

Nicola Bowers Scotland



A Masters Student at the University of Edinburgh, Nicola Bowers is studying Applied Animal Behaviour and Animal Welfare. For her thesis she chose to look at 'The Effect of Difficult Births on Lamb Survival'. To gather data she worked with organic sheep farmer Richard Pickup of Craigadam Farm, Kirkcudbrightshire in South West Scotland. Nicola said:

"To complete this project I needed to carry out an extensive research project. I was delighted when Richard agreed that I could work with him and his flock of grey face and texel crosses. We looked for a system that would enable me to complete data collection and analysis to the highest level and also provide really useful information on the performance of the flock. Select Sheepware did both of these. It allowed me to capture all vital data and also to record comments on individual animals. Using the reports I can therefore look at both statistics and any unique information that has been recorded.



Nicola recording data with the Psion reader

With 850 ewes lambing, a real consideration was entering data quickly and the handheld reader is ideal for this. Due to the size of the flock we used two readers and I found it to be very straightforward to use, taking very little time to get to grips with.



All lambs are tagged at 48 hours old

It was essential that I was able to record details such as the mothering ability of the ewe and any problems. The farm culls the majority of ewes that prolapse, so again all of this was recorded and will be used as part of the final culling decision. These were all features that we looked at when selecting the software to use.

150 lambs are kept each year as replacements with a further 100 being bought in. Having now used Select Sheepware Richard believes it will be very helpful in deciding which lambs to retain. I am pleased with how practical Select Sheepware is, yet the level of detail that can be recorded and subsequently analysed really met the needs of this extensive piece of research."

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The Findings - The Abstract from Nicola's Thesis



Lamb mortality is a major concern in sheep farming all over the world. The aim of this study was to address whether or not suffering from a difficult birth increases the risk of mortality, not specifically from dystocia but all causes at all ages prior to weaning.

The study was conducted on an organic farm in Southwest Scotland using a total of 839 Greyface and Texel x Greyface ewes. Data was recorded for 1295 lambs and 77 of these died during the recording period (5.95%).

All lambs were scored on their presentation, the level of birthing assistance and birth difficulty, vigour within 5 minutes of being born and sucking ability. Birth weight, litter size, order of birth and age of dam were also recorded and these were found to have significant impact on mortality.

Performing autopsies on the deceased lambs showed that the main causes of death in this study were dystocia and infection.

This study found no significant connection between those lambs that suffered a difficult birth and those that subsequently died, and indicates that a difficult birth only affects mortality within the first 0-3 days after birth.

