

DAVID COOPER CASE STUDY

[Pull out quote: “The 20 tag semi automatic RapID Multishot tagging system has speeded up tagging for me to 300 lambs in under one hour.”]

Working alone with livestock can be challenging but for David Cooper from Tardoes Farm, Muirkirk, Ayrshire, it’s second nature. The farm is home to a flock of 3000 ewes, which he looks after almost entirely on his own.

“I’ve developed a simple system and I do everything I can to make the most of the natural environment, the hills are mainly heather and the land is peaty so ewes need to be self sufficient to thrive here. It’s a low cost model so I carry out all routine duties with the sheep, including lambing, by myself,” says Mr Cooper.

Arriving at Tardoes, a 474-acre former dairy farm, in 2004, Mr Cooper brought 450 ewes from his family’s mixed farm in Dartmoor, Devon. He was 17 years old and says he settled quickly in his new home.

He immediately started improving the holding, which had previously been used as an open cast coalfield and has now fenced the whole farm, singlehandedly erecting 40,000 metres of post and net over the last 12 years.

Ewe survival on the hill

A neighbouring farm was purchased in 2006 and more land in 2010 and 2013 extending the unit to 5000 acres so the flock has grown to 1200 Herdwick and 1800 Welsh Mountain ewes. The breeds are very hardy and well suited to the wet climate and rough hill land, everything is bred pure and an ideal scanning result is a single as the ewes must survive on the hill without silage, no supplements, blocks or licks.

This year scanning was 110% so all singles are returned to the hill and the twins come down to the in bye land where the grass is good enough for rearing twins. Lambing starts on the 25th April and despite the large numbers involved

it's a very manageable time for Mr Cooper who has a couple of hard working sheepdogs and one quad bike that he relies on to carry out the daily checks.

"I control prolificacy by breeding only from singles and I always select to breed from ewes with good mobility, sound mouths and with no feet problems, so when it comes to lambing the ewes are in good condition and capable of delivering their lambs with no intervention," he comments.

Dosing and vaccinating

In keeping with the rest of the operations the marketing of the lambs is also as straightforward as possible. The lambs, which are marketed through Farm Stock Ltd, are ideal for the light lamb market and achieve an average carcass weight of 12kg.

Single-handed tagging

Applying slaughter tags to the finishing stock has become a whole lot faster and easier since Mr Cooper started using the Allflex Rapid Multi Shot Applicator. The lambs go straight from the farm in big batches so tagging a lorry load in one go is a normal occurrence and achieving this quickly is now possible with the Rapid Multi Shot.

He says: "The 20 tag semi automatic tagging system has speeded up tagging for me – using the old single tagger was always slow but this is so fast that I have tagged 300 lambs in under one hour. The tagger is easy to squeeze and very reliable, it uses a strip of 20 tags, which speeds up the process, and I can reload it easily too. The blade cuts each tag and the good design means that the tags line up every time, reducing the risk of ear damage."

Building the livestock system at Tardoes from scratch has taken careful planning and management, Mr Cooper attributes a positive mental attitude to his success so far and is keen to improve performance and expand further. He concludes, "The Allflex Rapid Multi Shot Applicator is an innovation that saves

me time and money, adopting new technology and smart equipment helps me to run my business as cost effectively as possible.”

Testimonial comment

David Cooper, Muirkirk, Ayrshire. 5000 acres and 3000 Herdwick and Welsh Mountain ewe flock.

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