Introduction to the UK sheep industry

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Leading the way in Agriculture and Rural Research, Education and Consulting

Who am I?

Post-Covid!

UK sheep industry built on wool production
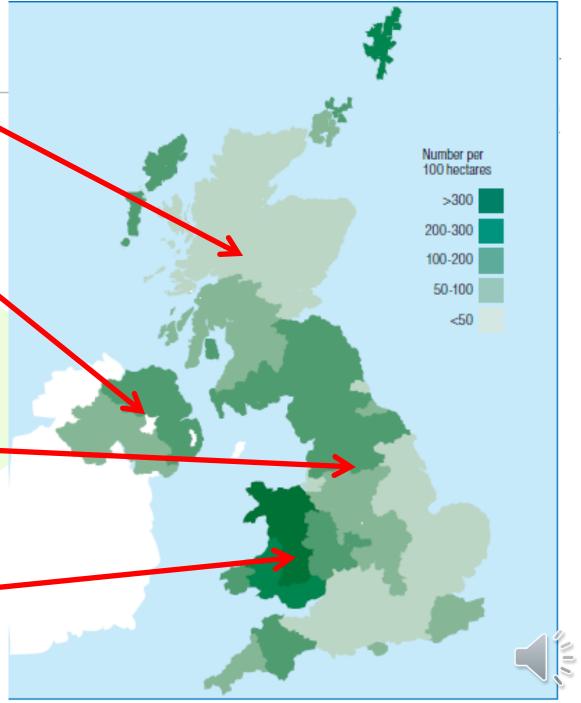
Scotland 3.3M

N. Ireland 0.9M

England 7M

Wales 4.3M
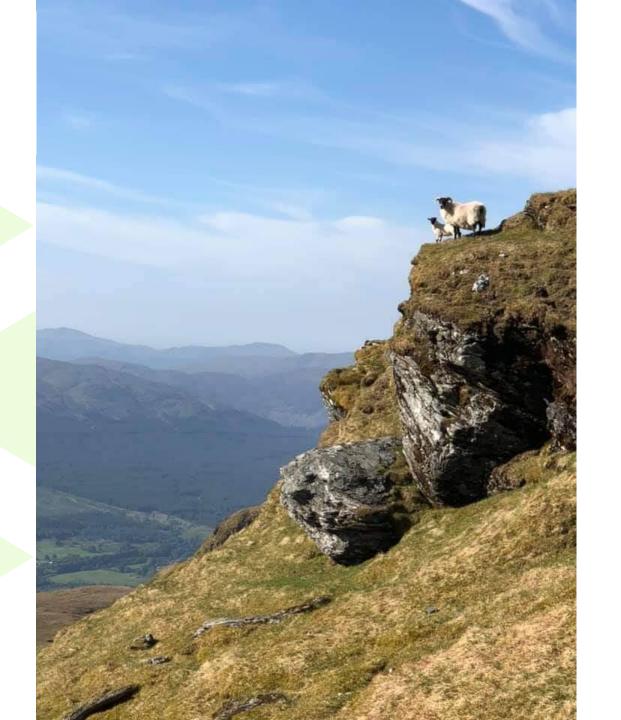
Number per 100 hectares

>300
200-300
100-200
50-100
<50

Source: Defra

'Stratified' UK sheep industry

Hill and Mountain

Uplands

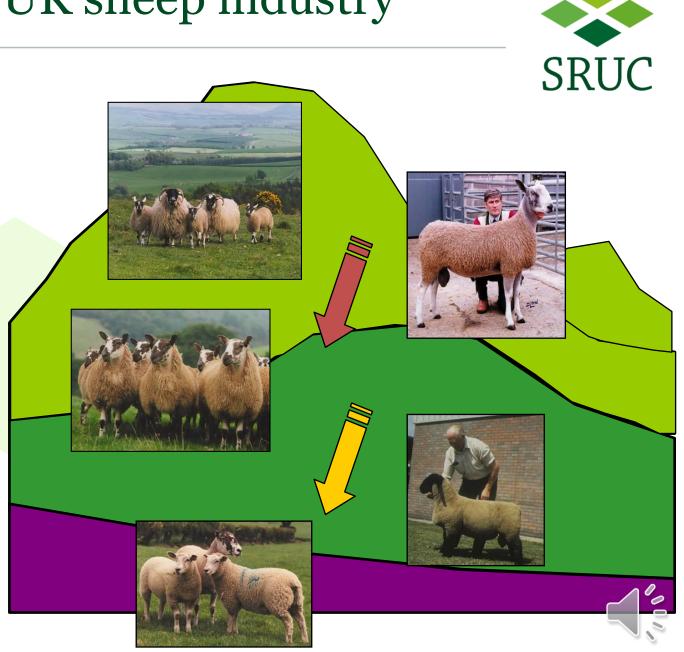Lowlands

Scottish Blackface

Welsh Mountain

Swaledale

'Stratified' UK sheep industry

Hill and Mountain

Uplands

Lowlands

Prolific 'longwool' breeds

Longwool Ram Breed
Bluefaced Leicester

Longwool Ram Breed
Border Leicester

F1 sheep
(cross between hill breeds and prolific breeds) are the most numerous breeding ewe in the UK

