifers

-
Sector: Dairy
Farm size (ha): 105
Livestock numbers: 150
crossbred dairy cows and
60 youngstock heifers

LOWER HOUSE FARM

GRAIANFRYN

EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS

EIN FFERMYDD
OUR FARMS



LOCATION:
Llandrindod Wells,
Radnorshire



FARMER(S):
Robert and Jessica Lyon



FARM:
Sector: Mixed
Farm size (ha):
93 owned, 48 rented
Livestock numbers: 32,000
hens, 150 heifers, 600 ewes

Evaluating a bi-crop of peas and beans to replace bought in protein for pregnant ewes and growing and finishing beef cattle

Robert Lyon's main drivers at Lower House Farm is to increase farm resilience while reducing the farm's carbon footprint. The first project on the farm aims to do this by increasing the farm's self-sufficiency levels.

To work towards self-sufficiency in protein, Lower House Farm will trial incorporating bought in peas and beans as the main protein source in the pregnant ewe ration for winter 2023/24.

In winter 2024/25, home-grown peas and beans will be crimped and incorporated into the rations for both the beef cattle and pregnant ewes.

Why peas and beans?

Peas and beans can be a useful source of energy and rumen degradable protein. Peas contain around 26% protein in the dry matter and beans around 29%. They are both high in energy, containing 13.6 to 14 MJ/kgDM with over 40% starch.



Robert Lyon

What will be done in winter 2023/24?

- At housing, 180 twin bearing ewes will be split into six groups of 30
- All groups will be balanced for age and body condition score
- Three groups will receive a diet of grass silage and bought-in crimped peas and beans from housing until lambing
- The other three groups will receive the usual diet of silage, maize and soya
- Ewe body condition score, lambing percentage, colostrum quality, lamb weight to 8 weeks, lamb weight to weaning, lambs reared to weaning and kg of lamb/kg ewe mated will be recorded

The financial impact and carbon footprint will also be monitored and analysed to compare the incorporated peas and beans diet with the control diet containing soya.

The same approach will be taken for winter 2024/25, but home-grown peas and beans will be used as the protein source for three of the groups.

The cost of buying in, in comparison with growing the peas and beans during spring-summer 2024 will also be assessed.

For more information and to follow the our farm's project development, please visit the Farming Connect website.



Grainfryn calf shed

New Calf Housing System at Graianfryn to improve animal welfare and reduce the use of antibiotics

Gerallt Jones and family currently rear 150 crossbred calves annually, which are brought on to sell finished at between 17-24 months, depending on the breed and growth. They aim to achieve 300-330kg deadweight.

The first two weeks of calf rearing management is the most critical, this is when mortality rate can be high as the calf will experience stress from moving onto a new holding, a change in their living environment and a new feeding regime.

At Graianfryn, the project aims to develop and improve the current calf rearing system through design and adaptation of the existing shed, together with modifying the calf journey towards weaning to improve animal welfare and reducing the use of antibiotics on farm. Gerallt has adapted the existing housing through the inclusion of straw bale bunkers within some pens for added

warmth and draught protection and addition of pen enrichment, in the form of hanging rubber stars and boat buoys. The plan for the project is to monitor the impact of these different inclusions on calf daily live weight gain, health and welfare.

In addition, calf movement and temperature data are collected and monitored through calf tag technology and when abnormalities arise, alerts are sent to the farmers phone via an app. Housing temperature and humidity sensors are also used to monitor the environment of each individual pen to aid management decisions.

For more information and to follow the our farm's project development, please visit the Farming Connect website.



LOCATION:
Llanfachraeth,
Anglesey



FARMER:
Gerallt Jones



FARM:
Sector: Red Meat
Farm size (ha): 119
Livestock numbers:
500 sheep 280 cattle

