

# ALTERNATIVE INCOME FOR FARMS

## SHEEP MILKING

### INTRODUCTION

Despite the high numbers of sheep in Wales, producing sheep milk is not commonplace. As we learn more about the benefits of sheep milk, and its high solids content (5.4% protein and 7% fat), the demand for the produce is expected to increase.



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- *What is essential to start milking sheep?*
- 1. **A MARKET** - There is currently no contract available in Wales for sheep milk. You can either form a partnership with a processor to use the milk, or aim to add value on the farm. Cheese is traditionally the main product from sheep milk but it is also possible to produce yogurt, ice cream and 'kefir', or sell as fresh milk in bottles. In contrast to cow's milk, people with lactose intolerance are able to enjoy sheep's milk. It can also be frozen and therefore stored as it is naturally homogenised.
- 2. **DAIRY SHEEP** - The breeds include 'Eastern Friesian' from Germany, 'Lacaune' from France, 'Friesland' and 'British Milkshopeep' from the UK and 'Sarda' from Italy. One farmer from Wales is trialling milking 'Lley'n' sheep.
- 3. **EQUIPMENT AND BUILDINGS** - Compared with cattle, establishing a sheep milking unit can be relatively inexpensive. It is possible to purchase or build a simple milking stage which can hold between 6-10 sheep at the same time. Purchasing basic equipment such as a pump, small tank, milking buckets and milking clusters can be done from specialist companies. The sheep can be housed in a general agricultural shed and can be managed intensely indoors or grazed throughout the year.
- 4. **LAND** - Wales' farming traditions mean that farmers have an excellent understanding of sheep grazing needs. Hay and/or silage will be needed to support the flock over the winter.
- 5. **INFORMATION AND DAIRY SHEEP HUSBANDRY SUPPORT** - Good information about nutrition, breeding, welfare and health of dairy sheep and the support of an experienced vet are essential. Be aware of the health status of any sheep purchased, and contact your local veterinary practice to ensure that you respond to the needs of the flock.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

An enterprise can be started on a small scale of 20-40 sheep with each of them producing 200-400L of milk per year on average, with a lactation period of 180-250 days.

### Establishing Costs

- ✓ On average **£3-5k** would be sufficient to start a basic bucket milking system on a farm that already keeps sheep. It would be necessary to increase the budget up to **£100k** to install an up to date milking parlour for a flock of a few hundred. Further investment should be allocated to process the milk on farm. Extra income can be made by selling ram lambs and by selling the wool. It is estimated that a flock of **250-300** with a stable market can offer a good living for a farmer.

*\*information correct at time of publishing 02/2018.*

### ..... Friesland Sheep

### Next Steps

- Discuss and learn from others within the sector.
- Develop/identify a market.
- For further information and to move forward with your idea contact your local Development Officer or contact us on the details below.



### Contact us on:

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