

Sheep Farmer

MAY/JUNE 2013

THE JOURNAL OF THE NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION



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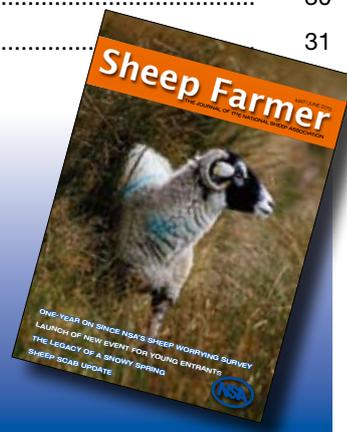
CONTENTS

Phil Stocker Writes...	2
News in Brief	3
Regional Reports	4
SW Ram Sale Secretary Steps Down after 20 years	6
Royal Winner for George Hedley Award	7
Healthy Sheep, Healthy Profits	7
Perfect Location for Biennial Event	8
NSA Summer 2013 Events	9
Young People in the Sheep Sector	10
The Youthful Sheep Event	10
Sheep Worrying a Growing Problem	12
The Legacy of the Snow	14
A 1980s 'New Entrant' Shares His Farming Story	16
Greening of the CAP	18
Sheepdog Showcase at Stoneleigh	20
Nematodirus & Fly Strike Warnings	22
Stamp Out Scab Update	23
A Cautionary Fluke Tale	23
Keeping Records Simple & Meaningful	24
Getting to Grips with Scab	26
Wool Update	28
Making Money from Wool	29
Breed Society Directory	30
Classifieds	31

Front cover

Photograph taken by Jan Wilson of Cheshire on the Keld-to-Kirkby Stephen road in Cumbria.

Jan is a semi-professional photographer looking for North of England farmers willing to allow her to take photographs of sheep. She has spent lots of times on farms, will come at a time that suits you and will not be intrusive in your daily work. If you can accommodate Jan, email her on brackendalephoto@aol.com.



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Phil Stocker Writes...

Membership Matters

I like to use as many column inches of *Sheep Farmer* as possible to talk about things we can affect, with the weather being something sheep farmers mainly have to deal with. However this issue cannot go by without mention of the horrendous conditions that all our sheep farmers have experienced recently, with those that have suffered losses through heavy and prolonged snow drifts being particularly badly hit.

The snow-related losses hit the media headlines with some farmers losing hundreds of ewes and, in some cases, over 50% of their breeding stock. Less worthy of media attention has been the serious impact delivered by a record-breaking wet summer, autumn and winter, followed by chilling winds that killed new born lambs and burnt off any grass during a critical period. The result of all this is high losses, high feed costs, poor milk yields, difficult to manage parasite control and compromised sheep health.

The NSA has been heavily influential in securing the support that has been announced by all devolved national Government for individual hardship cases and helping with fallen stock costs. On the farm, attention to detail and careful planning and management will be essential to pull back from where we find ourselves.

On a more positive note, lamb prices climbed rapidly in March and April after several winter months of alarmingly low returns, which were the result of three main things coming together. One was poor grass growth and little sunshine delaying and concentrating lamb sales, with many farmers off-loading stores out of necessity rather than choice. Another was the value of the pound adversely affecting exports. And thirdly, the volume of NZ lamb coming in was abnormally high this autumn and was increasingly made up of legs and loins rather than whole carcass cuts, and to make things worse, some supermarkets used NZ legs as a loss leader to attract people into store.

But looking forward, at least we have the well-balanced basket of markets for UK sheepmeat that I have mentioned many times before – supermarkets, independent butchers, farm shops, direct retail, export markets and domestic catering markets, and within all this

our hugely valuable ethnic market. As farmers we also benefit from the choice of selling in live markets or deadweight, and of working together via independent producer groups.

Our main competition in lamb is NZ but, with export demand for our UK product strong, if it's done right NZ and UK lamb can sit alongside each other and compliment the offer to consumers. If it's done wrong, as it was last autumn and over the winter months, it can have catastrophic effects on our domestic prices, which does not benefit anyone long term.