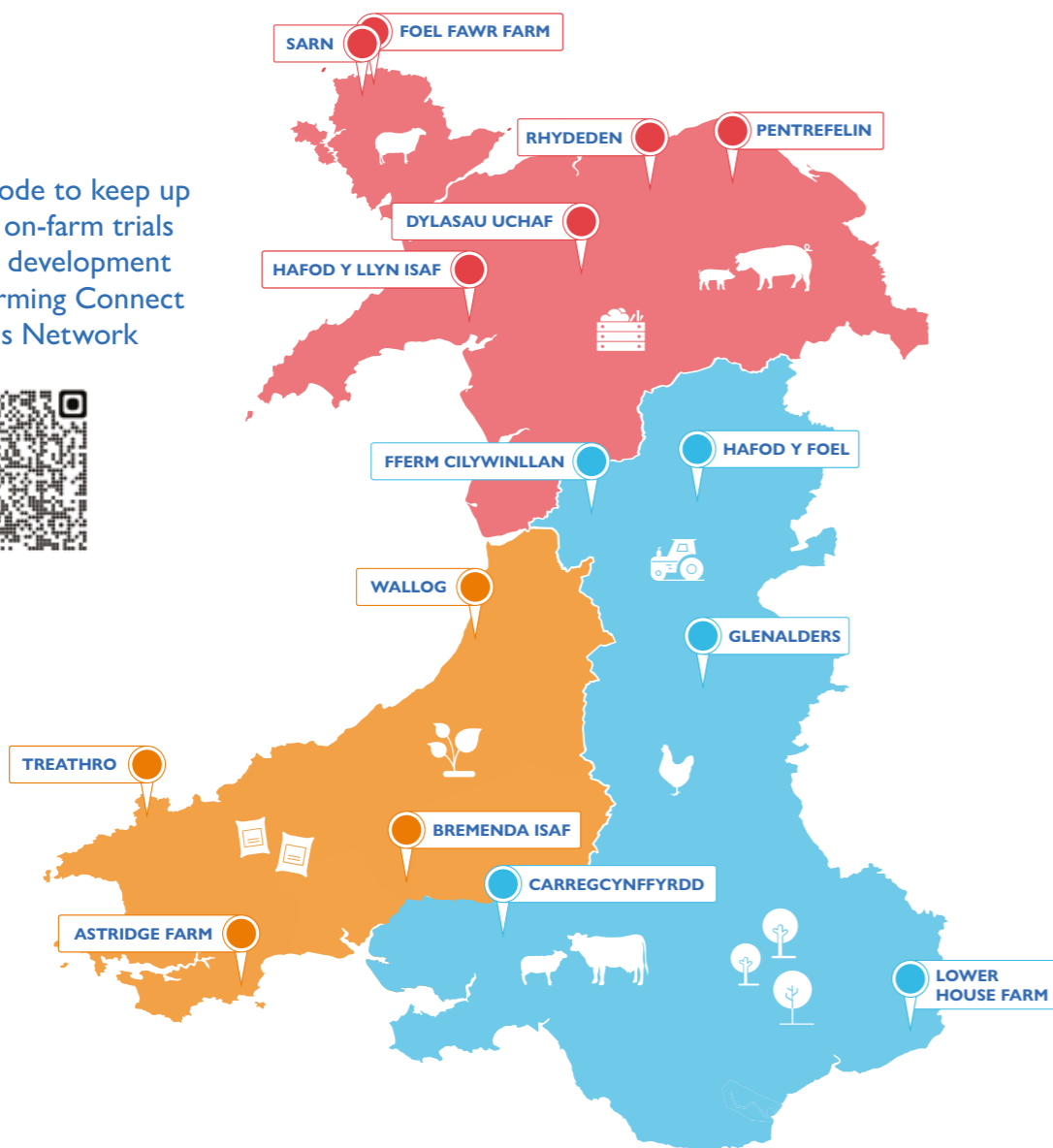


THE FARMING CONNECT OUR FARMS NETWORK IS EXPANDING!

Fifteen new farms from across Wales have joined the Farming Connect Our Farms Network, taking the total up to 30 farms. The new additions to the network include beef, sheep, dairy, poultry, mixed and horticulture farms, who will run on-farm trials and projects from incorporating agri-technology, moving towards net zero, data capturing for informing decisions to enhancing habitats, improving animal health and welfare and local supply chains.

Stay tuned to learn more about these farms who will be opening their doors to you over the next year to share best practice and new ideas on the back of their on-farm projects and trials results.

