Abstract

Two groups of comparisons were made between rare and minority British breeds of sheep, and numerically stronger genotypes. In the sire breed trial, Shropshire (n=5) and Ryeland (n=4) rams were compared as sires of meat lambs with Suffolk, Oxford Down, Texel and Dorset Down rams at two farms (total lambs marketed: n=732). At the first farm, lambs sired by the Ryeland and the Shropshire made poorer prices than those sired by the Suffolk and Oxford Down, because of small size and low price per kg respectively. At the second farm, the Ryeland and Dorset Down performed similarly in respect of days to slaughter, carcase weight and sale price. The Shropshire conferred rather poorer
conformation on lambs than the Suffolk. In the maternal breeds trial, commercial crossbred (control) ewes ($n=84$) and ewes of rare breeds (Cotswold $n=10$; and the primitive breeds Manx Loghtan $n=17$; Hebridean $n=26$; Shetland $n=16$) were mated with terminal sires on four farms. Lambs from Cotswolds reached slaughter condition earlier than control lambs, but were not as remunerative. Lambs from Hebrideans made a better price, per kg and per kg of ewe body weight, than control lambs from commercial crossbreds, but took longer to reach slaughter weight. Generally the primitive breeds produced lighter lambs but their production of lambs per unit of ewe body weight was no different from that of the commercial crossbreds. In this preliminary trial, economic advantages of using rare breeds were not demonstrated, but neither were there obvious economic penalties.

Keywords
Rare breeds; Performance; Conservation; Sheepmeat

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