

# *Charollais Proves Popular in Northern Ireland*



## **Maureen Cowan reports on 24 years of the breed in N.I.**

Deliberating on writing an article to promote the Charollais Breed in Northern Ireland I was carrying out some research for the report, when it struck me that really Northern Ireland as a Region portrays a very positive picture for Charollais.

Every breed can find someone willing to promote their breed, with most stories following a similar scenario; however as all good businesses know the success of any product has to be measured in its sustainability and profitability.

The Charollais Breed has been established in Northern Ireland for twenty four years, discerning decisions by dedicated breed members has ensured the continuous growth of the breed in the commercial market. The initial perception of the Charollais lamb as lacking in wool and hardiness has been banished, we have

seen how through careful breeding the Charollais has developed a hardier exterior to cope with the Northern Ireland elements and yet maintained that all important fast growth rate and superior muscle for which Charollais are renowned.

Charollais have brought so many beneficial assets to the sheep industry that they are now much sought after, this fact was endorsed last year with a virtual clearance at all Charollais Sales.

A spokesperson from one sale yard which has a high throughput of sheep stated that "Charollais X lambs are in big demand by our buyers because of their high kill out and the quality of the finished product, unfortunately we don't see as many Charollais X lambs as we would like as most Charollais producers sell direct to the factory".

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Butcher’s lamb Competitions have always been a great advertisement for the breed and present a varied illustration of the commercial use of the breed. The September Competition winner in Ballymena market was David Jackson from Broughshane.

Mr Jackson runs around 300 Texel and Suffolk X ewes on his County Antrim farm. He originally purchased Charollais rams to use on his ewe lambs but was so impressed with their weight gain and ease of management that he now uses Charollais across his Flock.

Several producers sell direct to their local butchers. The general consensus from these butchers was that they like to buy Charollais because “their lean quality meat, exceptionally long loin and lighter bone means that there is less wastage and more profit. With the higher prices now being paid for lamb it is more

important than ever for a butcher to be discriminating when purchasing lambs to ensure he generates a profit. Charollais lamb is no doubt a valuable commodity for the butcher”.

This year we bought a foster ewe from a hill farm situated on the foothills of the Mourne Mountains, travelling to the farm in the snow just after Christmas we thought we wouldn’t make it. What did surprise us was seeing a field of Charollais X lambs on the snow covered hill behind his house. On further investigation we discovered that this sheep farmer ran a Dorset flock which he aims to lamb three times inside two years; he found that by using a Charollais ram the quick growth of the Charollais X lamb meant that he was getting his lambs away that bit earlier thus giving his ewes a break before putting them back in lamb, the Charollais lambs were also easy lambed and therefore not taking as much out of the ewe. He was very enthusiastic about the Charollais Breed, his lambs are sold direct to the factory where they are achieving top grades; using Charollais has made a huge difference to the profit margins on his sheep enterprise.

It is these positive stories around the region which reflect the success of Charollais, these along with the increasing demand for Charollais at sales and the standard of the commercial lambs in the fields and in the markets which demonstrates the very progressive picture of the Charollais Breed in Northern Ireland. They say a picture speaks a thousand words, when you can see Charollais lambs of this quality grazing in the fields around the countryside it makes you proud to be a Charollais Breeder.