Then there was the horsemeat scandal. Will the promises of Tesco and other supermarkets to work more closely with producers change the way retailers source their lamb? Do they see opportunities, or even necessities, to shorten or localise supply chains? Is this an opportunity for UK sheep farmers, a catalyst that will result in greater stability and security and a move away from troughs and peaks of supply and price? Or will this prove to be another false dawn?

Only time will tell, but today there is still a shocking lack of understanding with most supermarkets believing British lamb goes 'out of season' during our winter months. The diversity of production we have means there should never be a month when British lamb is not available, and with proper incentives and a bit of strategic thinking, producers could easily respond to a more constant demand.

But if larger retailers showed an increased interest in committed and continual UK sourcing, it would throw an interesting challenge our way, in terms of whether we as producers would be prepared to show commitment and supply those markets preferentially. Some may well do, as long as supermarket prices reflect those available elsewhere. And this is where our well-balanced market structure comes in, to provide competition, natural market value and resulting security.

For lamb, for all of Tesco's statements, this will not and cannot be the end of NZ imports – and the issue of ensuring a fair and reasonable return for sheep farmers is one we have to tackle as a global farming community.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Show Season is Here!

NSA is looking forward to welcoming members to the five regional sheep events planned for this summer – kicking off this month with NSA Welsh Sheep and culminating in July with NSA Sheep NI.

Many of you will receive a NSA Welsh Sheep programme and/or NSA North Sheep Programme with this copy of Sheep Farmer magazine. If your poly-envelope did not include these and you would like to see a programme ahead of the event, please contact Helen Davies (07976 803066 or helen@nationalsheep.org.uk) for NSA Welsh Sheep or Julie Sedgewick (07836 773888 or jas@nationalsheep.org.uk) for NSA North Sheep. Details of the other three events

can be found within the magazine.

NSA will have a stand at each of the events and we look forward to speaking with members from all over the UK. We will also be promoting our Rappa membership recruitment campaign at each of the events, which may well be the ideal opportunity for you to sign-up a friend or neighbour to NSA and be entered into the prize draw.

The membership recruitment campaign has been running since February and is already proving very popular. To remind you how it works, anyone who signs up to NSA as a new member automatically gets entered into a free prize draw to win a Rappa 10ft mobile sheep yard. But as an existing NSA member you can also benefit from this membership recruitment campaign and be entered into the draw



One lucky NSA member will win this Rappa 10ft mobile sheep yard as part of our 2013 membership recruitment campaign.

Not Too Late to Fill in the 2012/13 Lambing Survey

Please visit www.surveymonkey.com/s/WWHBNC5 to fill in the 2012/13 lambing survey, which is aimed at collecting information particularly about Schmallenberg. We appreciate the later lambing flocks had far bigger issues to worry about than Schmallenberg but it is important that the industry collects data on this emerging disease and we do urge members to complete the survey even if they did not see any Schmallenberg cases at all. If you do not have internet access please feel free to contact the NSA Head Office at Malvern and answer the questions over the phone. Please have your membership number handy. A full list of the questions asked in the 2012/13 lambing survey can be found in the previous (March/April) edition of Sheep Farmer. □

New Chairman for Scotland

NSA Scotland welcomed their first ever female chairman at their AGM in March. Sybil MacPherson of Argyllshire will be ably assisted by Ian Hepburn as Vice Chairman, with George Milne and Caroline Orr continuing in their roles as Regional Development Office and Secretary respectively. □



NSA Sheep Event Quick Guide

- **NSA Welsh Sheep** • Tuesday 21st May at Beili Ficer Farm, Llansawel, Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, SA19 7JT.
- **NSA Highland Sheep** • Thursday 30th May at Dingwall Mart, Dingwall, Ross-shire, IV15 9TP.
- **NSA North Sheep** • Wednesday 5th June at Crimple Head Farm, Beckwithshaw, Harrogate, North Yorkshire, HG3 1QT.
- **NSA Sheep South West** • Tuesday 11th June at Moortown Barton, Knowstone, South Molton, Devon, EX36 4RZ.
- **NSA Sheep Northern Ireland** • Monday 1st July at Ballymena Market, Woodside Road, Ballymena, County Antrim, BT42 4HX.

