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## Background

- Established in the Autumn of 2008
- Part of Teagasc Response to the Malone sheep report
- Objective: establish focal points for implementation, evaluation and demonstration of technology
- Goal to increase the productivity and profitability of the sheep enterprise



## Background

- Initially 3 hill flocks & 4 lowland flocks were recruited
- Farmers selected primarily on the basis of willingness to improve their sheep enterprise and adopt technology
- Each farmer willing to share detailed information about their own flock
- Additional flocks were recruited in 2012



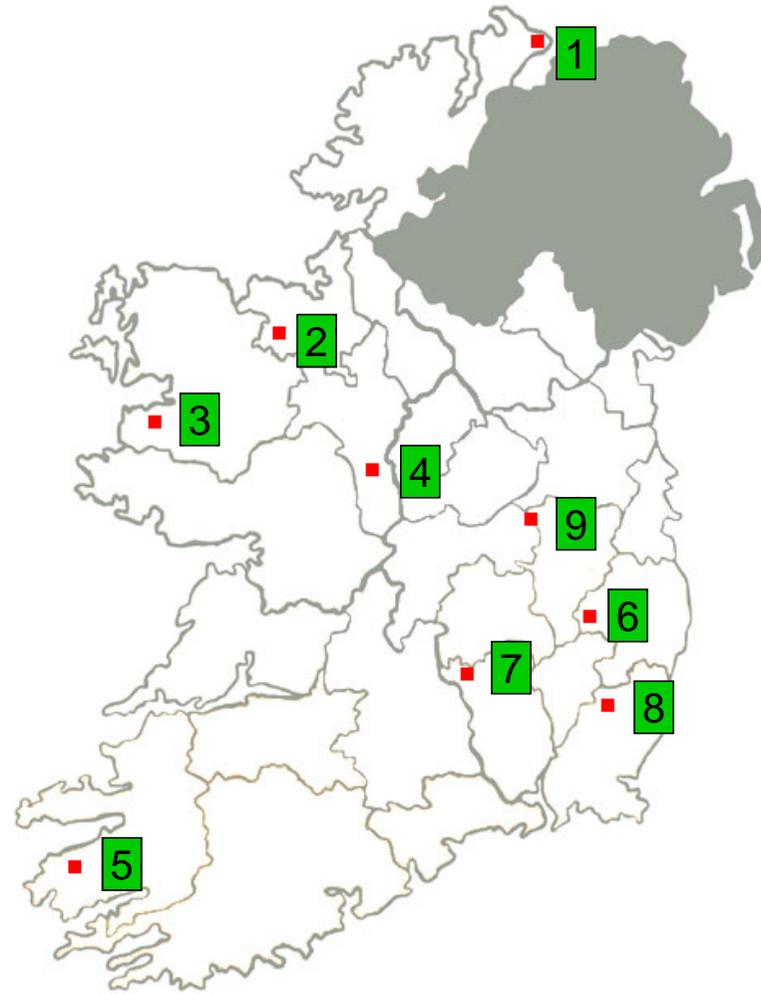


### Hill Flocks

- 1 David Mc Laughlin
- 2 Colm O'Donnell
- 3 James Lally

### Lowland Flocks

- 1 David Mc Laughlin
- 4 John Curley
- 5 Brendan O'Sullivan
- 6 John Kelly
- 7 Brian Nicholson
- 8 John Doyle
- 9 Andrew Maloney



## Farm Plan

- Initial step in the programme to develop a 3 to 5 year plan for each flock
- Plan focused on a number of key areas:
  - Flock size
  - Farm layout
  - Breeding policy
  - Grassland management
  - Parasite control
  - Winter management
  - Overall flock management
- Aim to develop a more productive and profitable system for each flock

## Grassland management

- Vital to improve flock profitability
- Winter Management
  - Closing date
  - Extended grazing
- Matching lambing date to grass supply
- Measurement weekly to make decisions
- Manage to appropriate sward height
- Reducing paddock size
- Reseeding
- Ensure soil fertility is correct
- Improve silage quality



## Parasite control

- Anthelmintic resistance is a serious issue facing the sheep industry
- Evidence for resistance on BETTER farms (*Good et al.2011*)
  - Benzimidazole: all farms
  - Levamisole: 2 farms
  - Macrocylic lactone: no resistance found
  - AAD's: no resistance found
- Aim to implement a more sustainable system of parasite control
- Samples collected fortnightly for FECPAK analysis
- FEC counts used to aid dosing decisions

## Flock productivity - Lowland flocks

	National Average	Season			Target
		2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
Litter size	1.55	1.71	1.77	1.86	<b>1.9</b>
Ewes lambed (%)	92	90.2	93.8	97.3	<b>&gt;94</b>
Lamb Mortality (%)	9	7.8	8	8.5	<b>&lt;10</b>
Lambs weaned per ewe joined	1.3	1.42	1.53	1.66	<b>&gt;1.6</b>

