

Farmers perception of the Eurostar ram index after the completion of the STAP scheme in the Mayo region



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Background and Rationale

The sheep sector in Ireland is an important enterprise in Ireland’s agricultural industry. However, sheep farmers’ incomes are low with the average sheep farmer having a farming income of over 13,000 euro in 2018 (NFS, 2019).
With this in mind, sheep farmers need help in improving their farm income. One way the Irish sheep industry can improve its profitability and sustainability is through using genetically evaluated, Eurostar rams. The Sheep Technology Adoption Programme (STAP) was launched by the Department of Agriculture in 2013. Farmers received annual payment for attending meetings and completing a number of tasks. Task one was purchasing a Eurostar ram that had a star index from 3-5 from an approved ram Lambplus breeder. The STAP scheme concluded in 2015 and there has been no incentive to purchase a Eurostar ram. Since the completion of the scheme it is unknown how many farmers continued using rams that are genetically

Research questions

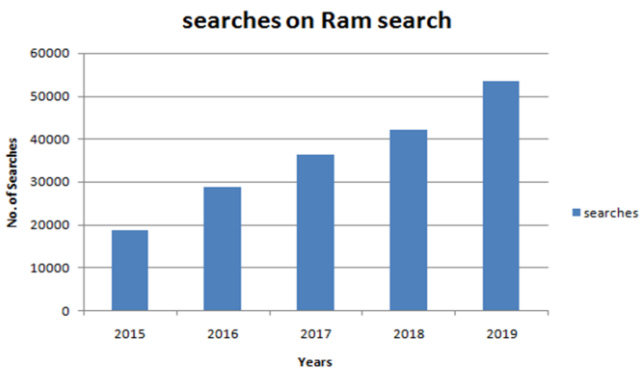
- The study addressed the following questions:
1. Are farmers continuing to use Eurostar rams and the Eurostar ram index since the end of the Sheep Technology Adoption Programme?
 2. What are farmers’ main reasons for continuing to use Eurostar rams?
 3. If farmers have discontinued with the use of Eurostar rams, what are their reasons for doing so?
 4. Are there any changes that could be made to the

Methodology

- A mixed-method approach was employed:
- Qualitative analysis consisted of Semi structured interviews with Sheep Ireland Board members.
- Three board members completed interview which were carried out over the phone.
- Quantitative analysis consisted of phone surveys with sheep farmers who were in STAP groups. Farmers were based in the mayo region. 40 out 47 members completed the phone survey

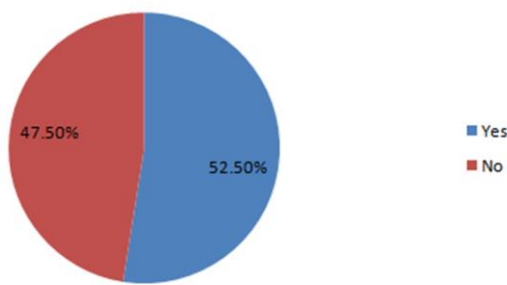
Results

- The findings suggest that the sheep industry leaders are happy with the level of usage of the Eurostar Ram Index and ram search.ie

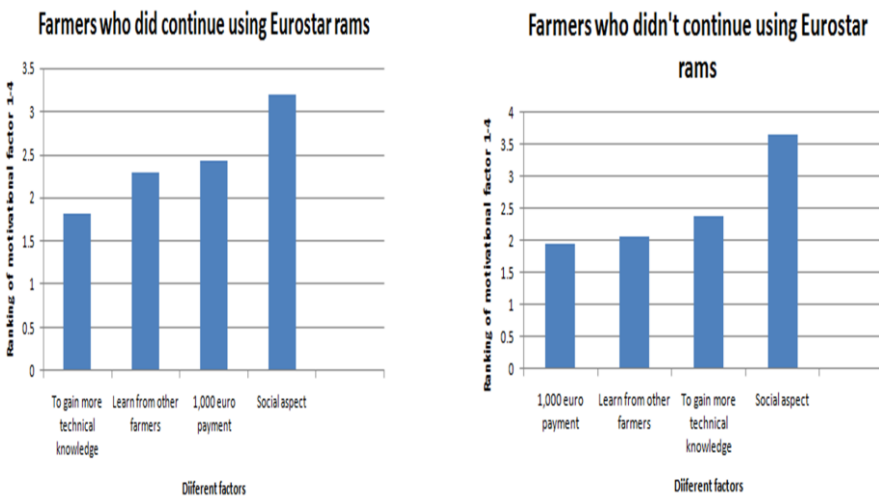


- 52.5% of respondents have continued to use Eurostar rams.

Continued to Purchase Eurostar rams



- Those who did continue to use Eurostar rams found it easy to use and useful.
- The opposite is true for the farmers who didn’t.
- Some of these farmers only joined the scheme for the financial incentive and not for knowledge gain.



Recommendations

- One way to encourage farmers to readopt the Eurostar index would be to publicise positive changes that have been made to the Eurostar ram index to the farmers who have discontinued the Eurostar index in areas where they gain most of their information on farming.
- If another scheme similar to STAP were to be approved in the future changes could be made, for example, free farm visit could replace mandatory discussion group attendance.