



Resilience and sustainability in sheep and goat farming

Findings from seven UK case studies

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Sheep and goat farmers face challenges including climate change and fluctuating markets and often live in rural areas with limited support networks. iSAGE, an EU project (2016-2020), was set up to help address issues through industry innovation.

In the UK, seven case studies were carried out by ORC with partners, investigating: 1. breeding for natural resistance to intestinal parasites, 2. on-farm use of copper supplements for *Haemonchus* burden in lambs, 3. improving sheep welfare with improved farmer-vet relationships, 4. assessing the benefits of grazing grass-clover or herbal leys, 5. the resilience of breeds and systems to climate change, 6. sustainability tools and certification to increase system resilience, and 7. industry support to increase engagement of young farmers.

Findings included:

1. Breeding for parasite resistance is possible, reducing reliance on anthelmintics.
2. Copper is effective against *Haemonchus* burdens. Workload and cost acceptable, with higher growth rates in supplemented lambs.
3. Flock Health Clubs improve farmer-vet relationships and knowledge, create farmer networks and encourage proactive health management, increasing productivity.
4. Herbal leys produced more forage and lambs grazing them had higher growth rates and lower worm burdens compared to grass-clover leys.
5. Breed is important to farmers but landscape and flock management were more important for managing climate change effects.
6. Public Goods Tool was considered a good entry level assessment of on-farm sustainability whilst Holistic Management training was more in-depth but cost more. Ecological Outcomes Verification certification promotes an economic return but uptake is low in UK.
7. Young farmers on the Next Generation programme (NSA) valued the training, made positive changes to their practice, developed support networks and actively promote the sector.



Weighing lambs before feeding them a copper supplement

FURTHER READING

1. iSAGE Innovation Leaflets: isage.eu/innovation-leaflets
2. Breeding technical projects: signetdata.com/technical/projects
3. Flock Health Clubs website: flockhealth.co.uk/Flock-Health-Clubs
4. Next Generation programme (NSA): nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation