



A comparison of growth and carcass characteristics of hill lambs finished on a selection of forage-based diets

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Study objective

- ◆ To investigate 'low cost' alternatives to all-grain diets for finishing hill lambs during the autumn/winter period



Materials and methods

- ◆ 136 castrate male lambs (33 ± 5.5 kg) sourced from 6 hill flocks
- ◆ 8 lamb genotypes (data not presented)
- ◆ 3 forage-based finishing diets (n=38/39):
 - Precision-chop grass silage
 - Maize silage
 - Grazed grass
- ◆ Concentrates offered daily (0.5 kg/d)
- ◆ Measurements: daily feed intake; feed conversion ratio (FCR); live weight gain; age at slaughter; carcass weight, conformation and fat class; dressing proportion
- ◆ Data analysed using REML with means predicted for a 20kg cwt

Results

	Grass silage	Maize silage	Grazed grass	s.e.d	Significance
Silage DMI (kg/d)	0.44	0.53	-	0.022	***
Live weight gain (g/d)	85 ^a	105 ^b	116 ^b	7.8	**
Slaughter weight (kg)	44.3	45.5	44.7	0.54	P=0.06
Days to slaughter	138 ^b	126 ^a	116 ^a	6.0	*
Conformation score	2.93	2.95	3.11	0.100	NS
Fat score	3.26 ^b	3.34 ^b	2.95 ^a	0.109	***
Dressing proportion	0.452	0.440	0.448	0.0056	P=0.06

Conclusions

- Growth rate of lambs on forage based diets is approx. 50% levels reported for lambs of similar genotype finished on concentrates
- Under good grazing conditions, grazed grass is superior to grass silage for finishing lambs
- Maize silage has higher intake and performance characteristics than grass silage