Use the QR code to keep up to date with on-farm trials and projects development across the Farming Connect Our Farms Network



Take advantage of up to 90% subsidised support towards

ANIMAL HEALTH ADVICE AND TESTING

Farming Connect can support animal health advice and testing with your local vet.

Farmers and vets must receive approval from Farming Connect before starting work.

Limited funding available.

A health plan tailored to each business may include:

- › A review of routine veterinary treatments
- › Livestock disease profile
- › Benchmark and identify areas for improvement
- › Advice on improving the health status of all the animals on the farm
- › Biosecurity measures to reduce the risk of introducing or spreading disease
- › Animal welfare
- › Sampling and testing animals to investigate a possible disorder on the farm

For more information contact your local Development Officer, or call the service centre.

 **03456 000 813**

 **gov.wales/farmingconnect**



‘PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE’





LOCATION:
Nantmor,
Gwynedd



FARMER(S):
Teleri Fielden
and Ned Fessey



FARM:
Sector: Red Meat
Farm size (ha): 120
Livestock numbers:
100 ewes &
37 suckler cows

The progression towards a regenerative grazing system

Teleri and Ned are tenants of the National Trust at Hafod y Llyn Isaf and are keen to develop a grazing system that does not require artificial inputs and that works in harmony with the valuable ecosystem on the farm. The site is alongside the Afon Glaslyn and acts as a flood plain for the river resulting in regular flooding incidents throughout the year. The aim of the project is to develop a grazing system that builds organic matter and develops the soil structure to provide year-round grazing for the cattle and is resilient to the regular flooding. They are also keen for their farm to be a haven for nature that can thrive alongside their farming enterprises and any interventions must not be to the detriment of the local fauna and flora.

The starting point is to address the compaction that has built up in the soils from years of poor grazing and cropping management by previous tenants. Holes dug across the project fields highlighted the compaction in the soils and the poor rooting depth. There was also evidence of anaerobic conditions as shown by the rusty and grey colouration in the photo. Infiltration rates were very poor as the water could not penetrate the compacted layer.



The compacted soil holds together in a block. There is very little root penetration through this block.



The soil profile here shows the grey and rusty red colours indicative of anaerobic conditions.



Water infiltration rates were extremely slow because the water could not penetrate the compacted zone.

The project will compare a range of treatments across two fields including:

- sward lifting - a form of non-inversion tillage (Sumo GLS Grassland Subsoiler, Opico Sward lifter or similar). The successful operation of the sward lifter requires the lifting and fracturing of the soil from below the compacted layer.
- 3m Spiral Blade Aerator - designed to be used in summer months where the impact of the blades will shatter the soil and reduce compaction.
- grass harrowing to remove undesirable grasses and dead material followed by overseeding with desirable species.
- feeding cattle with high quality hay from a meadow with desirable species. The hay will be rolled out across the field to promote seed drop which will be trampled into the sward. The cattle will also be trampling the rushes which are dominant across the field.

The aim is to get deeper rooting, desirable grasses and herbs into the sward to begin the process of improving the soil structure, while the sward lifter will hopefully speed up this process. The aim is to avoid the use of chemical interventions, ploughing and fertilising but assessments will be made to see if the soils would benefit from lime or gypsum.

In early November 2023, a comprehensive set of soil measurements, using the SoilMentor app, were undertaken to act as a baseline for the project and these measurements will be repeated throughout the project to see if improvements are being made. Assessments included rooting depth, earthworm counts and Brix percentage. The Brix percentage is a measure of the light refracting through dissolved solids and sugars, taken using a hand-held refractometer. It provides an indication of the health of the plants and regular sampling will be taken throughout the year to look at patterns of plant health. The list of measurements advocated by the Soilmentor app is comprehensive and the aim will be to see which provide a useful measure for Teleri and Ned, allowing them to focus on fewer, more meaningful indicators going forward.