- Output per ewe key driver of profit - Major opportunity to increase
- Considerable improvements in 2 years
- Benefits of breeding policy and better flock management

## Lamb Performance



**Aim to increase lamb performance in a cost effective manner**

## Lamb weaning weight (kg) on Lowland BETTER Farms

Birth type	Season			Target
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
Single	36.5	37.2	37.7	>38
Twin	31.7	32.5	32.8	>33
Triplet	30.5	31	32	>32

- Focused on improving performance from a grass based diet
- Reduced concentrate supplementation
- Lamb performance has increased by 1.2, 1.1 and 1.5 kg for singles twins and triplets

## Flock productivity - Hill Flocks

	Season			Target
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	
Litter size	1.18	1.29	1.32	1.3
Ewes lambled (%)	88.2	79.5	95.9	>92
Lamb Mortality (%)	7.8	10.3	13.1	<10
Lambs weaned per ewe joined	0.96	0.92	1.1	1.1

- National average for Blackface flocks:
  - 0.8 lambs reared per ewe joined
- Improve ewe weight and condition prior to joining
- Guard against ram infertility



## Lamb weaning weight (kg) on Hill Better Farms

### Season

Birth type	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Target
Single	23.9	28.0	27.6	> 21
Twin	20.9	24.1	24.4	> 25

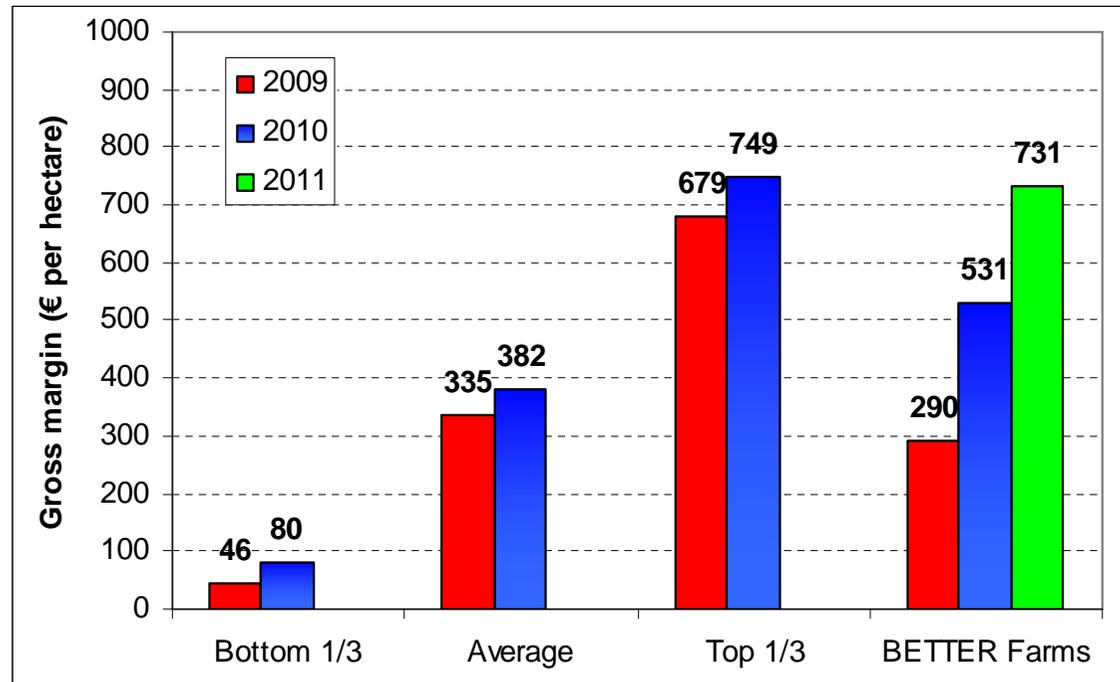
- Focused on strategically using semi-improved areas
- Produce crossbred lambs:
  - 3 - 4 kg heavier than purebreds at weaning
- Lamb performance has increased by 4.1 and 3.7 kg for singles and twins respectively

## Financial performance Lowland Flocks (€ per hectare)

	Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Gross output	857	1051	1271
Total Variable costs	567	520	540
Gross Margin	290	531	731

