



**Challenges facing the viability Sheep Irelands
sheep genetic improvement program in the
Irish sheep Industry**



Sheep Ireland - Background

- **Began in 2009 after industry consultation.**
- **Followed on from Pedigree Sheep Breed Improvement Program (PSBIP), which only concerned with growth rates.**
- **Very little industry progress made in past thirty years.**
- **EBI & Beef Euro-Star delivering huge results.**
- **Potential of recording in Sheep Industries elsewhere has shown major gains can be made.**

Sheep Ireland - Structure

- **MALP (Maternal Lamb Producers Group)**
- **CPT (Central Progeny Test)**
- **LambPlus (Pedigree recording service)**

Sheep Ireland Database and Genetic Evaluation System

Leadership

Services

Information

Data

Performance recording

LambPlus flocks

Data

Data

Data

AI and detailed records

CPT

Genetic links

Rams

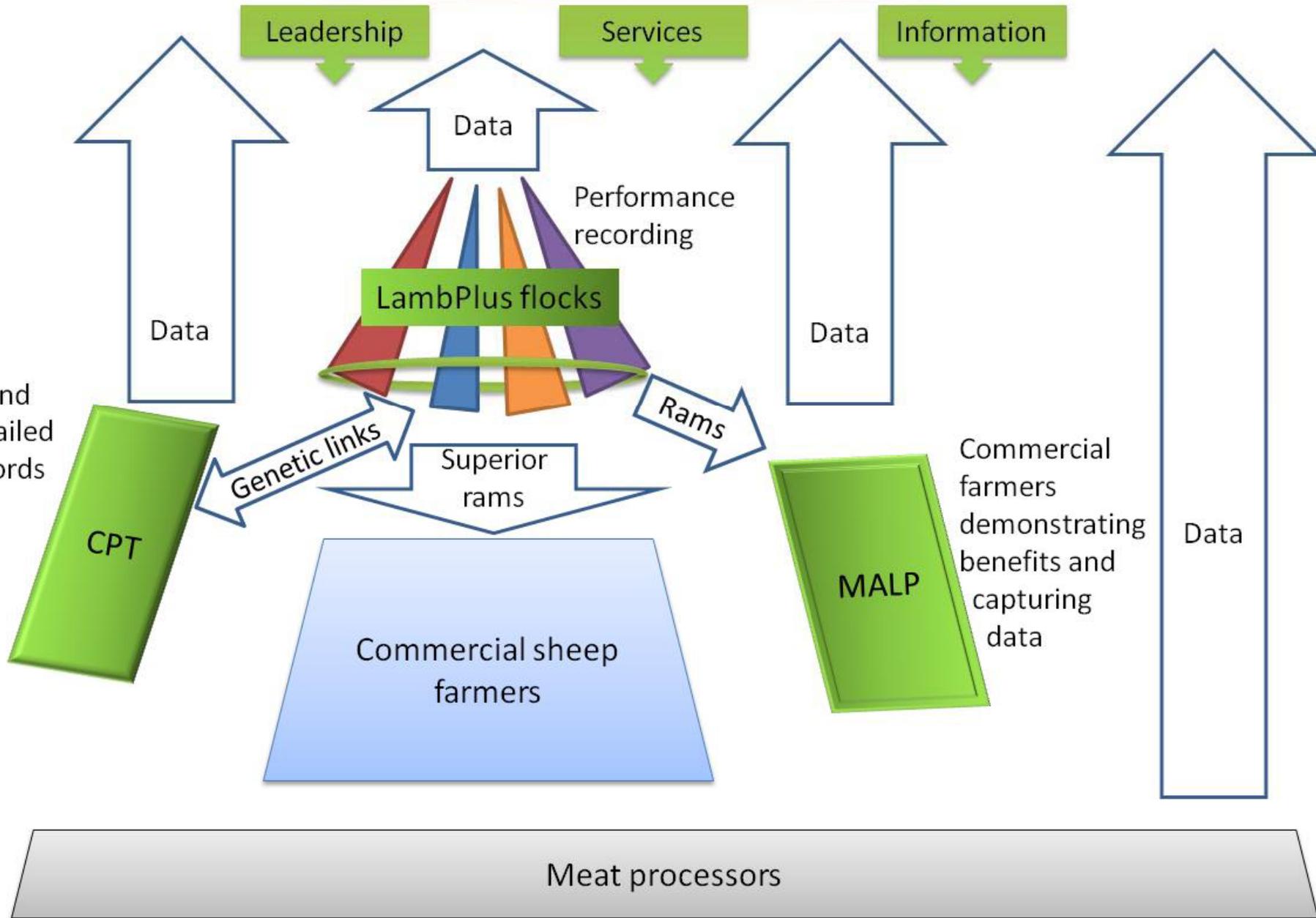
Superior rams

Commercial farmers demonstrating benefits and capturing data

MALP

Commercial sheep farmers

Meat processors



Data Recorded

- Lamb parentage.
- Lambing Difficulty Survey (Scored 1 – 4)
- Weights at Lambing, 40 day & Weaning. Other weights can be recorded.
- Lamb Survival Data
- Ultrasound Scanning
- Dag scores (MALP & CPT only)
- Lameness (MALP & CPT only)
- Faecal Egg Counts (CPT only – so far)
- Mature ewe weights (MALP & CPT)

How to use the Euro-Star's when purchasing a Ram

1. Identify what aspect of Flock Performance you are trying to improve ie.
2. **To Improve quality of Factory Lamb-** use a ram with 4* or 5* in Production Index.
3. **To Improve Quality of Replacement Females-** choose ram with 4* or 5* in Maternal and Lambing Index.
4. Use the Euro-Star Indices as a Tool to help you in your selection process.

