

# SCANNING

At the most recent meeting of the Scottish Sheep Strategy Group, the advantages and disadvantages of using scanning alone as a selection tool were discussed.

The group were aware that some people would favour the idea of scanning potential replacements as an aid to final selection, compared with a full recording process. As with all systems there are valid arguments both for and against this method.

The pros for scanning, which were highlighted were -

1. Difficulty of recording birth data at lambing time removed.
2. Scanning would only be required once a year, and as long as the timing was approximately the same each year comparisons could be used both for annual selection and as a rough guide to whether or not the particular flock is progressing satisfactorily towards the goal set by the farm.
3. It is a known fact that it takes more energy to produce 1kg of fat than it does to produce 1 kg of red meat, so if the lamb with a propensity to be fatter is eating the same as the lamb with the propensity to lay down muscle, it will be unable to grow as quickly.
4. Scanning both stock tups and the female replacements means that breeding groups could be selected to complement muscling traits.
5. The biggest animals do not always have the biggest eye muscle, so scanning is an improvement on visual selection alone.

The disadvantages highlighted were -

1. Using scanning alone is a fairly blunt instrument and it could be expected to favour older single lambs. Twin lambs, gimmers lambs and later born lambs could be discriminated against, and in order for the selection process to be as fair as possible, records of the dam's performance and information about the lamb would really need to be kept. This would make the system fairly cumbersome and would still involve collecting a lot of data. Without a specially designed system this data could soon become unmanageable.
2. Scanning alone does not take into account environmental factors, and lambs reared on certain hefts or fields could perform quite differently to others in the flock. This could tend to distort the results.
3. There is a cost implication, it is expected that there would be a minimum charge of around £160 per flock, and for small flocks this could prove quite

expensive, bearing in mind scanning alone could tempt people to work on single trait selection.

The group decided that if people show an interest in scanning alone, they should not be discouraged from using technology, but the risks should be pointed out to them. Anyone who is considering this option should be encouraged to record fully as the figures are more reliable, and have authenticity. If, however, they remain unconvinced about full blown recording they should be given all the help and advice they need for using scanning only. There are independent scanners in Scotland who would be prepared to do the work, and the Strategy could point people in their direction.

Any comments or experience which people have, and would like to share, would be very welcome on the Bulletin Board.