

HILTEX



The Mother Of All Crosses

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Introduction

HILTEX is a new name given to the progeny of a Texel Ram and a Mountain Blackface ewe. This cross is dual purpose and has multidimensional values. Both Hiltex ewes and lambs are much sought after throughout Ireland and the U.K.

Why HILTEX

Hiltex ewes make excellent mothers for many reasons.

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Hiltex ewes are hardy as they are derived from two of the hardiest sheep breeds.

They are milky thus their lambs thrive very quickly.

They are clean inheriting “worm resistance” from the Texel.

They are docile, another Texel trait.

They produce quality lambs that grade well.

They have perfect compact udders which make them easy to suckle and give less mastitis problems or “beanbag udders”.

They have very good teeth formation and hold teeth well with age.

They outlive most other breeds and are often functional at 7/8 years old.

They have optimal prolificacy and when managed properly can have a lamb REARING rate of close to 200%.

They rate well for lambing ease.

They have very sound feet that seldom give problems.. They cross well with any breed and are exceptional when crossed back with Texel.

Hiltex ewes produce a good fleece of valuable high grade wool.



Why HILTEX

Hiltex lambs are dual purpose and have many positive dimensions.

They are ideal for French or light trade as they stay well fleshed at any weight.

They are excellent graders in abattoirs capable 50/60% U grades

They are worm resistant and stay clean throughout the seasons.

They are easily fed and have an exceptional food conversion rate.

They sell very well as stores.

Hiltex females are much sought after as they make excellent mothers.

They are lively at birth and quick to suckle.

They are hardy and can survive in harsh conditions or mountainous terrain.



Simple sheep system a good fit with suckler enterprise

By: Darren Carty Irish Farmer Journal

The make-up of the National sheep flock includes close to 50% of flocks with sheep numbers lesser than 50 ewes. There is no doubting that flocks of this size run on their own will not generate a realistic family farm income. In addition this make-up frequently presents challenges for getting new technologies adopted at farm level.

However, many flocks lesser than 50 sheep are ran on a part-time scale or in conjunction with other enterprises and therefore are a perfect fit for the farm. These flocks remain an important part of the industry and where managed correctly have the potential to deliver a margin to the farming system.

One such example is the flock of Sean French, who farms just outside Claremorris in county Mayo. Sean runs a small flock of about 40 Scottish Blackface ewes which he finds goes well with his suckler enterprise. He comments that there is no real expense or work associated with the flock and yet they deliver a margin to the farm.

Sheep are run extensively in a mixed farming system “I find you would not really notice the sheep with the heifers or the cows and they help in maintaining a better sward” he comments. The Blackface ewe fits well with the low cost, low labour system and according to Sean is often a highly underestimated ewe. During the winter ewes graze rotationally around the farm cleaning off paddocks where grass has accumulated over the winter. Ewes are grazed closer to the yard as they approach lambing which takes place from 1 April to coincide with grass growth.

Hay and silage is fed where needed but Sean find’s that the ewes generally have a low requirement for supplementary feeding. Meal is fed for about two weeks’ pre lambing at a rate of 0.3-0.4kg per head. Ewes are not housed but have access to housing and can be ran indoors if problems occur “I find with this type of ewe does not take kindly to indoors, the ewes are happier outside and find a place to lamb themselves”.



The system focuses on doing the simple things right. Ewe condition post mating is monitored and ewes are fed to improve condition pre-mating. He finds that condition at mating is important to getting a good lamb crop. This year's ewes are currently rearing 69 lambs for the 41 ewes or 1.68 lambs per ewe. He admits he had a very lucky spring with weather suiting outdoor lambing and only one lamb loss occurring. In general the litter size ranges around 1-6-1.7 lambs per ewe put the ram.

Ewes receive a fluke dose two to three times a year depending on weather conditions and are dipped pre-mating. A low sheep stocking rate and mixed grazing with cattle means there is also reduced pressure from a worm burden. This year's lambs have been dosed once for worms and also received a cobalt dose. Ewe quality is also important to get performance from lambs. Sean looks for a good sized hogget and last year purchased one of the top priced pens of hoggets at the Mayo Blackface sales.

