

Monitoring sheep breed changes in Britain over 40 years: breed choice responds to economic and political pressures

Geoff Pollott

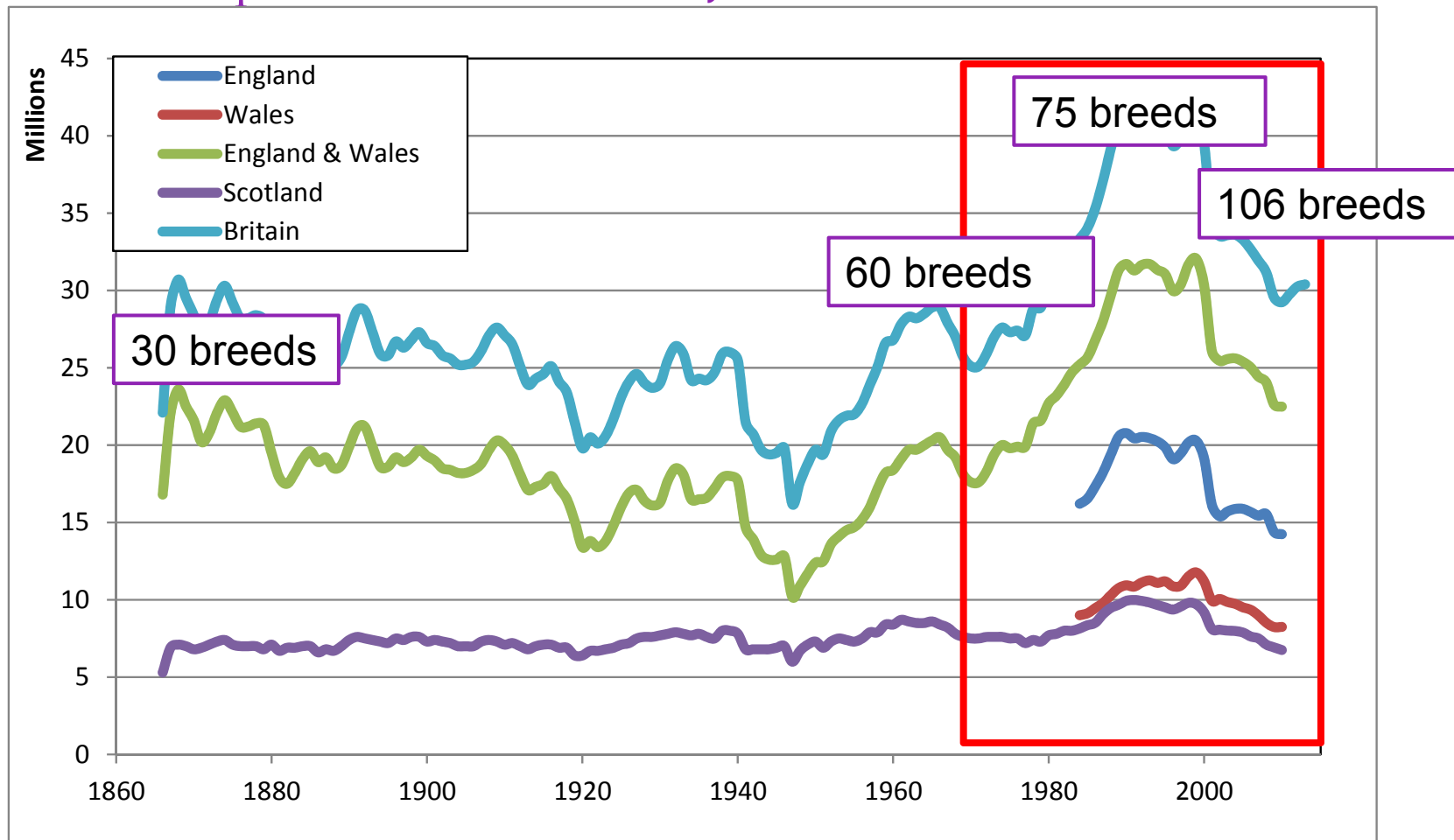
Department of Production and Population Health

Monitoring sheep breed use in Britain

- Annual Census data collected in June and December by ‘ministry’
- No information on sheep breeds or matings
- In 1970, the newly formed Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) set up study groups to determine technical direction of improvement programmes in each meat species
- No comprehensive information was available on sheep breeds in Britain – initiated 1st postal survey at mating 1971
- Subsequent surveys carried out in 1987, 1996, 2003 and 2012

The last 40 years in context

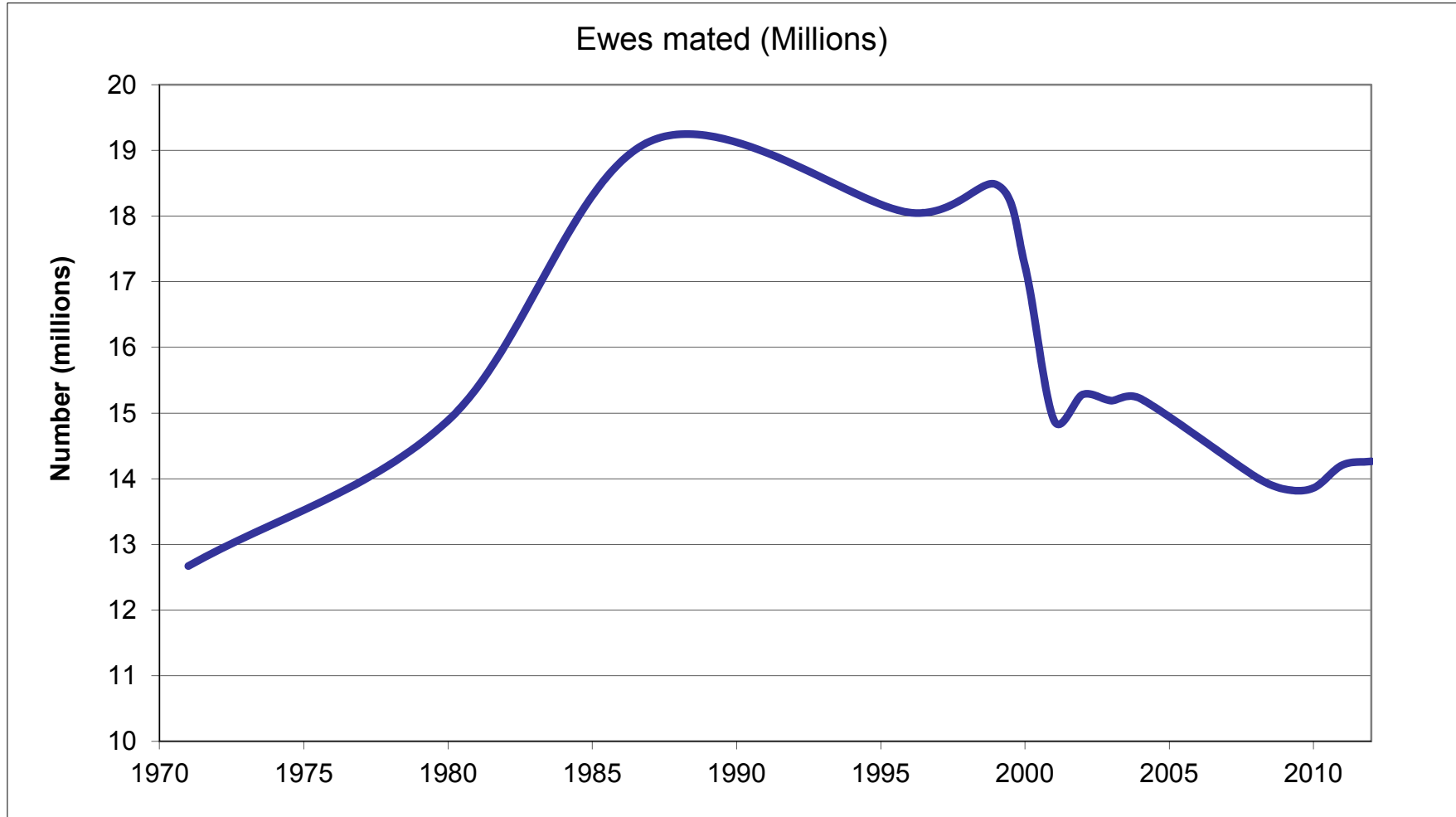
Total sheep numbers in Britain – June census