when someone you recommend signs up to NSA. The more recommendations you make the more chances you have of winning, so make sure anyone signing up puts your details on their NSA membership form. As always, there is a membership form in the back of this magazine. If you need call NSA on 01684 892661 or visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/rappadraw. Full terms and conditions for the Rappa membership recruitment campaign can also be found on the website. □

Date Confirmed for NSA AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 120th Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held at Pentlands Science Park, Bush Loan, Penicuik, Midlothian, Scotland EH26 0PZ at 10am on Thursday 22nd August 2013.

Members are entitled to appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf at the AGM and the Proxy Notice will be available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk ahead of the meeting. Any member wishing to have a copy of the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st December 2012 please contact NSA Head Office at Malvern. □

Overseas Shearers Given the Go-ahead

The National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC) has received confirmation from the Home Office that the concessional arrangements for overseas shearers entering the UK for short-term employment will remain the same for this season. A letter from the Home Office to NAAC says the concession will be in place from 1st April to 30th June 2013. □



REGIONAL REPORTS

South West

We held the regional AGM in February, which was well attended and, with no changes in officers this year, was a fairly speedy affair! Robert Jordan announced that I will be giving up as Regional Secretary at the AGM in 2013, so we will be looking for a replacement and will advertise in the Sheep Farmer and on the NSA website later in the year.

Once again we found an extremely talented young speaker in Chris Berry, who was the Novartis scholarship winner in 2012. His presentation on his trip to New Zealand was informative and interesting. If you get the chance to hear it, please do so, as it is well worthwhile. Phil Stocker followed and updated us with the activities of the NSA and the sheep industry in general. As expected, there were a lot of questions and much discussion.

As I write this in mid-April hopefully the worst of the weather is finally behind us and we can start to look forward towards summer. We are planning events for the coming months and will try to spread them throughout the region.

The Royal Cornwall Show is on June 6th-8th. We have secured a prime position opposite the sheep marquee for our stand and, as usual we would be



The terrible spring weather and a desperate need for financial support from the Government saw NSA and other stakeholder groups invite David Heath, Minister of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, to Cumbria to see the devastating extent of the problem for himself. Here John Geldard, NSA Chairman (right), explains the need for financial assistance to Mr Heath (left).

grateful of offers of help to man it, even if just for an hour or two. In exchange we can provide an entrance ticket.

NSA Sheep South West is being held on June 11th and is a date every member should put in their diary. This is being held at Moortown Barton, Knowstone, South Molton by kind permission of Michael and David Snell and family. The event will have 140 trade and breed society stands, so whatever your need or interest, it will be catered for. This year, instead of the Open Question forum, we have arranged a programme of seminars. The farm tour will prove to be a popular attraction. Sheepdog demonstrations have been arranged along with the sheepdog sale. There will be various competitions, those that need to be entered before are carcass, fleece and Shepherd of the Future, so let me know if you're interested (see contact details on page 2); programmes will be mailed out to all members in early June.

Sue Martyn, Secretary

Cymru/Wales

In the last few months NSA Cymru/Wales has held two Roadshows in conjunction with British Wool Marketing Board and Dunbia. The one in Llanrwst, although poorly supported, provoked a lively discussion. The lack of attendance was put down to the first (and what we assumed would be the last) snow of the year – how wrong we were.

Our thoughts are with those farmers who have lost stock and suffered hardship during this hard winter, which as affected us all in some way. As I write this report it is the warmest day since last September and I hope we have many more of them to boost urgently needed grass and other crops.

We have been heavily involved with RDP and CAP consultations and will be pressing hard for the Welsh Government to embrace NSA's Animal Health Scheme within the RDP. Also in Wales, the Sheep Scab Task and Finish Group, which NSA was involved in, will present its final report to the Health and Welfare Steering Group in May. Our recommendation is to strengthening the current controls by making sheep scab a notifiable disease in Wales.