Sire type used on the farm is Texel. In Sean's opinion the Texel crosses well with Blackface ewes "ewes lamb easily and the crossbred lambs kill-out about 50:50 between R and U grades". Male lambs born in the flock generally develop horns with ewe lambs in most cases remaining polled. The dominant head colour is speckled as shown in the picture.





After returning home from England in 1994 Tommy O Haire took over the family farm at Letterlough, Newport Co. Mayo. The following year he and his wife Mary were married. They now have two teenage sons, Shane and Kevin. The farm consists of 40 hectares of mainly of rough grazing land that lies in the shadow of Nephin mountain.

Initially Tommy followed the traditional system of that area and ran the Blackface Mountain ewe with a mountain ram but in 1999 after some research and trials of other breeds; he decided to try crossing his Mountain ewes with a Texel ram. The result he says was “unbelievable”. From previously selling lambs at light weight to the Italian trade or as stores, his new system allowed him to comfortably push the Texel cross lambs to French market weights while still maintaining the hardiness required for the rough terrain on which they were reared . Tommy also saw a huge interest in his ewe lambs which he sold directly off the farm.

Then out of sheer curiosity he decided to push the boat out a little further and kept some of these Texel crosses as replacements on his own farm. These Texel cross ewes were then mated to the Texel ram. “I couldn’t get over it” says Tommy. “Not only were these Texel cross ewes producing super lambs, they were also as hardy as the pure Blackface mountain ewes and could survive the mountainous conditions equally as well”. Soon his flock became totally based on Texel X Mountain ewes mated with a Texel ram.



The longevity of the Texel X ewe is something that Tommy sees as very important especially at today's replacement cost. Many of these ewes are fully functional at 7-8 years old. He also points out other positive traits such as worm resistance, docility, milkiness, good udder formation and sound feet. Tommy supplies all his lambs to the renowned local butcher Sean Kelly. Kellys have been buying all Tommy's lambs for many years and continue to do so to this day.

Male lambs are castrated at an early stage and all tails are docked. Most lambs receive just one worm dose with the exception of a few later drafts which may receive a second dose later in summer. Lambs are drafted at 48-50 kg liveweight and kill out at 24-25 kg carcase weight and are usually of U grade type.

With nothing haphazard about Tommy's system he carefully drafts his lambs about a month ahead of slaughter and feeds a little meal for that last four weeks. Ewes are fed ½ kilo of meal for final five weeks before lambing.

Tommy's two teenage sons, Shane and Kevin also help out on the farm, especially at lambing time. Lambing begins around March 10th and Tommy points out that as the Texel X ewes have very few lambing problems and are good mothers, the work load isn't huge.



HILTEX – the new brand of sheep

Crossbreed sheep are nothing new in Ireland, but the newly branded Hiltex promises to be a very useful and profitable option for both upland and lowland sheep farmers. The Hiltex is the name given to the progeny of a Texel ram and a Blackface Mountain ewe. It takes on the best characteristics of both parents and are much sought after in both Ireland and the UK. The Hiltex cross is a genuine dual purpose animal.

The farmers perspective

From the farmer's point of view, the Hiltex is an undemanding and rewarding breed to work with. The innate hardiness means they can live out in almost any conditions and will lamb easily without being housed. They are excellent mothers and produce plenty of milk so the lambs thrive from the beginning. Their udders tend to be well formed and compact so the lambs can suckle without difficulty and mastitis problems are very rare. Lambing rates are good, and when managed properly the Hiltex can have an impressive lamb rearing rate of almost 200%

The lambs themselves are lively from birth and are extremely clean, inheriting the Texel worm resistance trait. They have sound feet which seldom cause problems. Hiltex lambs are easily fed and have an outstanding food conversion rate.

Texel rams are docile and easy to handle which makes general management much more straightforward. This docility is passed onto the Hiltex and again to the Hiltex crosses.



A choice of markets

Hiltex cross lambs are ideal for sending on to the factory at around 20 or 21kg in weight. Alternatively, the farmer can fatten them on and sell heavier lambs to the butcher. They have an innate advantage here, as they will readily put on muscle without adding much fat.