Economic/political changes – last 40 years

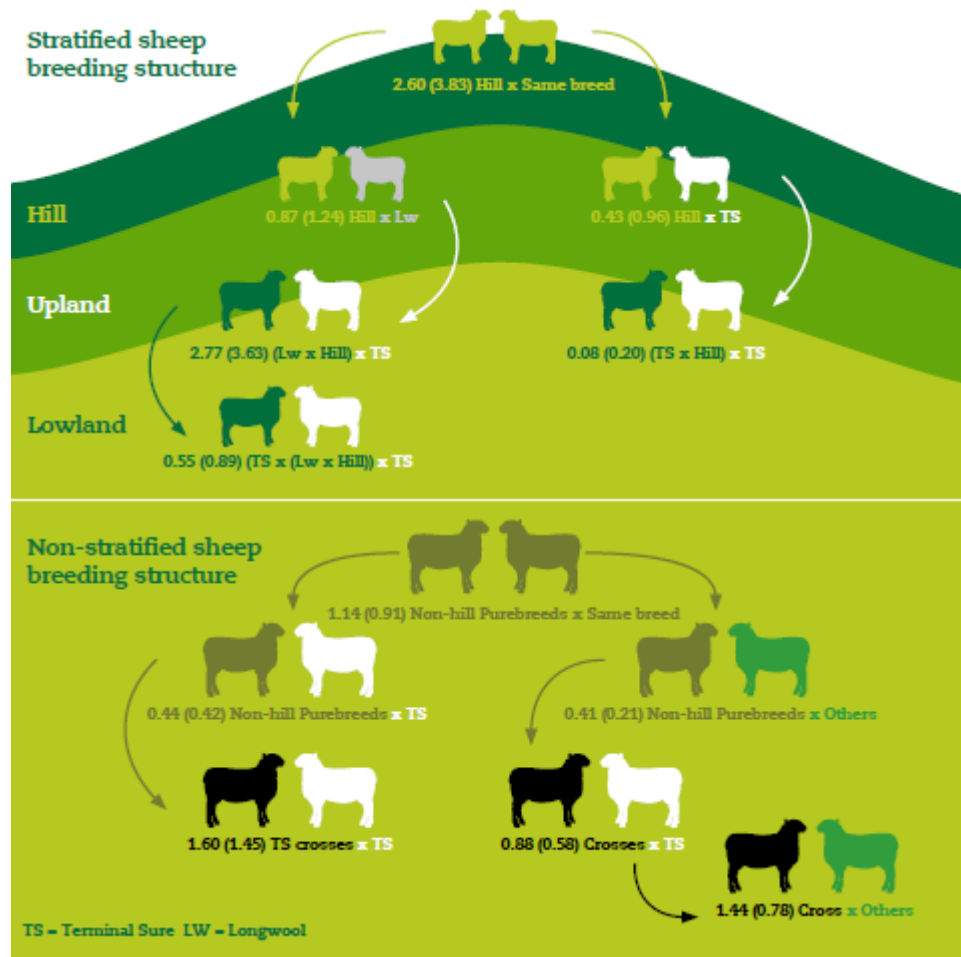
- New markets – EU, Asia
- Less competition – New Zealand
- Subsidies from EU – increase followed by decrease
- Foot and mouth disease
- Consumer pressure – less fat – larger cuts of meat
- Profitability of sheep and competing enterprises