€uro-Star Categories	
★ ★ ★ ★ ★	5 Stars: Top 20%
★ ★ ★ ★	4 Stars: Top 60-80%
★ ★ ★	3 Stars: 40-60%
★ ★	2 Stars: Bottom 20-40%
★	1 Star: Bottom 20%

Sheep Euro-Star Catalogue - Example

Lot: 1		Owner: John Murphy; Lattanross, Cragoue, Co. Galway Breeder: Shane Williams; Rathronan, Bray, Co. Wicklow							
Animal Details		Ancestry Details		Euro-Star Indexes - 10/10/11					
Official Id	IE041111702101J	Sire's Sire	Teiglum Magnum (CFT06231)	% Rank	Star Rating	Indexes	€ Value	Acc%	
Tattoo	EAI10021		Sire's Dam	Forkins (GAF06097)	Top 1%	★★★★★	Overall Sheep Value	€ 1.072	26%
Name	Ballybraoen Rambo	Sire		Castlescreen O-J (TXC08029)	Top 1%	★★★★★	Lambing	€ 0.9	21%
Birth date	07-Feb-2010		Dam	Ballybrooney (EWI08011)	Btm 40%	★★	Production	€ -0.065	42%
Breed	Texel	Dam's Sire		Tullagh Neptune (CJT07023)	Top 20%	★★★★★	Maternal	€ 0.237	25%
Sex	Male		Dam's Dam	Ballybrooney (EWI05034)	Other Key Traits				
Birth type	Triplet	Dam's Dam		Ballybrooney (EWI05034)	Top 60%	★★★	Days to Slaughter	-0.552 days	48%
Dam rec	23		Dam's Dam	Ballybrooney (EWI05034)	Top 1%	★★★★★	Lamb Survival	2.573%	31%
Musc & fat scan date	28-Jun-2010	Comment: Sire was Premier Champion 2009					Copyright, Sheep Ireland		

% Rank

Rams rating within Star Value

Star Rating

Help give an instant indication as to where an index for a particular animal places it compared to all others within its breed.

- 5 Stars: Top 20%
- 4 Stars: Top 60-80%
- 3 Stars: 40-60%
- 2 Stars: Bottom 20-40%
- 1 Star: Bottom 20%

Overall Sheep Value

Gives the overall Euro Star Rating of the Sheep.

Performance recording – where are we?

- **Approximately 1000 pedigree breeders in Ireland (some not very active)**
- **250 pedigree ram breeders now recording with ‘LambPlus’ in 2012 season - (150 in 2011)**
- **33,766 Commercial sheep farmers (Dept of Agri – census 2011)**
- **Approximate annual ram demand of 15-16,000 rams, based on a breeding ewe population of 2.36 million.**

Performance recording – where are we?

- **Huge potential exists to deliver major gains to the industry through annual ram sales**
- **Sheep Ireland produced 5000 ram evaluations in 2011**
 - **Of which only 1000 can be 5 Star for any one trait**
- **2011 marked the first Sheep Ireland Euro-Star ram sale**
 - **Resulted in a lot of exposure & publicity**
 - **Helped educate and promote the Euro-Star message to Ram buyers & Pedigree breeders alike**
 - **Similar event planned for 2012 season**

Challenges to the Euro-Stars

- **Adoption of the Euro-Stars by the Industry**
- **Demonstration of the benefits**
- **Evaluation Accuracies**
- **Factory Engagement**
- **Technology**
- **Self-recording aspect of the programme**

Adoption of the Euro-Stars by the Industry

- Prompt adoption of the Euro-Stars will be essential to realise the full potential of genetic improvement
- Industry wide support will be critical to ensure this happens – Teagasc
- Commercial farmer demand will be the stimulus for greater breeder participation and ultimate progress
- Education & promotion through MALP & CPT delivering results

Demonstration of the Euro-Stars

- Industry stakeholders need constant reassurance that breed improvement programmes are worthwhile
- Sheep Irelands MALP & CPT programmes are critical to fulfilling this role
- 22 Commercial flocks using recorded rams and gather data to both contribute to and validate the Euro-Star Index
- Key message to be demonstrated is that genetic gain is permanent

Evaluation Accuracies

- **Urgent need to increase breeder participation in the scheme and expand data set upon which our evaluations are based**
- **Low accuracies have the potential to dishearten users and damage the potential progress of the Euro-Stars**
- **Education again key – MALP & CPT**
- **Flock book participation getting stronger – breed pedigree helping to strengthen accuracies**

Factory Engagement

- **Most notable ‘missing link’ from the Sheep Ireland evaluation process is a reliable source of carcass information**
- **Systems currently not in place to deliver this information**
- **Ultrasound measurements of Muscle & Fat depths are currently our best predictors of carcass quality**
- **Current regulations insisting on a single identity for each ovine animal in Ireland will facilitate progress in this area**

Technology

- **Technology presents major opportunities to the Sheep Ireland programme but the adoption of this Technology by Sheep farmers poses a major challenge**
- **Electronic Identification of lambs will facilitate easier data collection**
- **EID will open up the possibility of incorporating carcass data from slaughter plants**
- **Uptake may be slow due to the demographic of Irish Sheep farmers, which is an ageing one**

Self-recording aspect of the programme

- Source of criticisms from pedigree & commercial sector
- Independent Ultrasound Muscle and Fat measuring hugely important
- Promotion of Ultrasonically scanned ram lambs essential
- Commercial 'unbiased' data in the Sheep Ireland evaluation is critical to instil a sense of confidence and trust in the end users mind
- Expanding this commercial element will be a challenge but hugely important to the future of the programme

• **Thank You**

