

innovis

Monday 21 September 2009

New contract offers a sustainable future for Aberdale hill producers

Hill producers throughout Wales have welcomed the new contract to produce Aberdale crossbred ewes in 2010. The contract, which is part of the commercial cross-breeding programme developed by the Aberystwyth –based Innovis, offers producers guaranteed prices for Aberdale ewe lambs one year in advance.

Geraint Davies of Pantglas Farm near Trecastle leases Aberdale rams to put over 200 of his Brecknock Hill Cheviot ewes and for him, the new Innovis contract takes into account the quality of the Aberdale Brecknock crossbred ewe lambs that he produces by paying a premium above the SQQ for lambs above 34kg. "This year, when market prices for breeding stock and store lambs has been very high, the contract price agreed in 2008 has not yielded the return that we'd hoped for but the new pricing structure will enable me to sustain Aberdale ewe lamb production and to continue to take advantage of the buoyant slaughter prices for the excellent wether lambs."



Since 2005, Innovis has developed a breeding programme for commercial sheep which features an Aberdale nucleus flock based on British Texel genetics that also carries the naturally occurring Inverdale prolificacy gene originally discovered in flocks in New Zealand where it is now extensively used. The Aberdale rams are supplied on contract to selected hill farms to produce crossbred ewe lambs in an arrangement which offers producers a guaranteed price for the crossbred ewe lambs. All selected ewe lambs are then moved directly off the farm with no deductions or levy whilst ram/wether lambs which are faster growing, easier finishing with better carcass specification than the purebred or Longwool alternatives are retained by the producer. Around 85% of lambs from Innovis contracted hill flocks hit UK retail specification.

Aled Jones of Berllan Helyg near Llangollen also welcomed the new contract terms which will enable him to sustain profitable Aberdale production from his Beulah ewes. According to Aled, "Although the contract payback has not compared as favourably to the market prices as had been originally expected this year, the ram lease fees mean that I will save considerable amount by not having to buy a ram at today's high prices." Having been

an Innovis producer since 2006, Aled has also seen the benefits of working in partnership with Innovis during the FMD crisis in 2007 when hill producers benefited from the guaranteed minimum price when market prices were through the floor.

According to Innovis' Dewi Jones the new arrangements are all part of the long-term partnership approach which Innovis is pioneering in order to offer sheep breeders profitability and security. "In 2008 we offered our producers a minimum price to help ensure a guaranteed income for crossbred ewe lambs which was not affected by market fluctuations and coupled this with a variable 'top-up' payment linked to market prices for ewe lambs weighing from 34 to 40kgs. Likewise the agreed sale price for our crossbred ewe lambs was fixed to the SQQ price and so as the market prices rose to the unusually high levels this autumn, we were left with no room for manoeuvre. Hill flocks are one of our most valuable genetic resources and our UK hill ewe breeds play a pivotal role in our breeding programme. So as partners, we have listened our producers and revised our terms for 2010 to reward them for the quality of lambs that they are producing year on year.

The Aberdale rams carry the Inverdale gene which naturally increases ovulation rates in their female offspring by 0.6 lambs. The rams are used over selected hill ewes to produce the Aberdale crossbred, which is smaller and hardier than other traditional crossbreds and they are naturally prolific. This offers commercial lowland clients a ewe which can consistently achieve a lambing percentage of between 180% and 200% without the need to use the best grass for autumn flushing. The direct supply of crossbred ewe lambs from Innovis' hill production offers breeders a reliable source of replacements and aims to establish a system which builds relationships and trust throughout the supply chain.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
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