Hafod y Llyn Isaf



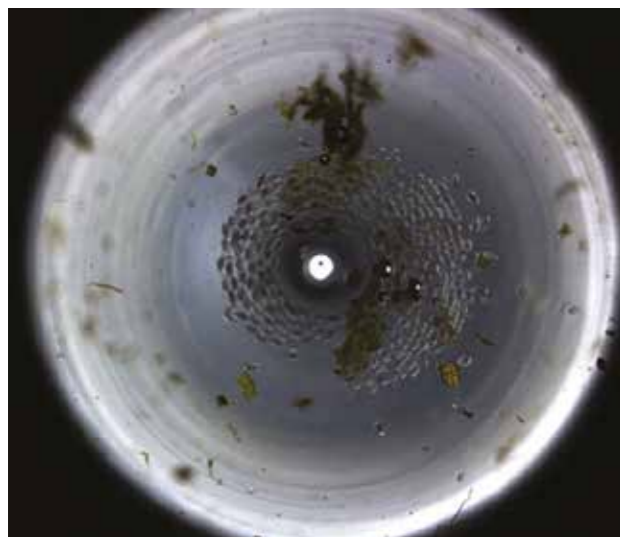
How well is your wormer working? Test don't guess!

Testing for anthelmintic resistance is a vital part of any sheep health plan. Internal parasites are one of the most common and important diseases that livestock farmers have to deal with on a daily basis. It has been widely reported that resistance in wormers used for sheep is now widespread, with a 2015 study finding 60% of farms having resistance at some levels to all three of the common wormer groups (1BZ, 2LV, 3ML).

Farming Connect has launched the Welsh Anthelmintic Resistance Status (WARS) project, working with 40 Welsh flocks to gather data to determine the current levels of anthelmintic resistance on sheep farms in Wales.

The work will involve a comprehensive Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test (FECRT) on 5 different wormer groups -

- **GROUP 1-** BZ - Benzimidazoles / 'White Wormer'
- **GROUP 2-** LV - Levamisole / 'Yellow Wormer'
- **GROUP 3-** ML - Ivermectin / 'Clear Wormer'
- **GROUP 3-** ML (long acting) - Moxidectin – (e.g. Cydectin, Zermex)
- **GROUP 4-** AD - Monepantel / 'Orange Drench' - Zolvix
- **GROUP 5-** SI Derquantel, 3-ML Abamectin (Startect)



Samples of eggs will also be sent for molecular speciation to determine which species (if any) are surviving treatment.

Image 1 - Worm eggs under microscope

How is the data collected?

TEST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mob faecal sample is collected by the farmer and sent to Techion Labs to check if the FEC count reaches the project threshold. • If worm count is over the agreed threshold, sampling work can proceed.
TREAT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This project will test the efficacy of 5 wormer groups. Each treatment group comprises of 20 lambs. • Individual faecal samples are collected. • Each group will receive an oral dose, animals are clearly identified according to their treatment group.
TEST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day 7 - Individual faecal samples collected from the Group 2-LV Levamisole lambs. • Day 14- Individual faecal samples collected from Group 1-BZ, Group 3- ML and Group 4- AD.
CALCULATE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following the DrenchSmart Laboratory protocols, drench efficacy will be determined and presented as a percentage for each wormer group. • $FECRT(\%) = 100 \times (1 - (\text{arithmetic mean of post-treatment FEC}) / (\text{arithmetic mean of pre-treatment FEC}))$
PLAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On completion of the work, each farmer will receive a detailed report which outlines the results, they will be encouraged to discuss with their own vet to feed into their animal health plan. • The project results will be shared anonymously with other farmers in Wales

Investigating anthelmintic resistance should be undertaken within every flock, due to various benefits:

- Saves money and labour time by avoiding the use of ineffective drenches and the need for repeat treatment.
- Using drenches that work will improve the health and production of your animals.
- Continued use of an ineffective drench carries a high risk of accelerating drench resistance development. Resistant worms do not die but carry on to breed.
- Knowing how well different wormer groups work on your farm, helps when choosing which wormers to buy.
- Remember, long before clinical (visible) signs of worm infection occur, there have already been significant production loss.

We need to move away from regular blanket treatments for worms, as this is only accelerating the speed of resistance and costing the UK livestock industry £3.15 million.

HOW CAN FARMING CONNECT HELP YOU?

- ✓ **Advisory Service** - Apply for funding to undertake a Faecal Egg Count Reduction Test on your farm.
- ✓ **E-learning** - Learn more about Anthelmintic Resistance in sheep from the comfort of your home.
- ✓ **WARS Project** - Once the final results are published in autumn 2024, these will be available on the Farming Connect website.