Crossbred Ewe Breed
e.g. Scotch Mule

(Bluefaced Leicester x Scottish Blackface)

Crossbred Ewe Breed
English mule / 'North Country mule'

Crossbred Ewe Breed
Welsh mule

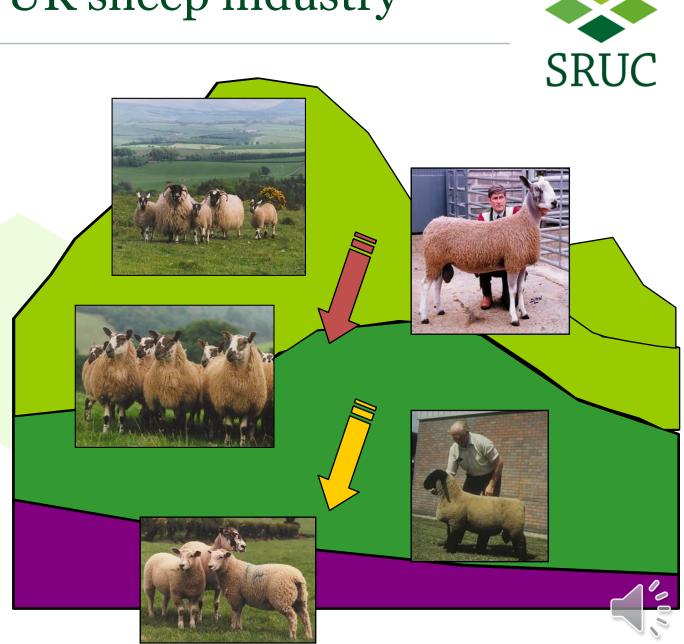Bluefaced Leicester x Welsh Mountain, Beulah or
Welsh Hill Speckled-face

'Stratified' UK sheep industry

Hill and Mountain

Uplands

Lowlands

Meat sheep breeds

Suffolk

Texel

Charollais

Advantages of this structure

- Breeds and their crosses fit well to their location and system of production

- Use of specialised males and females – breed improvement occurs in purebred

- Crossing system maximises use of 'hybrid vigour'

Disadvantages of this system

- Supermarket nightmare !
  - Very diverse end product

- Capture of the value of genetic improvement is complex

- Biosecurity compromised with purchase of animals from other farms / markets

UK sheep industry is very diverse

- 83 'Purebreeds'
- Many more crosses and composite 'breeds'

Only ~19 breeds have >10K

Native breeds

Jacob
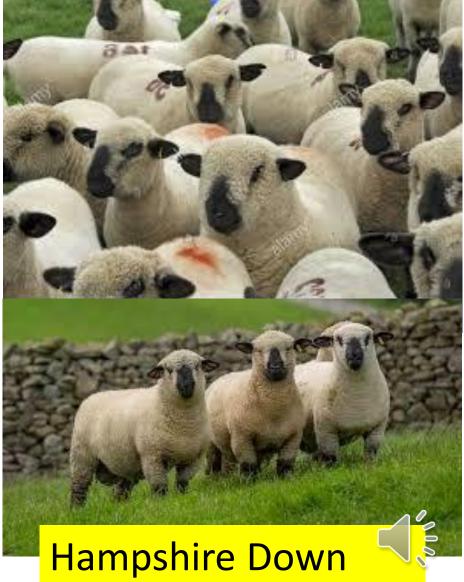
Native breeds

Wensleydale

Dorset

Native breeds

Devon Longwool

Hampshire Down

Cute imports!

Valais Blacknose
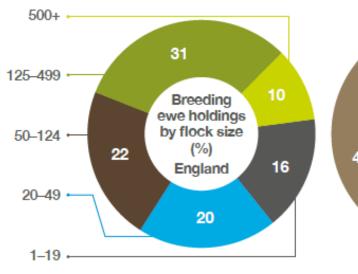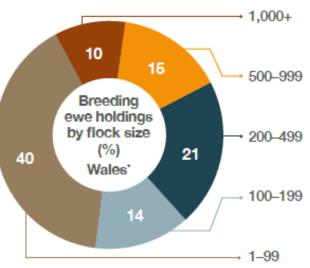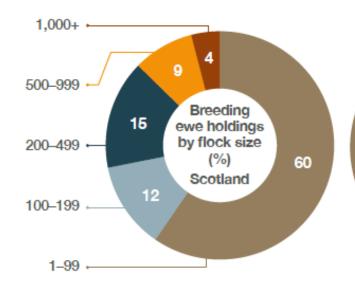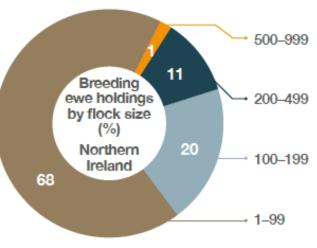
% flock size by region

