



# Farming Connect Management Exchange

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South East of France

Sheep Milking

26<sup>th</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2019

## 1 Background

I'm a 23-year-old farmer's son from Llanerchymedd, Anglesey. I keep a flock of 200 breeding ewes and help my father out on the family farm but there isn't enough land to provide a livelihood for the both of us. I graduated with a degree in Agriculture from Aberystwyth University last year and since then I have been working full-time on a local dairy farm. However, my dream is to set up my own business and I'm currently looking into sheep milking. I believe there is a gap in this market especially considering that people's eating patterns are changing and that consumers are ready to try new things, whether it be out of curiosity or for health reasons. Few people milk sheep in Wales at the moment which means that I must look beyond Clawdd Offa for information. This is the main reason for my visit to France where sheep milking is relatively common and where farmers add value to their produce by producing cheese. I also believe that diversifying into sheep milking is a good idea as it's a relatively low investment, generates significant gross margin and due to the fact that the market for sheep's milk produce is growing. My main aims during my exchange are to gain a better understanding of the sheep milk market and ewe management within a productive year.

## 2 Itinerary

### Day 1 & 2:

I spent the first two days on Brigitte and Philippe Cordier's farm in Chateau Arnox which is located around 75 miles north of Marseille. They milk around 50 Lacaune ewes that produce 50 litres of milk a day. It was interesting to see that the sheep were only milked once a day. The milk is used to produce a variety of cheeses (hard and soft) and yoghurt, all processed on the farm itself. I had a chance to milk the sheep and help with the cheese making process. Their produce is sold locally. Brigitte is responsible for the day-to-day management of the flock whilst Philippe works as an Agriculture lecturer. I'm deeply thankful to the family for their hospitality, friendship and patience with my poor French!





### Day 3:

The second farm was in Le Chaffaut Saint-Jurson. This business was somewhat bigger with 70 Lacaune dairy ewes and 100 Alpine goats as well as a slightly more modern milking parlour. Once again, all produce was processed on farm in order to produce cheese which added value to the milk. This was a typical French farming business and the French are used to buying a wide variety of local cheeses.

Farmers tend to milk in the morning and produce cheese for the rest of the day. They also fed sainfoin grass and lucerne to the sheep without milk.

## 3 Next steps

1. Research further into buying dairy sheep in Britain including visiting a farm in the North of England.
2. Look at milking parlour costs.
3. Find a market for the produce.
4. Determine if selling milk to someone else to process is the best option or process it myself, bearing in mind that costs are naturally higher at the start.
5. Ask companies who produce and process dairy produce if they would be interested in producing products from sheep's milk.
6. Buy dairy sheep from France in the summer.



## 4 Key messages to the industry

Due to the lack of dairy sheep farmers in Wales and England, information and practical experience is scarce but my key messages are:

1. In my opinion, the Welsh climate is better suited for dairy sheep than the North of France as we can produce top-quality grass.
2. You don't have to milk sheep twice a day.
3. You must have a market for the milk before you start producing.

4. Most farmers milk their sheep for 7 months of the year.
5. Milking 50 sheep in France provides a living for one person.
6. Cheese and yoghurt are the most common produce.
7. There are sheep's milk produce in our supermarkets, mainly yoghurt and cheese, but how much do they educate and urge consumers to buy unusual produce?

