

Buying a Signet Recorded Welsh Mountain Ram

It is important to identify rams with superior genetic merit, as their genes are the only attribute that they pass from one generation to the next.

This is easier said than done, because so many factors influence an animal's appearance – including its age, whether it was reared as a single or twin and most importantly the amount it was fed.

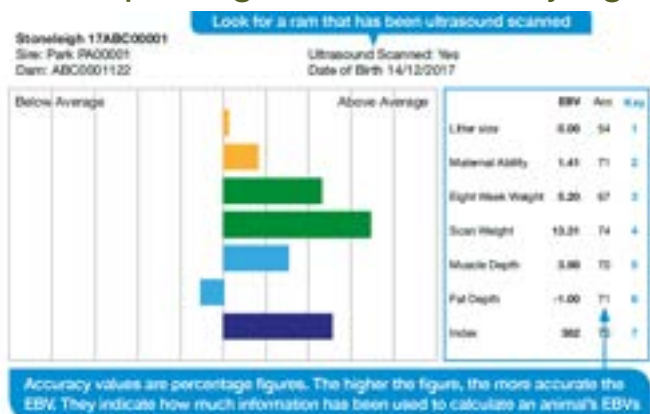
Recording schemes were developed to make the process of identifying superior genetics easier. Records of performance are analysed to tease out the non-genetic influences on an animal's performance so that its true genetic potential can be assessed.



This is important for traits that are visible, such as growth rate and carcass conformation, and absolutely vital when it comes to maternal traits that can't be assessed visually.

Investing in hill rams with superior genetics can realise an extra **£600-£1000** over the life of their progeny. Commercial producers should source Signet-recorded rams with high Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) for traits of importance to benefit from their investment.

Interpreting EBVs when buying a ram



EBVs, Indexes and Accuracy Values are often displayed on sale charts to highlight a ram's breeding potential the central line represents the average level of performance within the breed.

EBVs and Breeding Indexes indicate an animal's genetic merit for a specific trait or breeding objective. Accuracy values indicate how much is known about the animal and the degree to which EBVs might change over time.

Finding information

Sale charts can be freely accessed and printed from the Signet database (www.signetdata.com), via the section 'Sheep Search'.

A Breed Benchmark is also available to ram buyers to help determine where an animal ranks within the breed for a specific trait.

The Signet website also provides lists of sheep that are currently for sale and Flock Finder, a listing of breeders that record their sheep.



Welsh Mountain Breed Benchmark for 2021

EBV	Attribute	Average	Top 25%	Top 10%
Eight Week Weight	Growth to 8 weeks of age	0.31	0.72	1.09
Maternal Ability	Milking ability	-0.01	0.14	0.27
Litter Size Born	Number of lambs born	0.01	0.05	0.09
Scan Weight	Growth rate to scanning	0.74	1.76	2.68
Muscle Depth	Muscling in the carcass	-0.09	0.87	1.14
Fat Depth	Fatness / Leanness	0	0.13	0.24
Hill Index	Overall performance	115	175	192

A New Evaluation for Hill Sheep

In 2020 the genetic evaluation services provided to hill breeds were re-launched with support from The Hill Ram Scheme which is part of the Red Meat Development Programme*,

As a result:

- EBVs have been completely updated, rebased and are now produced on a monthly basis
- Carcass traits, like muscle and fat depth, are assessed on a weight (rather than age) adjusted basis to enhance the carcass attributes of hill lambs
- Breeding indexes have been updated to reflect the economic priorities on commercial hill farms
- New research has been initiated for traits like lamb survival and ewe longevity
- Over 30 new hill flocks have signed up to start recording their lamb crop, increasing the impact of this important work and the choice for ram buyers.

Breeding values have never been more accessible, accurate or relevant to Welsh hill sheep producers as they are today.

Ram Buying Tips

There are a number of factors to consider when buying a ram using performance records:

- Set breeding objectives that optimise your flock profitability
- Talk to the ram breeder about these requirements
- Select rams with the right balance of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) to achieve these objectives
- Review each ram's EBVs using the Signet database and compare them to the Breed Benchmark to identify their strengths and weaknesses
- Buy early to get access to the widest selection of recorded rams
- Look after the health and nutritional requirements of your rams to ensure they have a long productive life.



For more information go to the Signet website www.signetdata.com or email Signet at signet@ahdb.org.uk.

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