Progress on the Working Smarter report, the Welsh Government-initiated project to find ways to reduce red tape, is ongoing and NSA has been invited, along with other key players, to put an industry proposal together to review the six-day standstill rule. This proposal is undergoing a risk assessment, along with the Welsh Government proposal, and we will keep you updated on the progress of this.

Plans for NSA Welsh Sheep on Tuesday

21st May at Beili Ficer farm, Llansawel, SA19 7JT are now complete and the region is looking forward to another great event. Many thanks to all the hard work put in by hosts and the local farming community. The event guide can be found in this issue of the Sheep Farmer and if for some reason it is not included and you would like to a copy please contact NSA Malvern on 01684 893661 who will arrange for a copy to be sent out to you. Alternatively all information can be found on the event website www.welshsheep.org.uk.

Helen Davies, Secretary.

Eastern

Regional officers have been busy working away on arrangements for a new and exciting event taking place on 8th June – the Youthful Sheep Event – kindly hosted by the Darley Stud Management Co Ltd, at the Rutland Yard, Newmarket. This is an event for young people in the sheep sector (more details on page 10) but there will also be a BBQ and social event in the evening, which we hope many members of the Eastern region will join us for. For catering reasons, please let the Eastern Region office (contact details on page 2) know in advance.

We also have a member of the NSA Eastern Region Committee completely a heroic feat for charity this summer. Dan Phipps, who also happens to be our host for the Youthful Sheep Event in June, will be completely the 'London 100' (the 100 mile Olympic cycle route) on 4th August. He is raising money for the children's charity Scope and NSA members are invited to sponsor him at <http://uk.virginmoneygiving.com/fundraiser-web/fundraiser/showFundraiserPage.action?userId=DanPhipps2&fald=292400&isTeam=false>.

Jonathan Barber, Secretary

Scotland

Let's hope that by the time you are reading this we have green grass to look at. Never have fields and hillsides looked as barren and starved, or so many areas of Scotland struggled from a complete lack of vegetation for sheep to graze and roam across. The legacy of the snow will last a long time.

The atrocious spring weather came on the back of a wet summer and autumn, and another big problem on a lot of farms has been liver fluke. I was hit personally on my own farm, having never seen fluke here before, and NSA Scotland has initiated a number of meetings with Moredun and our Chief Veterinary Officer, Sheila Voss, to encourage more to be done in this area. The problem really cannot be over-emphasised enough, as

it is making farming a real challenge for many.

Also on the animal health front, myself and our new Chairman Sybil MacPherson met with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC, formerly SAC) to talk about flock health accreditation schemes and MV, Jaagsiekte (OPA), Borders disease, Johne's, LCA and Schmallenberg, as well as liver fluke (see picture).



George Milne (far left) with SRUC's Brian Hosie (left), Sybil MacPherson (centre), a lab technical (right) and SRUC's Ian Pritchard (far right).

Amongst the continuing CAP meetings and negotiations, all aimed at keeping Scottish farmers in business in the future, NSA Scotland is really looking forward to NSA Highland Sheep, our brand new event for 2013, being held at Dingwall Mart on 30th May. By hosting an event further north than ScotSheep, we hope we will see a lot of our members from the Highlands and islands. Lady Clare MacDonald will open the event and Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead will give a keynote address, so we hope to see lots of you there.

With preparations also underway for the NSA Sheep Centre at the Royal Highland Show, where all NSA members will receive a warm welcome, there's an exciting summer to look forward to as we turn our backs on a long winter and a cold spring.

George Milne, Development Officer

Northern Ireland

Many of you will know that Northern Ireland was one of the worst-hit areas when the snow came this spring, and NSA played its role in securing a support package from the Northern Ireland Agricultural Committee with John Blaney, NSA NI Vice Chairman John Blaney, and his brother hosting Permanent Secretary Noel Lavery on their farms to see the extent of the devastation caused by snowstorms. After a horrendous year the last thing we needed was a late spring but these things are out of our control.

