UTILISING COMMON VETCH AS A SOURCE OF FORAGE PROTEIN FOR GRAZING EWES

C.L. Marley, V.J. Theobald, R. Fychan, B. Thomas, A. Gethin, M.B. Scott, R. Sanderson and H.M. McCalman
IBERS, Aberystwyth University, Gogerddan, Aberystwyth, Wales, UK cvm@aber.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

• Sources of home-grown, high-protein legume forages for ruminants that can be grown over-winter are limited.
• Common vetch (Vicia sativa) is a legume typically sown early autumn as an over-winter cover crop.
• Lactating ewes require high quality feed during early lactation to maintain milk supply.
• To address this, both: 1) a replicated experiment; and, 2) participatory research on a commercial farm, were conducted to investigate the effects of vetch offered to lactating ewes as a protein feed at pasture.

RESULTS

1) Experiment

• Feeding Vetch / IRG mix to ewes resulted in a higher combined ewe & lamb weights on Day 35 only (Fig. 1).

2) Participatory Research

• Forage yields were found to be similar at 9.9 t DM/ha.
• Forage CP was 2% higher where vetch was sown.

CONCLUSIONS

• Overall, findings indicate that common vetch has the potential to be used as a source of high-protein fresh forage in spring to support lactating ewes and their lambs.

This work was part of the Sustainable Forage Protein project, funded by the industry partners and co-funded by Innovate UK.