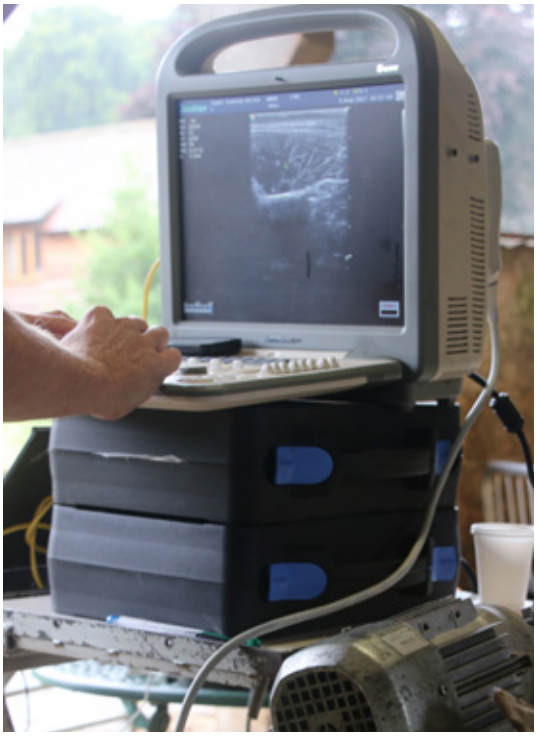
RamCompare Results: Hampshire Down Ram top for days to slaughter



AHDB RamCompare research backs up what the HDSBA has been saying for years – Hampshire lambs grow fast and finish quickly.

For years the Hampshire Down breed has prided itself on its ability to sire lambs that grow fast and finish quickly. This assertion has been thoroughly put to the test within RamCompare over the last four years, where a total of 25 Hampshire Down rams have been progeny tested on commercial farms – competing against many of the highest genetic merit rams in the country.

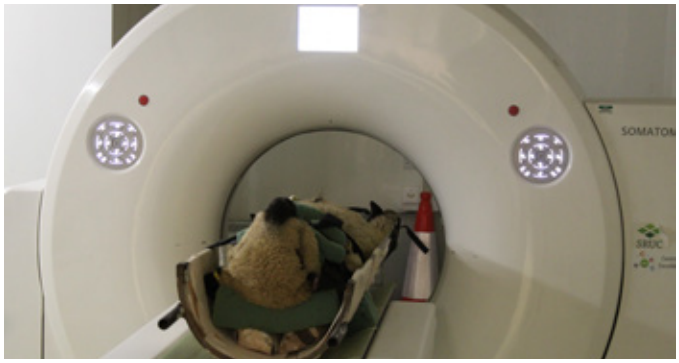
Out of 211 rams tested to date, a Hampshire Down sire Normanby 27Z1700622 bred by C M Brant and Son has come top for Days to Slaughter – one of the new breeding values produced as part of the RamCompare project. On the farm where he was used, it was shown he had the genetic potential to get lambs away two weeks earlier than most of the rest of the sires on test, three or four weeks earlier than one or two later maturing bloodlines.

In fact the Hampshire Down breed has three rams in the top ten sires tested in 2019, with Thorbeck 80X1700402 and Lecropt 53Y1700376 both ranking highly – following on from the high performance of Aspley 92W1400386 at the start of the project, whose performance still rates him highly amongst the all-time leaders for Days to Slaughter.
Completing this year's list of high achieving Hampshire's for growth traits is Sidwell Captain C471700012, who was one of the higher-ranking rams for Carcase Weight EBV – and the top Hampshire for this trait this year.

These achievements will come as little surprise to Hampshire Down breeders, who have observed massive increases in the genetic potential for growth in recent decades, with the impact of weight recording in Signet recorded flocks clearly benefitting the whole breed.

There's more to Hamps than just growth.

While increasing lamb growth rates the breed has also worked hard to increase muscling, using ultrasound scanning to produce rams with superior muscling across the loin. This work has really paid off, as RamCompare data has shown a genetic association exists within breeds between the amount of muscling measured across the loin and a ram's genetic merit for overall carcase conformation.



Amongst the trait leaders for muscle depth on the trial this year are three Hampshire Downs rams from the Normanby and Sidwell flocks. However, it is when looking at the primal weight that this is most apparent, with Hampshire genetics dominating the ranking of ram's for loin weight, when carcases are assessed on a weight adjusted basis.

Six of the top ten rams for primal loin weight are Hampshire Downs, with rams from the Court, Kelsey, Graylen, and Sidwell flocks all ranking highly.

What do breeders think about RamCompare?

"As breeders of a terminal sire breed, the Hampshire Down Breeders Association values this project as it highlights which traits to concentrate on including quick finishing, carcase quality and good grades." Said Roy McFarlane, Breed Development Committee Chair, HDSBA.

"Progeny testing on this scale shows the wide variation in performance between rams and places an important role in identifying the qualities of the rams involved that are commercially significant."

"Farmers can be sceptical when it comes to figures – the important point about the RamCompare Project is that it is carried out on commercial farms, it proves how vital it is to choose rams with good genetic merit. This data set now includes a large number of Hampshire Down sires and so provides evidence supporting what we, as the Breed Society, have continuously said – that Hampshire Down lambs (and their crosses) are fast finishing." He concluded.

Judith Galbraith added:
"Hampshire Down breeders have been using performance recording to dramatically improve the commercial qualities of the breed over the last 25 years. It is great to see Hampshire Down rams competing so well against the other popular terminal sire breeds. As a society, we were keen to get involved in RamCompare as it tests our breeding programme in a wide scale, commercial setting providing an invaluable resource for both our breed improvement and the UK sheep industry. Commercial sheep farmers in the UK have always been a little sceptical about 'figures' produced on pedigree farms and only a progeny trial like RamCompare can provide the compelling evidence they need to get on board and make the necessary changes to improve profitability in the wider industry."