A third option for hill farmers is to sell the lambs as stores for finishing in the lowlands. The muscling trait is very important here and the finished lambs are of impressive quality.

The Hiltex and Hiltex cross lambs are ideal for the French or light trade as they stay well fleshed at any weight. They grade well in abattoirs with up to 50-60% reaching U grades.

The next generation

Hiltex females are becoming very popular for breeding as they make excellent mothers. They are long lived, often remaining functional at 7 or 8 years old. The Hiltex crosses well with almost any breed and are exceptional when crossed back with the Texel.



Exceptional carcass quality

Texels are well established as the dominant terminal sire breed in Ireland and are famed for exceptional carcass qualities. They are also a hardy and adaptable breed, traits which combine well with the renowned resilience of the native Blackface Mountain ewe. The resulting Hiltex is a more marketable product than the traditional hill breed. When crossed again with Texels the resulting lambs are of superior quality and have excellent confirmation which leads to the fleshy carcass beloved of butchers and housewives alike.

Master butcher Sean Kelly of Newport, Co. Mayo is enthusiastic about the breed, saying, "The Hiltex cross is really easy to work with from the butchers point of view. It's a good meaty carcass and has just the right covering of fat needed for flavour, with very little trimming waste." This can be seen in Photo. Up to 70% of Hiltex crosses achieve a U grade.

He went on to say, "The average Hiltex cross lamb has good confirmation and a farmer can either sell to the factory at around 20-21kg carcass weight, or can feed them on for the butcher trade. They'll reach the higher weight without gaining extra fat, just more muscle which is what we like to see".

From a display point of view, this is exactly what the housewife wants to see too. This is clearly illustrated in Photo where Sean Kelly has laid out the various cuts from the Texel cross carcass. The exceptional quality of the meat is self evident. This lamb tipped the scales at 50kg live weight.

Kelly's Butchers source quality Hiltex cross lambs from local farmer Tommy O'Haire and would take more from other suppliers if they were available.



Hilltex ewes will improve profits on Hill and Lowland sheep farms

The current supply and market conditions provide an ideal opportunity for farmers to increase profits on both Hill and Lowland sheep farms. Research carried out by Dr Ron Annette in Northern Ireland has shown that crossing purebred Blackface Mountain ewes with lowland ram breeds such as Texel will result in carcasses being 1.4 kg heavier with better conformation grades at slaughter compared to the purebred Blackface Mountain lamb. This would result in cross bred lamb carcasses been worth €7 - €8 more than pure Blackface Mountain.

The Northern Ireland research has also shown that Texel x Blackface Mountain ewes (Hilltex) are more prolific than the Blackface Mountain and will wean more lambs per ewe mated when grazed under similar conditions on the lower and green hill areas. Hilltex ewes are heavier and will sell for more as cast ewes. This research concluded that hill farms can increase lamb output by 20% by using cross bred hill ewes such as the Hilltex.

Another favourable feature of Hilltex ewes was their increased longevity through lower levels of culling and mortality. This combined with the fact that Hilltex ewes had higher fertility, i.e. less barren ewes, meant that this breed had fewer ewes culled annually compared to pure Blackface and other Blackface crosses. These results clearly demonstrate that the Hilltex ewe has the potential to improve the profit margins of hill sheep farming.

It has long been recognised that newly born Texel cross lambs are away superior in their ability to get up and suckle compared to other breeds. The inclusion of the Texel breed combined with hill breed genetics (Hilltex) will result in increased hybrid vigour and lamb survivability. In Lowland flocks, where replacements are home reared, the Hilltex is the ideal ewe to use as the basis for breeding prolific replacements. Crossing the Hilltex with a maternal ram breed will result in a prolific ewe with hardiness and excellent mothering ability that, when crossed with a terminal sire, will produce superior quality carcass lambs.



Texel Ram Sales Dates 2011

Blessington	13th August
Roscommon	27th August
Tullow	30th August
Roscrea	31st August
Ballinrobe	2nd September
Raphoe (Evening)	2nd September
Athenry	5th September
Enniscorthy	7th September
Delvin	8th September
Kilkenny	19th September
Blessington(Multibreed)	24th September
Ballina	26th September
Blessington(Main Sale)	15th October

Regional Sales