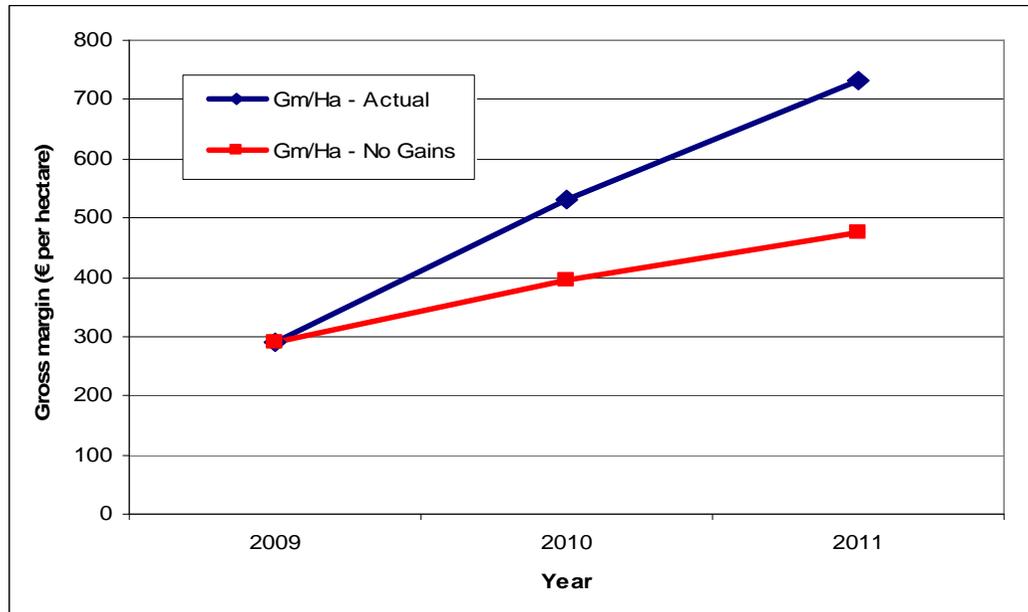
- Substantial improvement in financial performance
  - Gross output has increased by 48%
  - Variable costs have decreased by 5%
  - Gross margin has increased by 152%

## E-Profit monitor comparison – Lowland Flocks



- Year 1 started below E-profit monitor average
- Significant improvements in 2 years – potential to increase further

## Lowland Sheep BETTER Farms - Actual Gross Margin compared to Gross Margin if no productivity gains since 2009



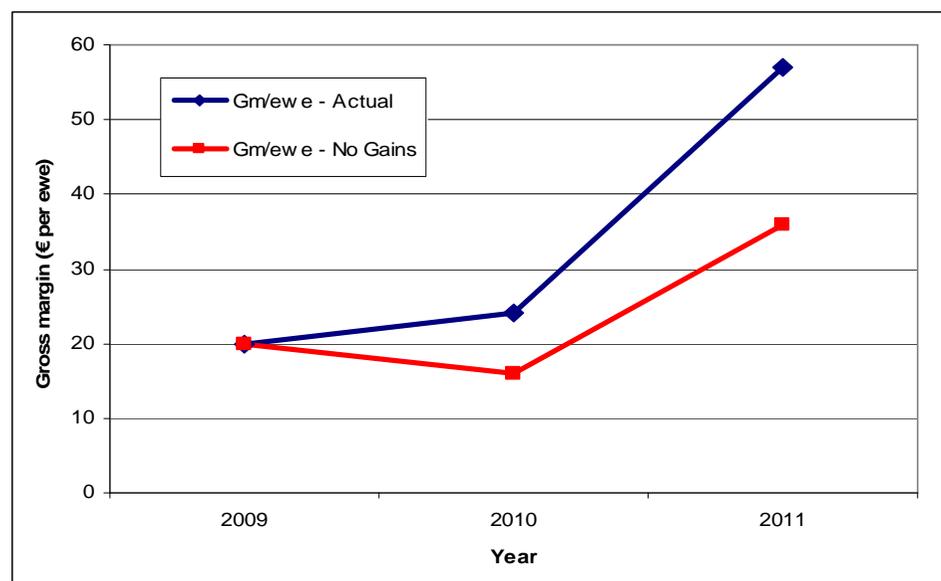
- Revenue is kept constant in both scenarios
- For No Gains scenario costs are inflated using the CSO index
- Increased productivity contributed to 58% of overall increase

## Financial performance Hill Flocks (€ per ewe)

	Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Gross output	42.71	45.02	72.31
Total Variable costs	22.88	20.91	15.24
Gross Margin	19.83	24.11	57.04

- Substantial improvement in financial performance
  - Gross output has increased by 69%
  - Variable costs have decreased by 33%
  - Gross margin has increased by 188%

## Hill Sheep BETTER Farms - Actual Gross Margin compared to Gross Margin if no productivity gains since 2009



- Revenue is kept constant in both scenarios
- For No Gains scenario costs are inflated using the CSO index
- Increased productivity contributed to over 40% of overall increase

## Key points

- Each flock has the potential to improve their own performance and profitability
- Adopt a 3 to 5 year plan to address key areas influencing production
- On the BETTER farms significant improvements in productivity
- Overall Gross margin has increased by €400 per hectare on lowland flocks and by € 37 per ewe on hill flocks
- The BETTER Farms are a resource for sheep farmers and each farm is willing to share their results and experiences



***We would like to acknowledge the contribution of the farmers and their families and all the Teagasc staff involved in the programme***