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Joe Henry graduated from Glasgow Veterinary School in 1998 and joined a mixed practice in Alnwick. After five years, he spent a year in New Zealand before returning to the UK and becoming a partner in 2005. In 2007, following a practice merger, he moved 14 miles inland to be based at Rothbury where his day-to-day work and health planning is helping reduce the impact of disease on the sheep and beef farms in the surrounding area.

Joe achieved the Certificate in Sheep Health and Production in 2011, is married with three children and runs a farm comprising 200 ewes and 90 cattle.

# Improving flock performance by reviewing the production year

When your clients' ewes are pregnant during the winter months, it is a good time to review the flock's overall production performance during the previous year. Helping sheep farming businesses identify losses and reducing them is a big step towards greater profits.

One of the biggest drivers for profit in a sheep flock is output as measured by kilogram of lamb produced per ewe tupped. This is made up of numbers of lambs reared and their weight. To do this, compare last year's scanning results with the numbers of lambs sold and kept for replacements.

Unfortunately, the average lowland flock only rears 145 lambs per 100 ewes in England (EBLEX Stocktake, 2013) despite most 'scanning' near to 200. This figure has not changed much for 30 years and represents a huge opportunity for the veterinary profession to lead their sheep clients to greater production and profit – especially if we consider the comparison of how much the yield per dairy cow has changed in the same 30-year period?

## Cornerstones of a health plan

Identifying where conception-to-sale losses occur is one of the cornerstones of a flock health plan. On most farms there is room for improvement and thus an increase in profit.

Ideally, the percentage of lambs sold/kept should be increasing every year. The best farm in our practice reared 184 per cent lambs last year; thereby proving what can be achieved. If their business is not improving, that on other farms will be and so theirs will, in effect, be going backwards.

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the dairy farmer as production is in the tank each day; whereas the sheep or beef farmer has to work harder to extract the information. It is there, however, and a great deal of the information has to be recorded as a legal requirement – numbers of lambs moved off farm to sales and when are recorded in the movement book, for instance.

Each farm's targets are different; they need to be realistic for that farm and set up in conjunction with the farmer.

Lameness control is vital and impacts all stages of sheep production and should be two per cent or below. If foot rot is the major cause of lameness, implementing a five-point plan can maintain lameness at less than one per cent (Clements R, 2014). Contagious ovine

digital dermatitis has been eradicated from flocks with good biosecurity in our practice by flock treatments with tilimicosin.

## Know about nutrition and parasites

Before mating, the ewe's body condition score is important with targets being set for tupping – aim for 3.5 in lowland ewes, 3 in upland ewes and 2.5 in hill ewes. These can be measured by the veterinarian when doing pre-tupping trace element blood testing for cobalt, selenium, copper and iodine status. Correct ewe body condition at tupping has a carry-over effect on subsequent weaning weight (EBLEX KPI, 2014) and the only costs are those associated with management. During the ewe's mating period, grass needs to be



\*Suggested Personal & Professional Development (PPD)

PRODUCTION