Demographic changes – breeding ewes



Britain - Source: Defra December census

A structure of two halves

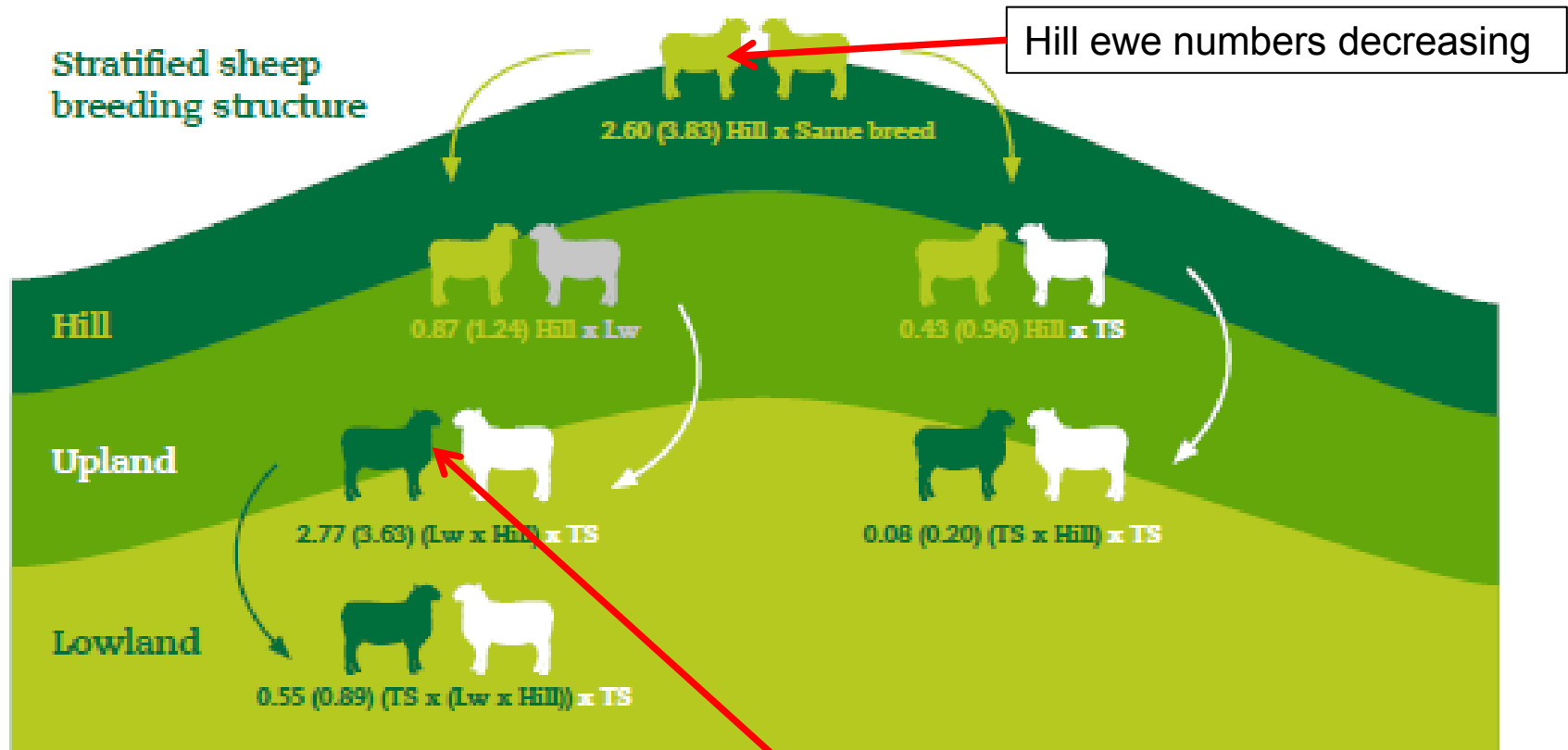


% split between the two structures

1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
86	78	77	71	56
14	22	23	29	44

2012 numbers with 2003 numbers in parentheses

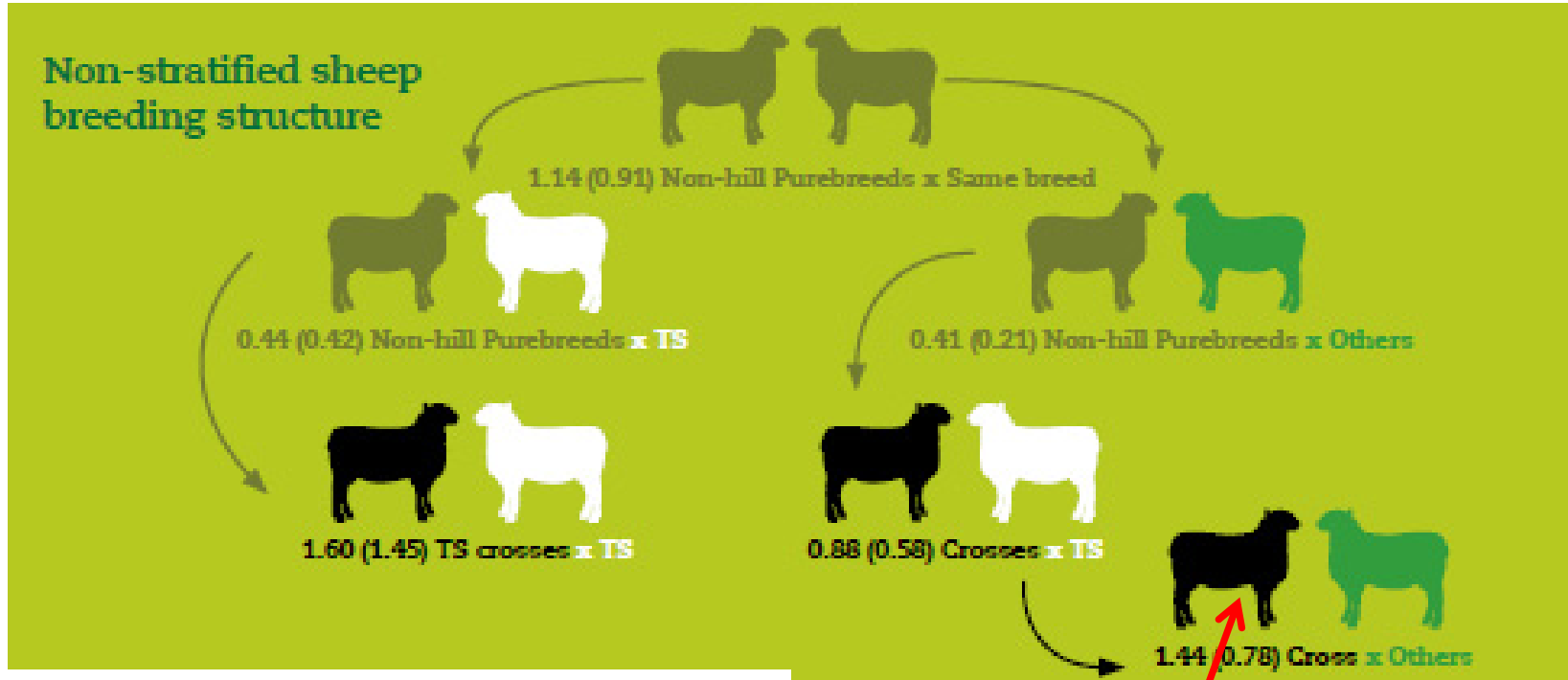
Traditional crossbreeding structure



Lw = Longwool crossing breeds e.g. Bluefaced Leicester
 TS = Terminal Sire breeds e.g. Suffolk
 2012 numbers with 2003 numbers in parentheses

