



### Sheep Welfare Scheme: Organic Sheep and Horticulture Farmer, Co. Dublin



The National Rural Network recently met with Pat Bobbett from Lusk, Co. Dublin (August 2021). Pat and his wife Heidi are the owners of Juliasdale Organic Farm, which consists of 14 hectares of permanent pasture which incorporates clover. Pat, who hails from Co. Meath returned from the UK to Ireland in 2006 and wanted to manage his land to complement the surrounding area. During Pat's time in the UK, he had experience on allotments which provided a therapeutic farming experience to people in need, and this is where his motivation to develop an organic farm with a therapeutic focus began, and since then, his love for farming and nature has flourished.

"Farming organically was the only route that seemed most sympathetic with the environment."

Pat participates in the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) and the Sheep Welfare Scheme (SWS). Both these schemes are funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, extended 2022, where farmers receive financial support to encourage the production of organic foods and additional animal welfare measures.



In 2008, Pat erected a large polytunnel to grow vegetables, fruits, and herbs. All of the livestock on the farm are reared within the organic system. An organic butcher processes up to 20% of Pat's lambs annually, all of which are sold directly off-farm as organic produce. "I love being able to grow my food. Everything grown in the polytunnel is fresh, tasty, and wholesome. I am constantly harvesting herbs and salads for dinner, and my family loves it." Pat has also planted a small apple orchard now bearing some fruit on the trees.

Since returning home, Pat has established an organic grass-fed sheep flock of seventy breeding pedigree Lleyn ewes. Land area and farm facilities such as animal housing were limiting factors for Pat; this led to the decision to specialise in producing pedigree stock.

"Breeding pedigrees is a speciality; you have to be interested in the genetics and traits of the breed and target to use rams that will complement the flock, thus hopefully producing lambs that will boast the most desirable traits required from the breed."



The Lleyn sheep originate from the Lleyn Peninsula in North Wales and are medium-sized lowland sheep renowned for their hardiness, prolificacy, easy lambing, strong mothering instinct, milkiness, and easy handling.



Pat lambs his seventy ewes outside in early Spring, "The breed is amazing, they are such low maintenance and produce very hardy lambs; the ewes require little to no handling at lambing. Across the winter, ewes receive additional organic hay and meals to help maintain desirable body condition scores in the weeks leading up to the next lambing. The lambs are up and suckling on the mother within minutes of birth. They suit the system I have to offer."

The SWS is a scheme funded under the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, extended 2022, which provides financial support to farmers for taking extra steps to improve the welfare of their flock. Farmers receive €10 per breeding ewe for completing flock welfare measures.

Pat selected the following options as part of the scheme:

- Scanning
- Mineral Supplementation Ewes Post Mating

Both measures have only enhanced Pat's efficiency at lambing time.

"Knowing how many lambs each ewe is carrying is beneficial; you can supplement ewes carrying twins or triplets to ensure they are receiving adequate energy intakes pre-lambing. Ensuring the ewes have good energy stocks before lambing time prevents them from becoming ill after giving birth. Knowing which ewes have single lambs can save you money as they have reduced energy requirements than ewes with twins or triplets; ensuring these ewes are not overweight at lambing can be a challenge and cause problems."



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Mineral deficiencies within a flock can affect your flock's performance, fertility, and general health. Mineral supplementing post-mating ensures the ewe remains healthy, thus encouraging high conception rates.



Pat plays his part in the community by opening his farm to social farming. Social Farming provides the socially, physically, mentally, or intellectually disadvantaged the opportunity to spend time on a family farm in a healthy, supportive and inclusive environment. He also facilitates school visits and is motivated to educate children and young people about where their food comes from and the value of organic food. "I have always wanted to create an environment that was an interesting place to come to. Watching the plants grow, from planting the seed to harvesting the fruit, is a great sense of achievement, and I want to share that."

The National Rural Network would like to thank Pat for taking the time from his busy schedule to share his story with us.



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