For more information on Farming Connect services please visit our website or contact your local development officer.

 **Local Development Officer**

 **03456 000 813**

 **gov.wales/farmingconnect**

Young entrant helps pig farmers solve succession dilemma

A new share farming agreement on a Carmarthenshire heritage pig farm has provided an exciting business opportunity for a first-generation farmer and a succession strategy for the owners.

Hugh and Katharine Brookes had spent six years establishing their Mangalitza herd at Penlan Farm, near Cenarth, building up a strong order book with top London restaurants among their customers.

But with their children not interested in taking over the business from them one day, it's future was uncertain.



Alice Bacon with one of the pigs

"We knew we had a really good business, a business that has legs," says Katharine.

"It has real potential for growth, but because of our stage in life we felt that we were probably not the right people to do that."

Share farming is a route they had not considered until they were made aware of the Farming Connect 'Start to Farm' initiative.

This service is designed to pair up landowners who are looking to step back from the industry with new entrants, providing funding for business planning and legal guidance.

"We had an initial meeting with Wendy Jenkins, of CARA, and Nerys Llewellyn Jones of Agri Advisor, facilitated through Farming Connect," Katharine explains.

"We wrote the specification and were about to do a national search when it dawned on us that we knew the very person who had all the qualities we had listed in that specification."

That person was Alice Bacon, who helped them out with feeding the herd once a fortnight.

She lived in Clynderwen, a 30-minute drive from the farm, and had always had an interest in agriculture, she was even renting a smallholding until 2021.

"The reason we knew she was the stand-out candidate was because she is someone who uses her initiative, for example when a water trough is broken or the pigs are in the wrong pens, we had seen that for ourselves," says Katharine.



Katharine Brookes, Alice Bacon and Hugh Brookes

They approached Alice and she was delighted to be given the opportunity.

"It had never felt like work, working with the pigs," she says.

Farming Connect helped to facilitate the agreement, which was signed in April 2023.

This agreement sees Alice working 30 hours of unpaid work a month on the farm and 40 hours of paid work. In return for the unpaid work, she acquires a stake in the ownership of the herd.

By 4 April 2024 she will own 9% of the stock, and 49% within five years.

"At that point we will look at how we move the business over to Alice completely so that she becomes the sole owner," Hugh explains.

Both parties feel that communication is key to making a share farming agreement work. There are formal meetings every two months and issues are also addressed as they arise.

"I met some people at a Farming Connect Business Bootcamp who had done a bit of share farming and it hadn't worked for them but I can now see the reason for that was because of poor communication," says Alice.

"Communication is key. If something is not working, it's really important to address it otherwise it is never going to work out in the long term."

Alice, who was also selected to take part in the Farming Connect Agri Academy last year, has brought fresh ideas to the business while she has gained important knowledge from Hugh and Katharine.

Hugh and Katharine don't believe they would have transitioned into share farming without the support of Start to Farm.

"We needed that hand holding as we were going along," says Hugh. "The people we worked with through Farming Connect made us take a hard look at the future of the business and its options, they definitely gave us confidence."

For more information on the **Start to Farm** programme and the support available on farm succession visit the website or contact **Eiry Williams** on **07985155670** or email **eiry.williams@menterabusnes.co.uk**

Have we got up-to-date information about **YOU** and **YOUR BUSINESS**?

- ✓ We are updating records for all our registered farmers and growers
- ✓ If we don't have up-to-date information, you could be missing out!
- ✓ All records are confidential and securely stored on our database

We want to make sure you are benefitting from the wide range of support services, events and training options we can offer you, your family and any PAYE workers.

THEY ARE ALL FULLY-FUNDED OR SUBSIDISED BY UP TO 80%

- Have we got your current address, email, landline and mobile contacts?
 - Have the key sectors you work in changed in recent years?
- Have you diversified into any new areas of working that we don't know about yet?

Once we know your interests, we can keep you up to speed with all our latest projects and news to help you and your business prepare for a more sustainable and profitable future.

Let's make this easy...

- ✓ Call our Service Centre team on **03456 000 813** to update your records over the phone
- ✓ Scan the QR code to choose a convenient time and date for you and one of our team will call you.



GENETEG
GENETICS

Some of the members of the Welsh Sheep Genetics Programme

Welsh Sheep Genetics Programme Scotland study tour broadening horizons for Welsh sheep farmers

Thirty-four farmers were given the opportunity to visit sheep farms in Scotland during a two-day study tour in December 2023 as part of the Farming Connect Welsh Sheep Genetics Programme.

The objective was to exchange knowledge by visiting sheep farmers who were pushing boundaries by harnessing innovation and adopting alternative farming practices within their livestock-based systems.

The first stop during the tour was 630-acre Southfield Farm, Hawick, where the Innovis nucleus flock is located. Innovis types bred at Southfield include Abermax, Aberfields and Primeras.

Run by farm manager, Hamish MacDonald, the production of performance-recorded forage-based sires for commercial production are at the forefront of operations at Southfield. Research is also a key priority, with an ambition of becoming net zero in future.

A feed efficiency trial is currently underway at the site. The aim of the trial is to determine the feed efficiency of lambs, collecting data on their ability to convert each kilogram of feed consumed into

daily liveweight gain. The trial is also exploring the relationship between genetics and feed efficiency.

The group also learned about financial gains which could be achieved by performance recording. For example, increasing kilograms produced per ewe, finishing lambs off grass, and reducing days to slaughter are all achievable methods of reducing production costs, as well as lowering the farm's carbon footprint.

Farmers also visited Sion Williams at Bowhill, part of the 202,000-acre Scottish Buccleuch Estate. 5,500 Scottish Blackface ewes form the sheep enterprise, with 300 ewes' performance recorded. Technology plays a fundamental part in the daily running of the farm, which includes biomass and an anaerobic digestion plant.

The tour concluded with a visit to Orton, near Penrith, to Jim Beary who runs a 1000-acre farm on a contract partnership basis. Jim has taken proactive steps to transform the farm's previous 'traditional farming' model by introducing regenerative farming, driving sustainability. By making key changes to ewe breed and focusing on genetics, Jim has managed to reduce the sheep enterprise' production costs by 70%.



MENTORA
MENTORING

Holly Blockley, George Sturla and Sam Pearson

Farming Connect helps young couple expand their meat box range

Selling beef and lamb via meat boxes with guidance from a Farming Connect mentor is helping new entrants to livestock farming reap a premium price for their stock.

George Sturla and Holly Blockley run a flock of 100 Lleyn-cross ewes on land at Holywell, Flintshire, tuppung the flock to home-bred Beltex rams.

They also have a herd of 12 Aberdeen Angus suckler cows, and are introducing Longhorn genetics for the first time this year to produce superior beef.

To increase the profit margin in their business, the couple have been selling lamb direct to consumers in meat boxes branded as Beeches Meats since October 2022.

“There had been several times when I would go to the mart and think the lambs should have made a better price than they did so we decided to have a go at direct sales,” George explains.

This proved to be very successful and they were keen to expand the business.

They accessed the Farming Connect farmer to farmer mentoring service and were matched with Sam Pearson, a Welsh beef and dairy farmer whose key specialisms include direct sales and marketing.

Sam visited the couple at The Beeches and provided what George describes as “invaluable guidance and support.”

“Sam has given us some excellent ideas to follow up and examples of other established businesses to research as we discussed with him how we could expand our range by including beef.”

These mentoring conversations gave George and Holly the confidence to go ahead with developing their direct meat sales business. They report that sales have been very strong.

“We are starting to get customers from further afield, sending boxes recently to Peterborough and Cornwall, using wool to insulate the boxes to keep the meat cool,” says George.

Although he says he would have expanded the business without the mentoring, having input from someone with expertise in this area has helped to avoid pitfalls and to capitalise on sales.

“I think we would have given it a go ourselves, but having Sam as a mentor has definitely given us confidence to go ahead with making these changes,” he says.

Sam discussed options for websites and using social media and how to communicate with customers.

George has also attended Farming Connect Knowledge Transfer events to improve his practical on-farm skills, which includes Master Sheep and Master Grass courses, and he’s a member of a Farming Connect sheep discussion group.