Traditional crossbred types decreasing

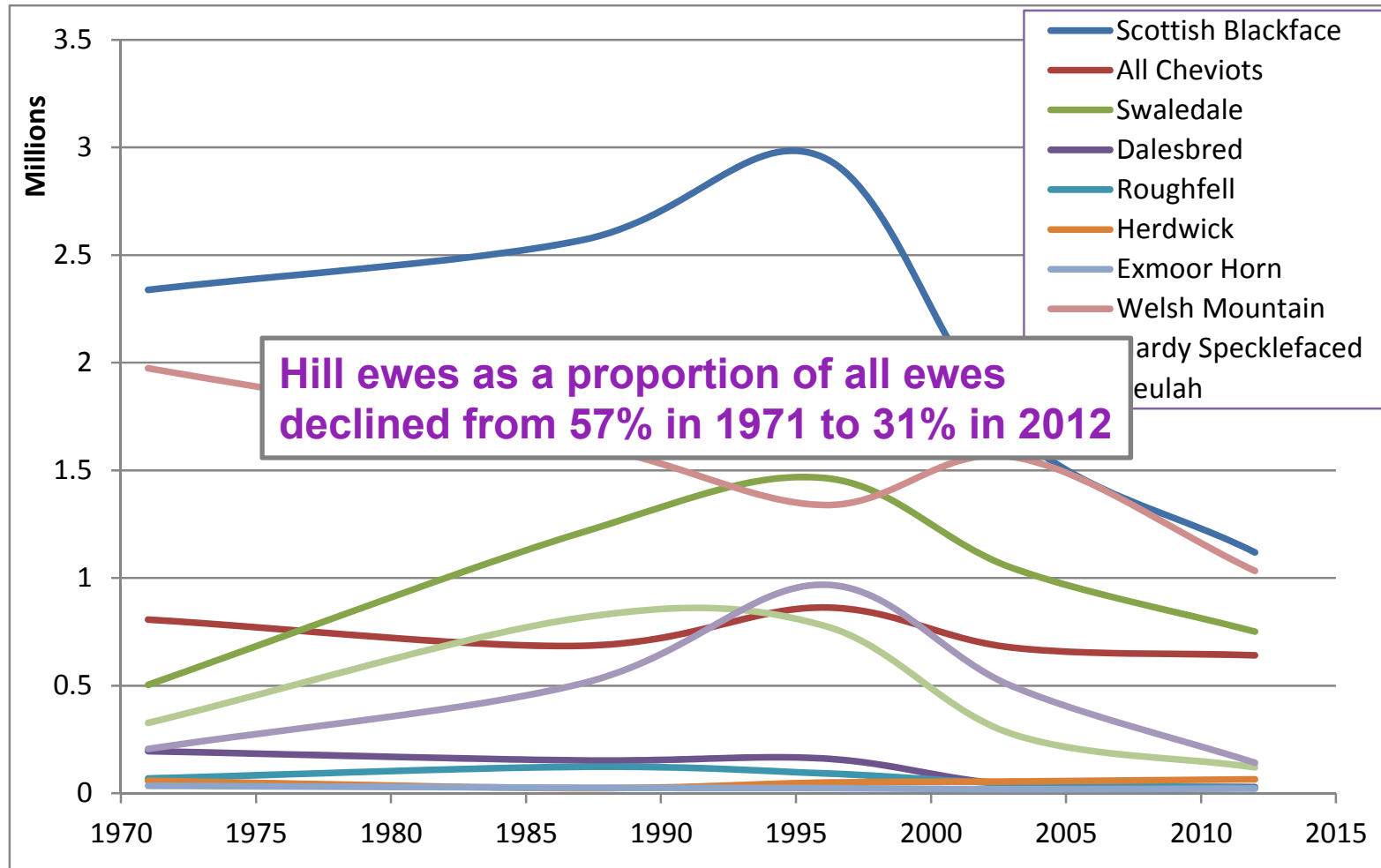
A growing structure



TS = Terminal Sire breeds e.g. Suffolk
2012 numbers with 2003 numbers in parentheses

Ad hoc crossbreeds increasing

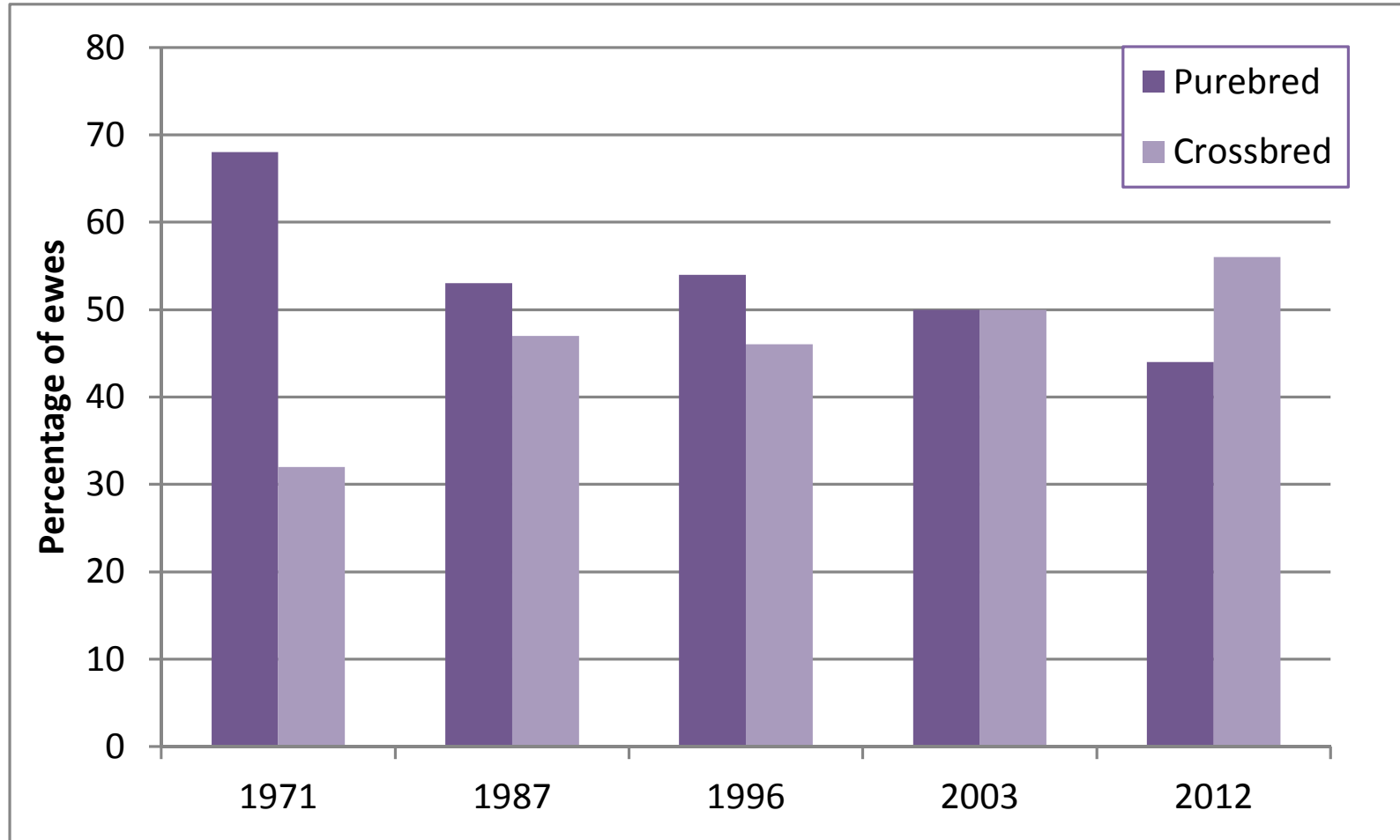
Changing hill breed numbers



Disappearing purebreds? (000)

