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**RamCompare Phase III – Flock recruitment for the coming season**

**What is RamCompare?**

RamCompare is the national progeny test for terminal sire breeds and is funded by the levy boards (AHDB, HCC, QMS) with Signet Breeding Services providing data collation and analysis services. The project is supported by Agrisearch in Northern Ireland, with whom it has a close working relationship.

The project works with partners across the food chain to drive faster rates of genetic improvement in the UK sheep industry. RamCompare supports this goal through the provision of data from commercial farms and abattoir records which are incorporated into the genetic evaluations delivered by Signet.

Each year nominated performance-recorded rams are taken from various terminal sire breeds and used on commercial farms across the UK. The progeny produced from this breeding programme are monitored from birth through to slaughter with the data collected being fed back to Signet.

To date we have progeny tested over 280 rams from 11 different breeds, collecting data from over 26,000 lambs in one of the largest trials of its kind. For more information go to [www.ramcompare.com](http://www.ramcompare.com)

**We are recruiting new flocks**

In March 2021 funding was announced to develop the next phase of RamCompare. We are looking for additional commercial sheep farms to join the project and support our data collection activities.

Ideally we would like to recruit new farms in England, Scotland and Wales to join the project.

Within RamCompare there are slightly different ways that flocks can engage with the project depending on their willingness to use artificial insemination (AI) and provide access to the lamb crop for ultrasound scanning. We would strongly encourage new flocks to partake in the AI programme in their first year.

**What do RamCompare farms get from the project?**

* Engagement in one of the UK’s leading sheep breeding projects
* A farm payment (dependent on the quality and quantity of records provided)
* The provision of recorded rams for natural mating, including funding for associated health and fertility testing
* Funding to undertake AI with a portion of the flock

**Other ways to participate in RamCompare – Bolt-on Projects**

We do have some funding to support the analysis of data for farms that wish to “bolt-on” to the work being undertaken within RamCompare. In this scenario the farms provide the rams to be tested, rather than the project and a payment is made for the data collected. Support for AI can be provided if required.

This type of approach may suit farmers that already have a high genetic merit team of performance recorded rams or wish to work with a group of ram breeders to test rams on their behalf. Farmers wishing to be considered for funding to provide data as a “bolt-on project” should contact us directly, as funding will be subject to the submission of a short breeding plan to explain which rams will be assessed and what data will be collected.

**When do I need to get involved?**

New farms will join the project ahead of the 2021 mating season. Plans are being made to continue the current program of progeny testing through to 2026.

The application process opens on 15th March 2020 and will close on 16th April 2021. Any interested parties should contact bridget.lloyd@ahdb.org.uk

**What do RamCompare flocks need to do?**

Flocks joining RamCompare\* must meet a strict criteria, which include…

* At least 350 uniformly bred ewes to be mated to rams nominated by the project
* Experienced EID user with own equipment and at least two years of experience collecting data, including the ability to collect lambing records and weights through a lamb’s life
* Able to rear all of the trial lambs on a similar system, ideally finishing them quickly over a defined time period
* Able to allocate ewes to single sire mating groups and undertake laparoscopic AI, if required
* Using an abattoir that reports standard kill data linked to an individual lamb ID
* Known flock health status, i.e. clear for MV, OPA, Johnes and following an active health plan
* Be willing to host events for interested farmers

\*Greater flexibility will be considered for farms wishing to engage with RamCompare by being a Bolt-on Project.

Please complete the application form in Appendix 1 if you are interested in getting involved.

We will review the information provided and contact you if we think you meet our criteria.

