



**Suffolk cross ewe with
Charollais lambs in
Pembrokeshire**

The farming enterprise comprises of 36 acres of owned land with a further 27 acres of rented ground. His sheep now number 300 ewes, up 50 ewes from last year, through the introduction of home bred mules; bred off draft welsh ewes, and home bred Suffolk cross mules.

“We’re now at the point where we have enough ewes” says Gareth, “so I’ve been looking for something to improve the end product”. Unsure which terminal sire to choose Gareth decided to buy one of each type that took his fancy rather than a group from one breed. In the summer of 2013 Gareth bought a Suffolk, a Texel, a Beltex cross Charollais and a pure bred Charollais.

So, how did the Charollais ram fair when compared to his counterparts from other breeds?

**“He was the stand out
ram”**

“He was the stand out ram” reports Gareth, “we were so convinced by the job the

Charollais takes pole position in ram trial.

Emyr Hughes updates us on results of an on-farm ram trial in Wales.

Twelve months ago we reported about a unique ram trial being carried out by Gareth Thomas, a young shepherd attempting to make his sheep business more profitable. He embarked on this unique trial, in order to assess which terminal sire will suit his sheep system best of all. Pitting several different terminal sire breeds head to head, with “no hiding

places” and everything fully recorded through EID.

Gareth (25) farms in conjunction with his mother and father near Letterston in Pembrokeshire. All three also work full-time, with Gareth working on a local dairy farm. He also has a keen interest in training sheep dogs for trials and sale.



breed was doing for us we mated that ram to over 90 ewes in 2014 and bought another for a further 60 ewes.” “Half of the flock now go to the Charollais tup”.

One of the main reasons Gareth gives for this, is the rapid growth rate of the Charollais sired lambs.

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“We are going to try lambing in two batches this year, lambing 60 ewes much earlier in January”.

These ewes will be lambing indoors, in the same way that the ewes have always been lambed previously, and then turned out at 24hrs old. Gareth is clear

“People told us that the Charollais couldn’t cope, that it was too soft!” “This is nonsense; picking the right ram with the correct head cover, the Charollais will stick the weather as well as anything else”.

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These early born lambs will then be creep fed and pushed on for the early spring lamb market, something that Gareth has not done before. But the growth rate of the Charollais has meant it’s something that he now thinks is achievable to make full use of the market peak.

Lambing an early group will then allow all of the remaining ewes to be lambed later on in March, including 90 ewes put to two Charollais rams and others put to the Bluefaced Leicester to produce mules and some to a Suffolk for further female replacements. Gareth hopes that these lambs will then be finished off grass and sold throughout the remainder of the year.



Suffolk Cross ewe turned out after 24 hours with Charollais cross lambs.



Suffolk Cross ewe penned with her new-born Charollais cross lamb.



Previous years have seen lambs taken right through over the winter to sell as hoggets. But the goal now is to finish all lambs before the Autumn.

“The Charollais ability to finish off grass should mean that all lambs will be away by the Autumn”. Also, lambing and finishing a percentage of lambs early should leave more grass to finish the second bunch without any feed. Gareth’s new system model highlights the versatility of the Charollais.

He is clear “Charollais lambs grow and finish fast with a good carcass on the creep system or just off grass.” “It’s why we bought another one”.

Gareth is also full of praise for many of the other traits of the Charollais breed. Firstly, the “Get up and go” as he puts it, of the lambs.

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Suffolk Cross ewes waiting to lamb.

are up and suckling in no time” “Having lively lambs instead of lazy lambs just makes things so much easier”. The ease of lambing is also something that Gareth states reduces stress when lambing large groups of ewes together.

Another quality Gareth is keen to talk about is the working ability of the Charollais rams themselves. “They serve lots of ewes, they are very active” with one of the Charollais rams covering 90 ewes last year.

So impressed is Gareth with the merits of the Charollais that he is sure that it will remain part of

the system for the foreseeable future. “As long as the breed produces good carcass sheep that grow quickly it’s a clear winner here” he says. It speaks volumes for the breed that when matched up against its closest rivals it has proved once again it can come out on top.

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Charollais Down Under
It is now 10 years since I