	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
Border Leicester	12	28	13	5	4
Romney Marsh	294	217	159	165	201
Devon Closewool	127	51	6	7	4
Devon and Cornwall Longwool	290	28	4	2	2
Whitefaced Dartmoor	39	1	6	5	4
Greyfaced Dartmoor	33	4	3	4	4
Clun Forest	401	124	44	12	10
Dorset Horn	59	124	17	12	11
Kerryhill	209	47	2	13	10
Llanwenog	20	3	10	6	7
Total	1,492	646	273	247	273

The rise of the crossbred



Britain - Source: MLC/Defra/EBLEX Sheep Breed Surveys

Changes in traditional crossbred types (000)

	1971	1987	1996	2003	2012
North Country Mule	311	3,233	3,809	1,915	2,094
Welsh Mule		370	631	738	330
Scots Mule		502	263	610	231
Greyface	214	332	156	212	90
Welsh Halfbred (HB)	304	410	250	130	28
Scottish Halfbred	590	346	162	100	19
Masham	406	249	162	56	32
Suffolk x Mule/HB type	550	603	495	590	622
Texel x Mule/HB type	0	32	220	307	862
Suffolk x Hill	154	182	115	81	154
Texel x Hill	0	25	28	92	76
Total	2,529	6,284	6,291	4,831	4,538

Overall breed number changes in 40 years

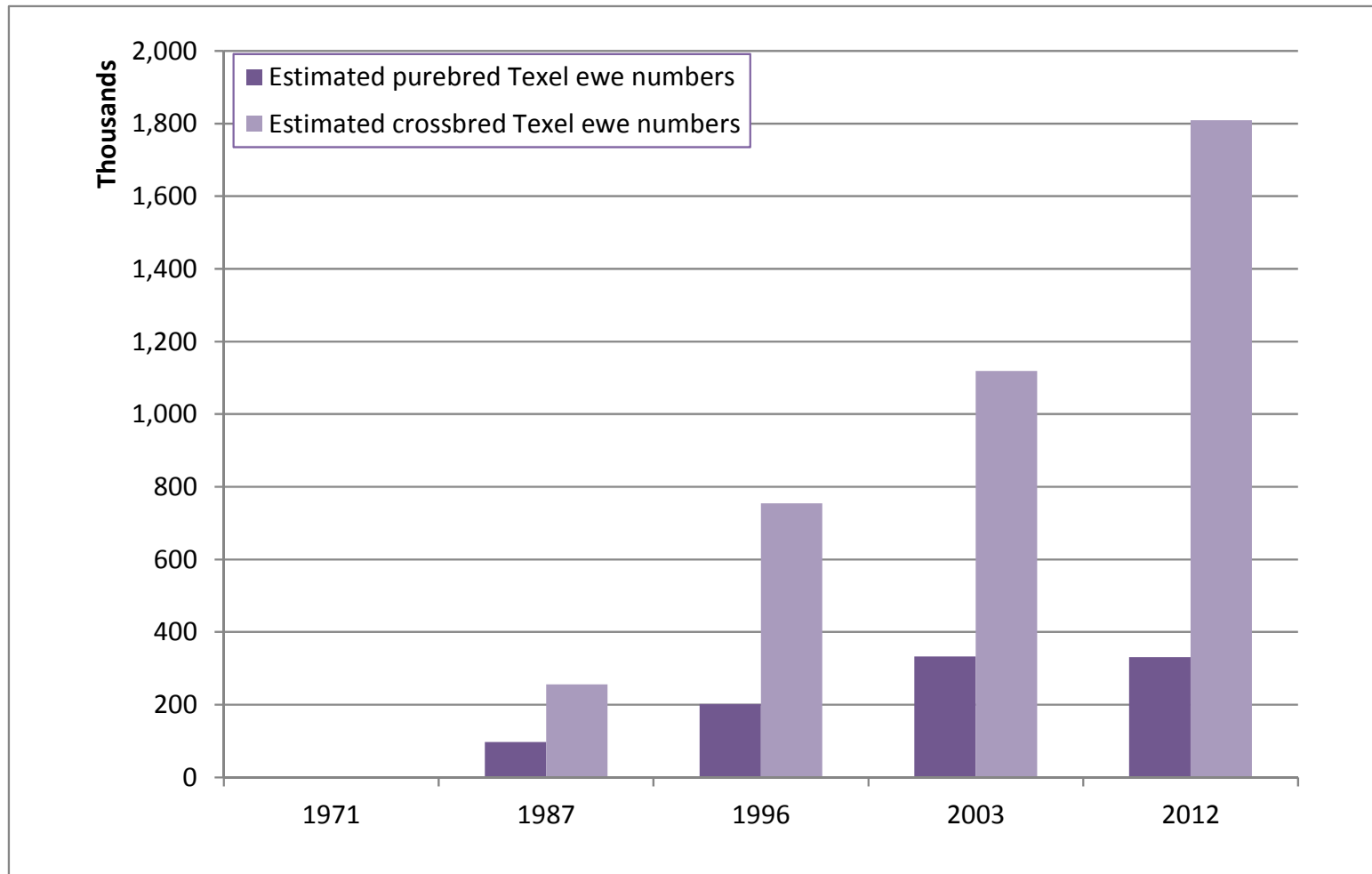
Year	UK	Imported	Newly imported	Lost imported	Compo sites	New comp osites	Lost compo sites	Total
1971	~50	1			1			~52
1987	58	1	8	0	1	5	0	73
1996	58	7	6	2	4	0	2	75
2003	58	13	10	0	4	3	0	88
2012	59	18	20	5	5	4	2	106
			44			12		

