

The Suffolk Ram – Proving his Point

The Suffolk ram has long been considered to be the No.1 terminal Sire in the UK & Ireland, and recent surveys on both taste and carcass, coupled with the phenomenal prices reached in 2020 at the Irish breeding sales for Suffolk Cross Breeding Ewes, have more than proved this point.

The aim of sheep production in Ireland is to deliver top quality lamb carcass in order to maximise on farm profits. The farmer needs to produce lambs which meet the market specification at all times. In order to do this, the commercial farmer must take into account a number of considerations:

- **Days to slaughter** ie fast finishing times
- **Carcass Confirmation** graded using EUROP scale, which assesses muscle content & distribution which ultimately decides the carcass quality and value
- **Carcass Fat Score** where carcass is graded by the abattoir, on a scale of 1-5 with an optimum score of 3. This score too, will reflect into quality and value of the carcass
- **Lamb Quality score** – on farm assessment of conformation, condition and general quality.

With these considerations in mind, many commercial men who have never previously used Suffolk tups are now introducing them to their flocks to produce, hardy, fast finishing lambs, with high growth rates and easy natural fleshing, excellent in the gigot, with a strong topline and wide front.

Through careful selection of top quality Suffolk tups, more and more farmers are experiencing excellent self replacing rates to their flocks as well as producing quality breeding stock, to meet the high demand at marts, which is being reflected in the breeding sales. The ewe of choice is the Cheviot Mule crossed with a Suffolk Ram renowned for their hardiness, ease of lambing, mothering ability and milkiness. When crossed with a Suffolk tup, these ewes produce lambs that are vigorous at birth, and hardy, which can be finished and ready for market by 12 weeks, to take advantage of the Spring Lam season when prices are at a premium. These lambs, are sold directly off grass to slaughter thereby reducing the cost of time spent on farm.

“The Suffolk Cross Lamb has an excellent hybrid vigor. As a result they get up and suckle quickly”

For farms producing a factory lamb, the Suffolk more than proves his ability to produce top quality butcher's lambs with consistency in the larger size of cuts, size of chops, amount of fillet, and exceptional marbling through the meat which enhances the texture and taste of lamb dishes. When these traits were compared via CT scan of the Sire, the progeny of the ram was seen to have followed through to the lamb carcass demonstrating consistency within the breed.



In a recent Sensory Tasting Project undertaken at the Ulster University, the Suffolk Cross lamb came out on top in every sensory attribute when compared with Charolais cross and Texel Cross lambs. The Suffolk Cross lamb was the preferred choice in 70% of the sample, where attributes tested were appearance, aroma, taste, texture, flavour, succulence and tenderness. The Suffolk Cross scored highest in every attribute tested, proving it had a better overall texture and flavour than the Charollais or Texel crosses.

In commercial sheep production, the Suffolk Ram continues to be the No1 terminal Sire in Ireland. And remains the Industry leader - #1 for Finishing, #1 for Taste and #1 for the Industry. For 135 years, the Suffolk has developed and adapted to the changes in the sheep market and continues to produce the fastest fleshing lambs in the industry. His contribution to the sheep industry in Ireland over the years has been second to none and with demand growing for this prolific and fleshy sire, his future remains very bright for the years to come.