They have also taken advantage of the Advisory Service to further improve their flock performance by looking at trace elements status of the farm and having a supplementation programme developed by a specialist adviser. George has also accessed funded advice to soil test his fields and obtained a full Nutrient Management Plan that gave recommendations on improving PH, P and K soil whilst reducing fertiliser usage.

“We are so lucky in Wales to have their service,” he says.

Although George didn’t grow up on a farm, his childhood summers were spent helping his grandfather and uncle on their farm in North Wales.

He later graduated from the Royal Agricultural College with a degree in Rural Land Management and worked at Strutt & Parker.

But he left his career in land management to work full time in agriculture, alongside a full time job as a sales representative for a livestock feed company.

George also secured a place on the 2023 Farming Connect Agri Academy Business & Innovation programme, which has further increased his knowledge and business confidence and formed an invaluable support network of like-minded young people.

The highlight was an overseas study visit to Ontario, where the group was given an insight into different farms and systems, ideas that George will implement in his own business going forward.

“We also visited a farm in Leicestershire that had 2,000 ewes and is selling all its lambs through its own butchery, I learned a huge amount from that visit.”

Einir Davies, Head of Skills at Farming Connect said -

“it’s great to see George and Holly accessing so much of what Farming Connect has to offer, as are many other entrepreneurial young business owners, who are keen to find their niche and make their mark”.

Farming Connect is dedicated to supporting the next generation in Welsh agriculture and offers a bespoke package of support to give them the skills, networks and confidence to succeed in their business and career goals.

Get on the farming ladder!

Services for new entrants include –

- **Start to Farm** – support to apply for, develop and formally establish a joint venture or apply for a tenancy
- **Agri Academy** – the flagship personal development residential programme
- **Mentoring** - receive up to 15 hours of free one-to-one support
- **Facilitated family meeting** to talk about succession with your family
- **E-Learning** - Short online modules to be completed in your own time
 - ✓ Collaborative and Share Farming
 - ✓ Farm Business Diversification
 - ✓ Planning and Finance
- **Accredited Training Courses**
- **Business Planning Advice**

 **Local Development Officer**

 **03456 000 813**

 **gov.wales/farmingconnect**

Ready to take your career to the next level? It's as easy as 1 2 3!

SGILIAU A
HYFFORDDIANT
SKILLS AND
TRAINING

Are you interested in....

- ✓ Learning how to work or run your business more efficiently, more safely and more sustainably?
- ✓ Improving your knowledge of topics ranging from animal health or land and business management to social media marketing and machinery handling?
- ✓ Becoming more profitable?

You can achieve this and more. Career progression, a better work/life balance and a lighter workload could be yours for the taking! Farming Connect's comprehensive training and lifelong learning programme – which is all either fully-funded or subsidised by up to 80% - could unlock a better, brighter future for you, your family and any workers on PAYE.

If you work in the farming or horticulture industry and you're registered with Farming Connect, we can help you increase efficiency, sustainability and profitability. For more information visit gov.wales/farmingconnectskillsandtraining or contact your local Farming Connect development officer.

1

Register with Business Wales/ Sign on Cymru to complete a Personal Development Plan (PDP). Unique to you, this confidential online plan will help you set long and short-term goals, assess any skills gaps and identify new training opportunities.

2

Select your next training course and apply for funding (up to three courses per year). Alternatively, sign up for one or more of our fully-funded e-learning modules. Many are now a mandatory requirement before you can apply for accredited courses. With all training broadly categorised under 'Business', 'Land', 'Livestock' and 'Machinery', your personal development journey is set to soar!

3

Storfa Sgiliau is your essential, secure online data-recording tool. Automatically updated with all your Farming Connect activities it includes a 'My Space' section for all other skills and achievements. Use it as evidence for Farm Assurance schemes, retail contracts, an up-to-date cv and more.

Let's do our bit and go greener

Farming Connect...the magazine for farmers & growers in Wales...is going online!

This January – March 2024 issue is the LAST one to be mailed out in the post to all registered individuals.

From now on, each issue will be a digital version that will be sent to your inbox each quarter.