44 breeds imported over 40 years
 - 7 not found in 2012

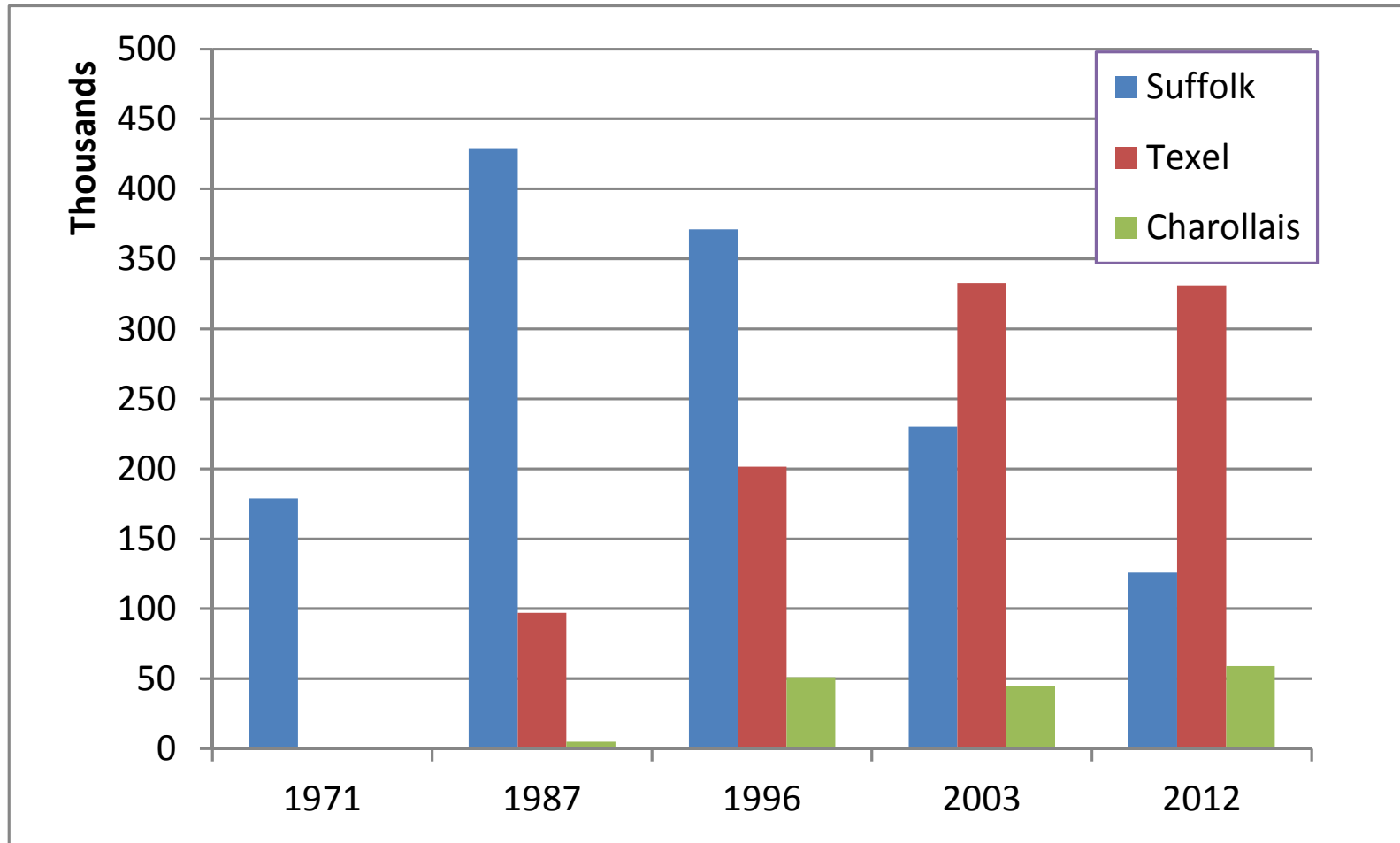
~ 545,000 ewes of imported breeds found in 2012

~ 20% of all non-hill ewes

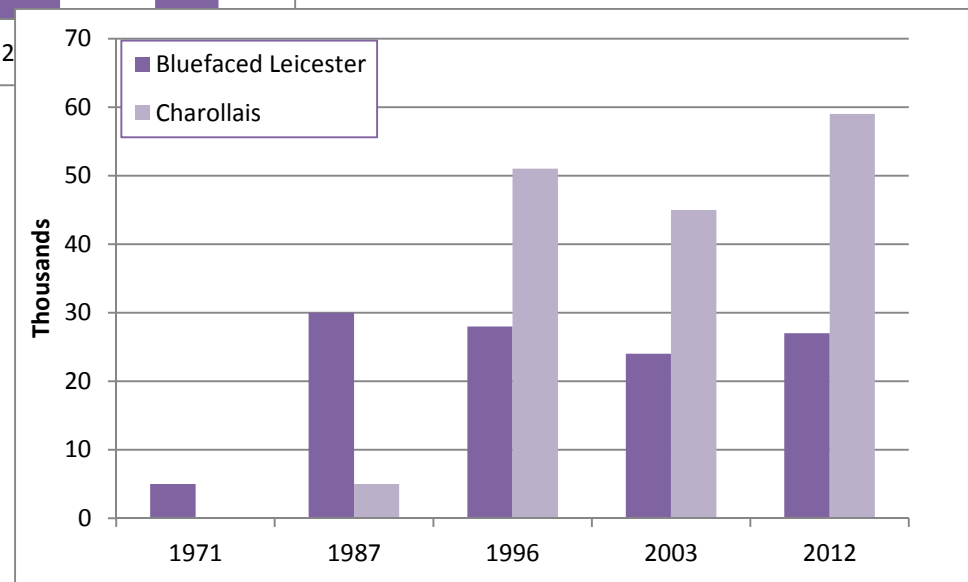
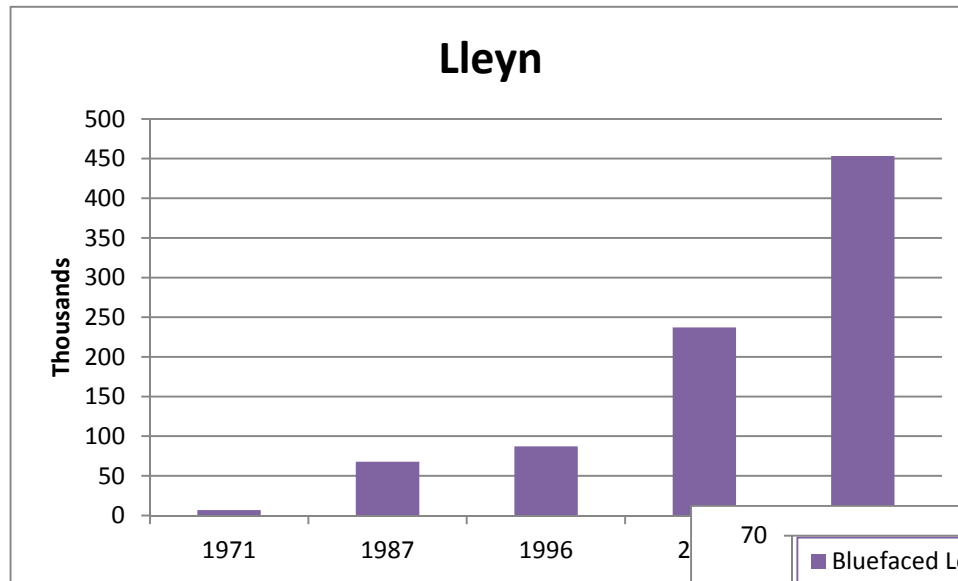
The rise of the Texel ewe