Meat production = main product

UK marketing chain 2018 AHDB, 2019

Ave carcass wt (lambs) 19.3Kg (dead weight) AHDB, 2019

Sheep slaughterings

Total – 14.4 million head
Clean sheep – 12.8 million head
Ewes and rams – 1.6 million head

Value – £1,191 million

Liveweight sales – 52%

7.6 million head

£624 million

Deadweight sales – 48%

6.9 million head

£568 million

Slaughtered production

288,600 tonnes

Meat exports

Total – 87,300 tonnes
Fresh/frozen – 86,800 tonnes
Processed – 500 tonnes

Total value – £368 million

Wholesalers/ depots/traders

Meat imports

Total – 91,900 tonnes
Fresh/frozen – 90,500 tonnes
Processed – 1,300 tonnes

Total value – £377 million

Total sheep meat usage

293,200 tonnes

£2,510 million

Genetic improvement - what do we want?
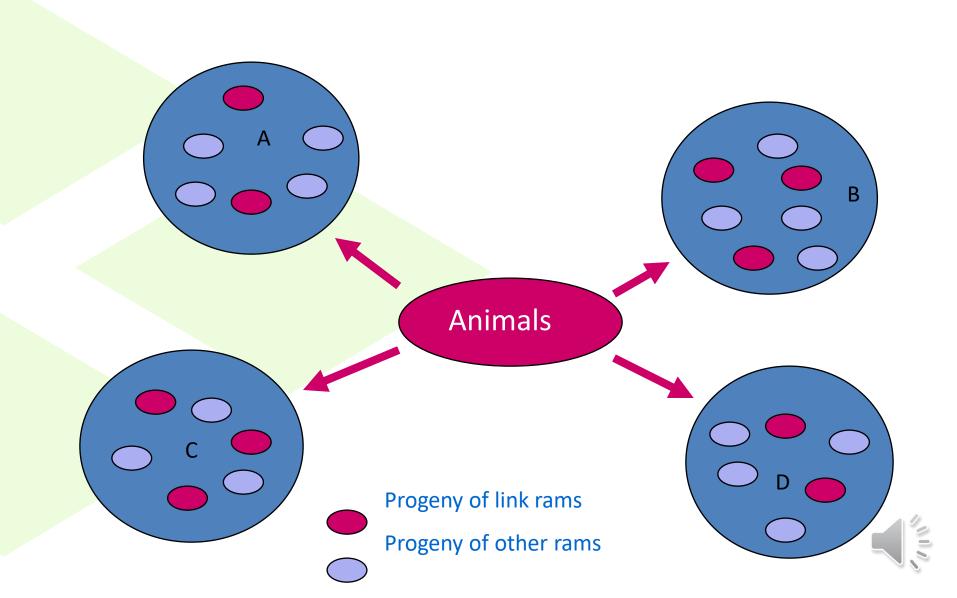
Comparing animals across flocks

SRUC

Statistical adjustments

Parity #

Age of dam

Age of lamb

Farm

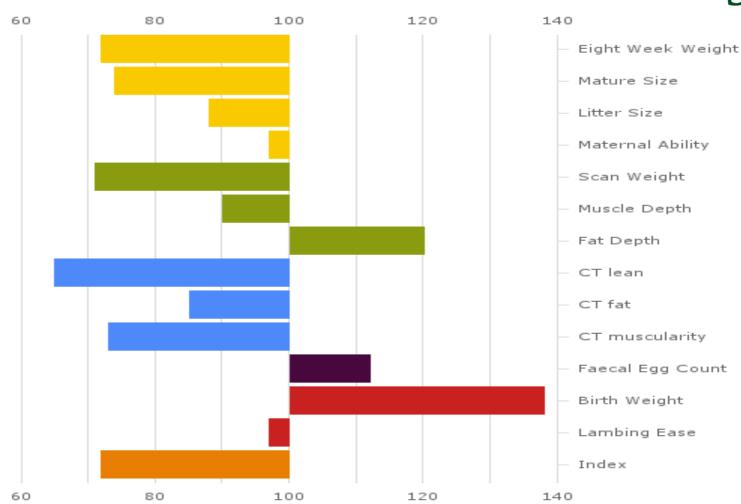Year-month

Single-twin

Sex

(% breed)

Linking flocks using common sires

Animals

A

B

C

D

Progeny of link rams

Progeny of other rams

Estimated breeding values(EBVs)

Performance recording

Data collection

Animal identification

What problems do we have?

Sheep image courtesy of AHDB

.. Probably the same as Finnish sheep farmers!

Disease

££ !

Skilled Labour shortage

Acknowledgements

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