You can also view all editions of the magazine at gov.wales/farmingconnect



Prepare **AHEAD** to reduce lambing losses

SGILIAU A
HYFFORDDIANT
SKILLS AND
TRAINING

The majority of lambing losses occur within the first 48 hours after birth. Specialist farm vets at the Builth Wells Veterinary Practice advise that it's essential to put in place a flock health plan, including a health and feeding regime, **BEFORE** lambing starts.

Here are some of the Builth vets' top tips for critical issues.

LOW BIRTHWEIGHT

Lamb survival is highly correlated to birthweight, so sub-standard ewe condition prior to mating or poor nutrition late in pregnancy can lead to low lamb birthweight and an increased risk of disease and mortality.

Regular body condition scoring, correct rationing and using metabolic profiles can improve the percentage of lambs born at the optimum birth weight. Blood test ewes and analyse your scanning results, either undertaking training or working with your vet to decide on a plan of action.

Ensure the ewe is in optimum condition ahead of lambing by testing forage. A forage-based diet can vary hugely depending on the ratio of protein to energy content. The quality of forage as well as the amount fed are both key contributory factors.

LOW COLOSTRUM INTAKE

Ensure lambs receive the adequate **QUANTITY** and **QUALITY** of colostrum **QUICKLY**. 'Passive immunity' is the only way to ensure they are resistant to infection. They need 50ml/kg bodyweight ideally within two hours of birth and a total of 200ml/kg over the first 24 hours.

Inadequate or low-quality colostrum intake can result in health issues such as watery mouth, septicaemia, navel ill and joint ill.

POOR HYGIENE

Ensure all feeding and tubing equipment is regularly cleaned using a recommended disinfectant. Replace overly worn items and maintain hygiene best practice with prompt navel dipping.

NB Routine antibiotic treatment contributes to antimicrobial resistance and is not appropriate to control neonatal infections. The sheep industry has pledged to stop blanket treatment of lambs.

DISEASE AND DYSTOCIA

Infection is a key contributor to lamb loss, accounting for 32% of all lamb mortality.

Data shows that dystocia (20%) is the second main cause of death and when combined with infection, accounts for a total of 52% of overall lamb mortality. Help reduce the risks by following the advice in this article.

SPECIALIST SUPPORT AND TRAINING

Farmers registered with Farming Connect can apply for specific technical advice and/or a flock health plan, subsidised by 80%, through the Farming Connect Advisory Service.

There are also numerous sector-specific training and e-learning options that can help you acquire the knowledge you need ahead of your next lambing season. Booking one of Farming Connect's fully-funded animal health workshops, provided throughout Wales by approved vets and specialists, have proved beneficial for many livestock farmers.

Relevant topics for sheep farmers include:

- Abortion and Nutrition (*Part 1*)
- Post-Lambing Losses from Birth to Weaning (*Part 2*)
- Animal health improvement in your flock

For dates and locations visit gov.wales/farmingconnectevents or follow Farming Connect on Facebook and Instagram.

Farming Connect's popular e-learning courses include numerous sheep-related topics ranging from lambing basics, problems and survival to anthelmintic resistance, body condition scoring and ewe nutrition as well as docking, fostering and castration.

For further information visit our website or contact your local Farming Connect development officer.



ACADEMI **AMAETH**
AGRI ACADEMY
2024

Application Window is now open
and will close on **15 April 2024.**

Rhaglen Busnes ac Arloesedd
Business and Innovation Programme

Rhaglen yr Ifanc
Junior Programme



More information is available
through the following QR code

**PARTNERIAETH
DIOGELWCH AR
FFERMYDD CYMRU**

**WALES
FARM SAFETY
PARTNERSHIP**

Farm Health and Safety WORKING FROM HEIGHTS

1. All those working at heights must be trained and competent.
2. If you are not trained or don't know what equipment to use then you should engage a specialist roofing contractor.
3. Try to avoid or minimise the time spent working at heights whenever possible – even short duration work needs the right planning and access equipment such as mobile elevating work platforms, scaffolds and fall prevention devices.
4. Reduce the risk of falls from large machinery such as combines by always using the access ladders, steps and/or standing platforms provided by the manufacturer



www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture



There is 80% funding available towards Working from Heights training course through Farming Connect. Scan the QR code for more information.



Farm Safety Wales



@farmsafetywales



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