Terminal sire purebred ewe numbers



A move towards more efficient sheep?



Conclusions and discussion points

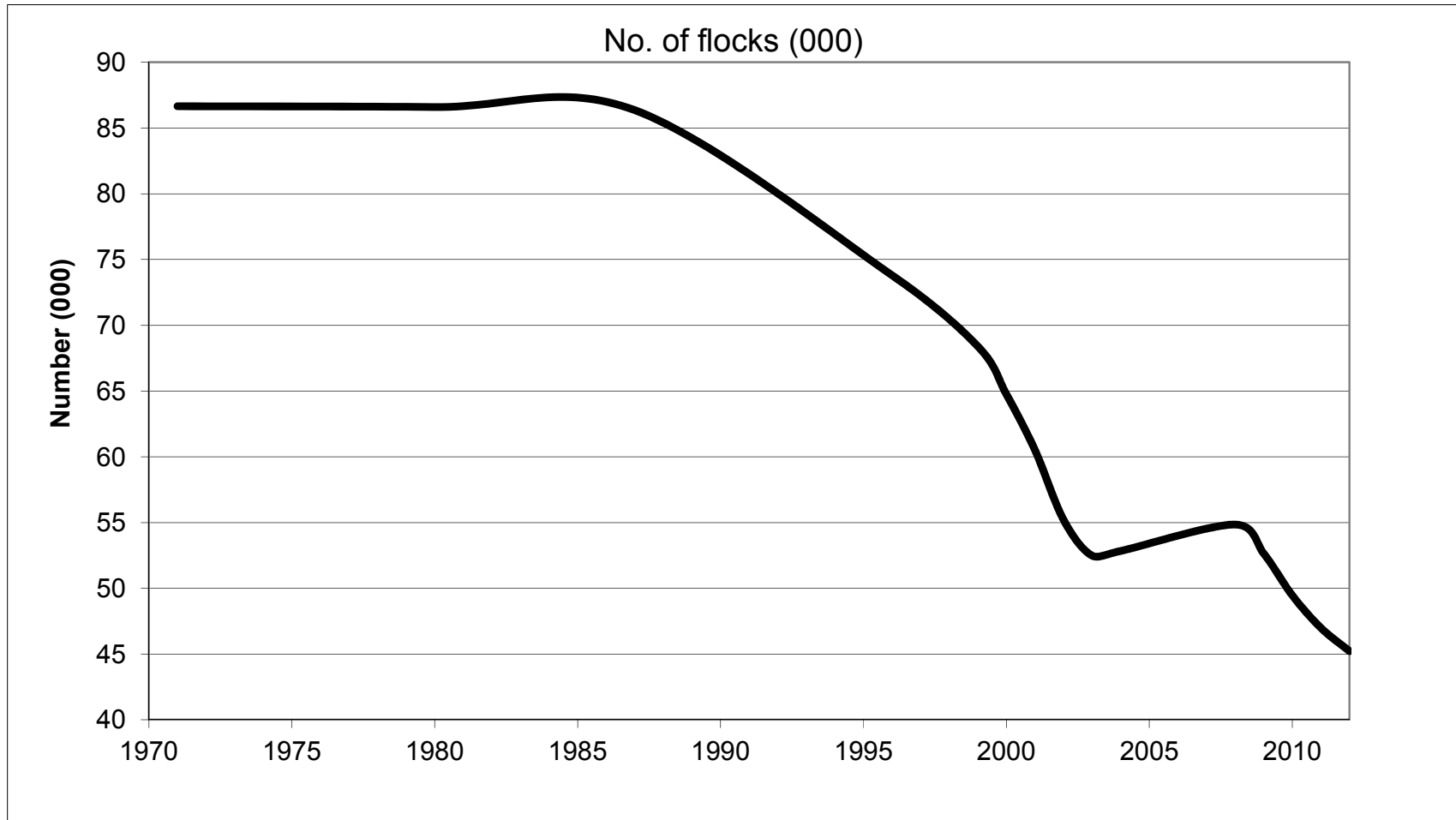
- Stratified crossbreeding structure still found
- Balance shifting towards crossbreds
- Many '*ad hoc*' crossbreds
- New breeds and composites still appearing
- Breeds with real traits to offer find a place

