

McCracken, D. 2019 Sheep project is a good example of collaboration. *Press & Journal*, 18<sup>th</sup> November 2019. <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-press-and-journal-inverness-highlands-and-islands/20191118/282170767983150>

### **Sheep project is a good example of collaboration**

The work of my team here at Kirkton & Auchtertyre revolves around highlighting to Scottish hill farmers and crofters what changes they can make to increase the future sustainability of their farms and crofts.

Many of those insights arise from the agricultural and environmental research we conduct on the farms. But many also come about from our contacts with scientists and livestock farmers working in mountainous and remote regions elsewhere in Europe.



I have highlighted in previous articles that we are already involved in a number of European projects, all with a focus on improving livestock system sustainability. And I am pleased to say that we and our partners have been successful in winning funding for another project which starts in January 2020.

EuroSheep is a three-year EU funded project led by Idele, the French Livestock Institute. There are 10 partners drawn from seven EU sheep producing countries (France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom) together with Turkey.

The project has two main goals. The first is to assess how best to improve individual and flock performance through improved management of animal health. The second will consider how an enhanced focus on the nutritional needs of the animals can help reduce annual feed costs.

We are inputting to the project in association with SRUC animal welfare and SAC Consulting sheep specialists. Members of my team will also lead on the wider European dissemination of the solutions that the project identifies.

The range of partners involved mean that the project will focus on both meat and milk production. A common focus will be put on the adult ewes, given their importance in transforming the vegetation they eat into marketable meat and dairy products for human consumption.

The nutrition and health of lambs will also be considered, though different partners will focus on how best to raise lambs so that they can express their full genetic potential when destined either for meat production or as replacements into a dairy flock.

EuroSheep will involve input from a wide range of farmers, farmer organisations, advisors, researchers, policy makers and representatives from across the meat and dairy supply chains.

Farmer input to the whole process is essential to ensure that their experience of what does and does not work is taken into account. But facilitating direct farmer to farmer discussions is also a great way to transfer knowledge effectively.

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