**Appendix 1. Flock Nomination Form – Please complete your details below:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Name  |  |
| Address |
| Telephone |  |
| Email |  |
| EID equipment |  |
| EID software |  |
| Interest to join as the following (circle)  | **RamCompare farm / RamCompare bolt-on / Either** |
| No. ewes in total |  |
| No. ewes available to project |  |
| Ewe breed |  |
| Ram breed(s) currently using |  |
| Are you already using recorded rams? | **Yes / Some / No** |
| Date of start of lambing  |  |
| Lambing indoors or outdoors? |  |
| Lamb finishing system |  |
| Date of first slaughter batch  |  |
| Date of last slaughter batch |  |
| Abattoir/Processor |  |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Essential** | Complete |
| Minimum of 350 ewes (uniform breed) to cross with terminal sire breeds |  |
| Experienced EID user with own equipment and at least two years of data |  |
| Able and willing to rear all their trial lambs off a similar system |  |
| Happy to manage single sire mating groups |  |
| If using AI, happy to align AI and mating dates |  |
| Willing to tag, weigh and fully record lambs at birth |  |
| Willing to collect lamb weights at 56 and 90 days of age, plus a sale weight |  |
| Willing to select lambs to 17-21 kg carcase weight and 2 and 3H fat class |  |
| Use an abattoir who reports standard kill data against individual lamb ID |  |
| Known good health status, i.e. clear for MV, OPA, Johnes, and active health plan |  |
| Good understanding of the project and its objective for genetic improvement of terminal sires |  |
| Be willing to host an event for interested farmers |  |
| **Desirable** |  |
| Willing to collect body condition score and ewe weights at tupping |  |

**Appendix 2. Farm involvement**

There are two main categories of farm involvement in the project, as RamCompare farms or through engagement with a Bolt-on project.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Farms would agree to provide:  | RamCompare farms  | Bolt-on project |
| Mating:  |   |   |
| Minimum of 350-400 ewes available | Yes | Yes |
| Full electronic identification system already in place and fully utilised | Yes | Yes |
| Detailed mating proposal required  | No | Yes |
| Ability to single sire mate groups of ewes with rams (natural service) | Yes | Yes |
| Sound facility to hold rams in quarantine on arrival until cleared for their release | Yes | No |
| Ewes for laparoscopic artificial insemination (AI). This may be up to 160 ewes each year (in groups of 30-40/sire) | Optional, but encouraged for new flocks | Optional |
| Lambing:  |   |   |
| All trial lambs would need to be tagged and weighed at birth, sire and dam recorded, any foster details and deaths notified | Yes | Yes |
| Artificially reared lambs are recorded | Yes | Yes |
| Male lambs - castrated or entire - all should be the same | Yes | Yes |
| Evidence of previous lambing report will be requested | Yes | Yes |
| Up to slaughter - all trial lambs need to be managed as a uniform group with any management group differences recorded against a date, moved to different grazing/introduced concentrate | Yes | Yes |
| Trial lambs need to be weighed at around 56 (8 weeks) and 90 days (12 weeks) of age | Yes | Yes |
| Trial lambs will be ultrasound scanned by Signet at around 90 days of age | Optional | Optional |
| Slaughter:  |   |   |
| A sale weight also needs to be collected | Yes | Yes |
| Abattoirs will report standard kill data on an individual lamb EID basis | Yes | Yes |
| Trial lambs will be selected to hit 15-22 kg carcase weight and EUR 2-3H | Yes | Yes |
| Slaughter batches supplied every two-three weeks from 12 weeks with final batch processed within 24 weeks (6 months) of age | Yes | Yes |
| Evidence of previous abattoir season reports will be requested | Yes | Yes |
| General flock information:  |   |   |
| Invited to attend project group meetings (2 per year) | Yes | Yes |
| Host farms will be willing to host an open day | Yes | Yes |
| The flock maintains ownership of the lambs | Yes | Yes |
| The project would agree to provide: |   |   |
| Rams free of charge, they will be fertility/health tested and quarantine drugs provided | Yes | No - farm responsibility |
| AI costs – Semen, appropriate synchronisation drugs and insemination fees | Yes – where required | Yes – where required |
| Access to veterinary advice as necessary - AI, ram health/fertility and lamb management | Yes | No |
| Payment per lamb\* (first 600 lambs) with complete dataset (\* Fully recorded = birth record, weight and carcase data) | £3.00 | £3.00 |
| Additional payment for per lamb\* for flocks with an AI programme | £1.50 | N/A |
| Additional payment for per lamb\* for flocks using ultrasound scanning | £1.50 | N/A |
| Additional lamb payment (601+) with complete dataset (birth, weight and carcase data) | £1.00 | £1.00 |

* Lamb payments would be split - 50% when lambing datais submitted, the remainder paid on completion when the final slaughter batch has been processed
* Training on lamb selection and ewe body condition scoring can be provided if needed.