Acknowledgements



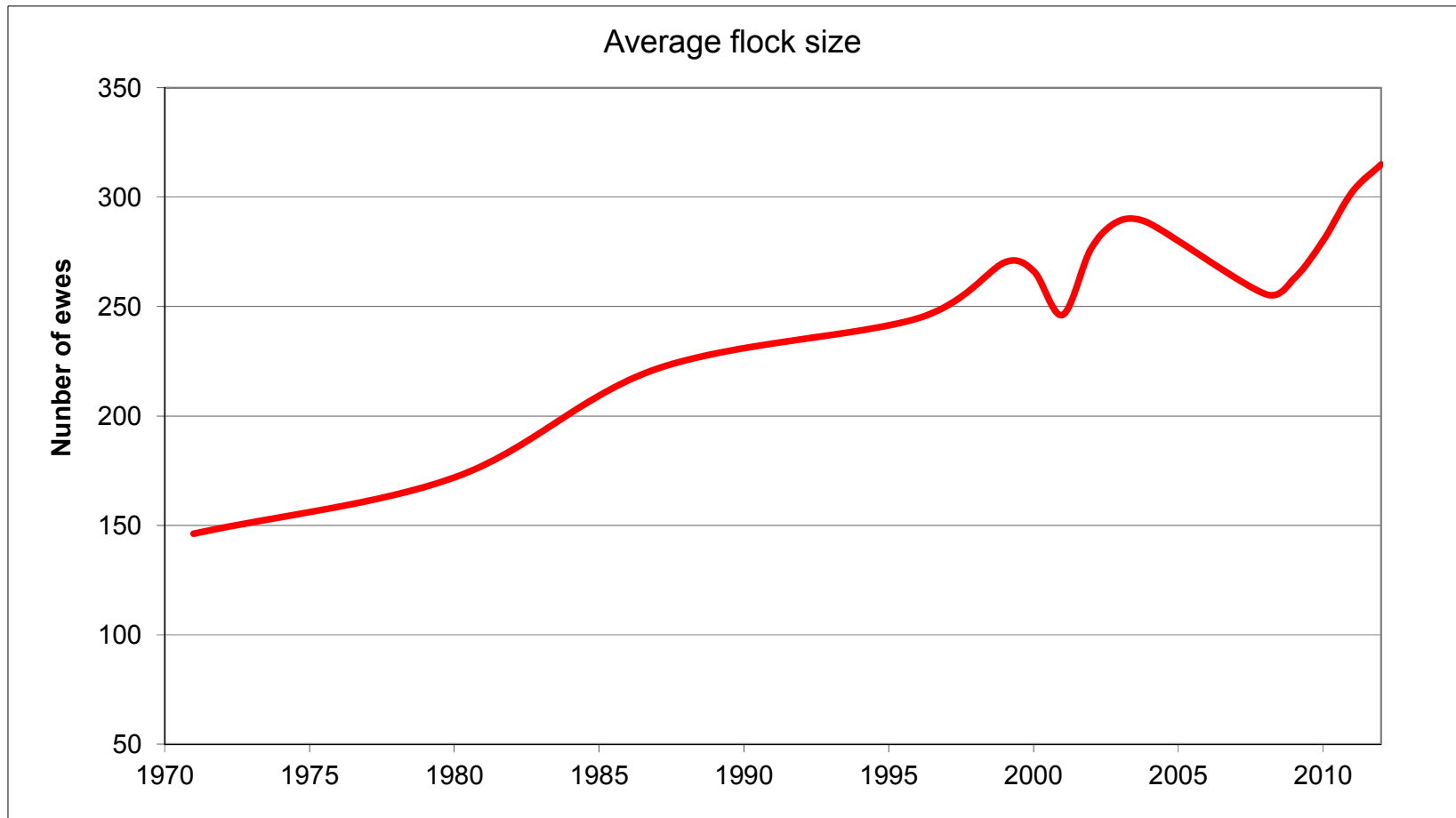
English Beef and Lamb Executive – for funding and carrying out 2012 Sheep Breed Survey

Demographic changes - flocks

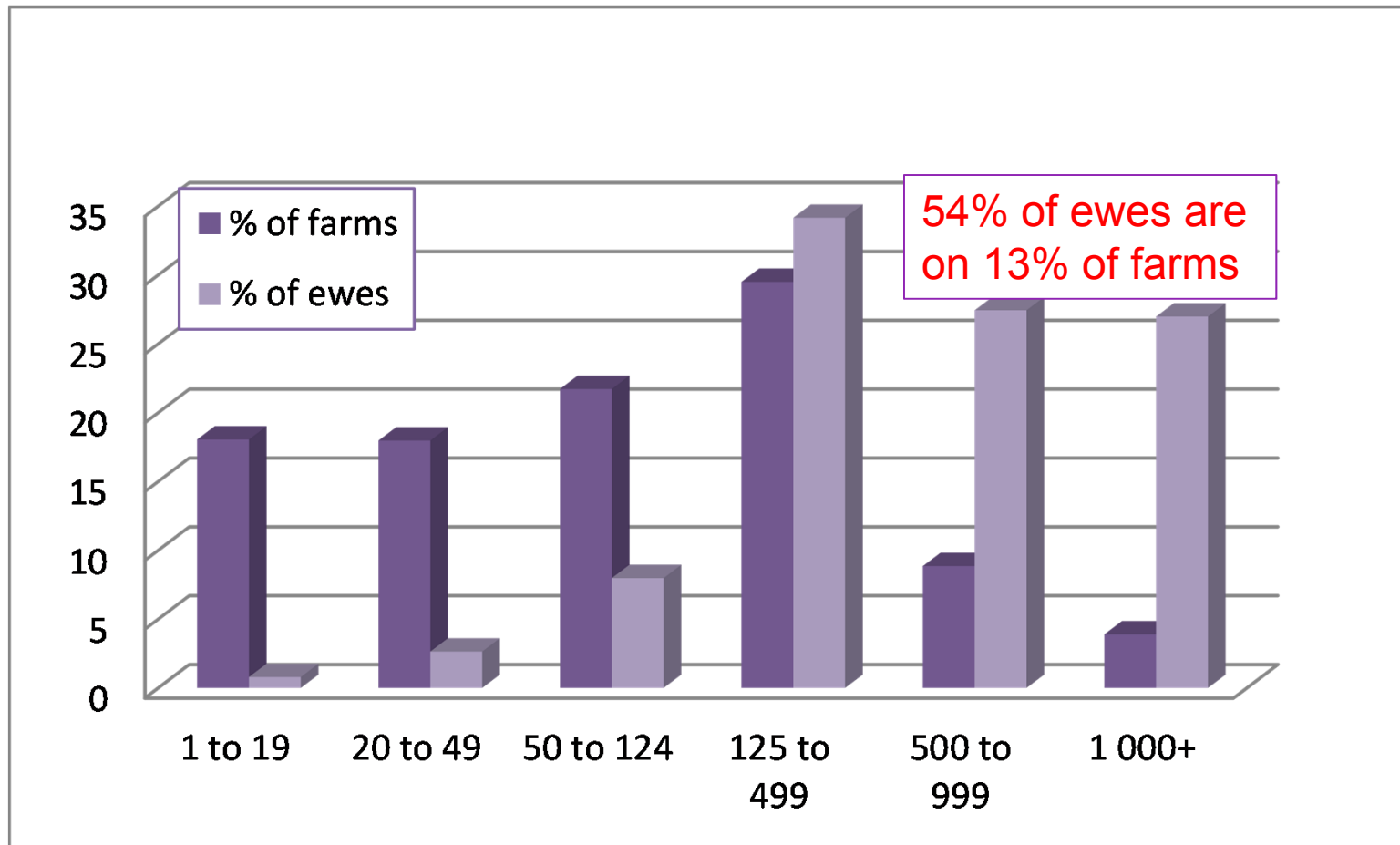


Source: BWMB

Demographic changes – Average flock size



Distribution of ewes and farms by breeding flock size



UK - Source: Defra June census 2012