A reminder to all NSA NI members that from 1st June all bought-in sheep moved to market must be in the flock keepers' flock. Until now, if a farmer moved sheep to another farmer and forgot to send DARD a movement notification, and then

moved them to market the department would generate an 'inferred movement' and sale could go ahead. As this is seen as a break in traceability it will not be allowed after 1st June 2013.

At the end of April Joanne Pugh, NSA Senior Communications Officer, and I spent an enjoyable evening with the members of Strangford Down Ltd, a co-operative that markets sheep and lamb in Northern Ireland, where we had an exchange of thoughts on a variety of subjects.

We are looking forward to the NSA Sheep Centre, our new venture at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's Balmoral Show in May. We are grateful to all have offered their support and volunteered their time at the show, including Charlotte Underwood from NSA HQ, who is travelling across to join us.

NSA Sheep NI is on course to be an array of sheep related exhibits, displays and information not to be missed. We look forward to seeing all our friends, old and new, on Monday 1st July in Ballymena Livestock Market.

**Edward Adamson
NSA NI Regional Manager**

South East

At the time of writing this report in Amid-April we are hearing very mixed reports for lambing flocks in the South East region, but one thing that is certain is that we are weeks behind in grass production. Many farmers are having to supplement feed, which is going to add a lot of extra cost. Let's hope these costs are covered by better market prices throughout the year.

Three members from our region, Marie Prebble, Susie Parish and Kate Kershaw, went to help at the Campaign for Wool event that transformed Somerset House in London into 'Wool House' in March. The event was a great success and enjoyed by many.

Please make a note in your diary for a farm walk hosted by Andrew Barr, our Regional Chairman, on Thursday 13th June. We will be meeting



continued on page 6

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SW Ram Sale Secretary Steps Down after 20 Years

And SW Ram Sale celebrates 25 years

At the NSA SW Ram Sale AGM Peter Farnsworth stepped down as Secretary, with Sue Martyn taking his place. Peter held the role for 20 years, having been the first person ever appointed to the job when Messrs Rendells auctioneers decided in 1993, after five years of providing various clerks, that a proper secretary was needed.

David Darke, NSA SW Ram Sale Chairman, says: "Peter has been an outstanding secretary, providing the sale with a very efficient and professional service. Nothing was ever too much trouble for him. Whether it was arranging our committee meetings, the ballot for the sale or the sale itself, they were always extremely well organised, without too much fuss. He made my life as chairman much easier, and was extremely well thought of by

the rest of the committee too. Vendors and purchasers knew Peter as a person they trusted and respected. Peter has been a major influence on our ram sale and we thank him for his dedication and support. We shall miss you Peter."

This year the NSA South West Ram Sale celebrates 25 years. The sale first started off at the old Devon County Showground on the outskirts of Exeter, before moving to Westpoint, adjacent to the M5. The sale moved with Westpoint and stayed there until the rent got too prohibitive. The sale then moved to Exeter Livestock Centre, where it has been ever since – and where it will be celebrating 25 years this August.



NSA Ram Sale Quick Guide

- **NSA Eastern Region Sale of mixed breed pedigree shearing rams:** Monday 19th August at Rugby Farmers Mart. (To be confirmed)
- **NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale:** Monday 5th August at the Royal Welsh Showground.
- **NSA South West Region Ram Sale:** Wednesday 14th August at Exeter Livestock Centre.
- **NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale:** Friday 20th September at Melton Mowbray.
- **NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale:** Monday 23rd September at the Royal Welsh Showground.



continued from page 5

at 2pm at Place Farm, Firlé, Lewes, East Sussex, BN8 6LP. Andrew has an early lambing flock of 140 Charollais/Mule and Suffolk/Mule ewes that are homebred, and an April lambing flock of 400 mainly Scotch Mules. He also runs Sussex cross and Angus cross suckler cows along with a Welsh Section A and Shetland Pony Stud. Altogether this requires tight grassland management and we will be able to see what he does to rejuvenate and lift his swards. It is always useful to know how many people will be attending, so please let me know (my contact details are on page two).

The Region's Committee will have met by the time you read this, when we will be discussing next year's NSA South Sheep Event. We have several possible sites to consider and the event will almost certainly be held in East Sussex. After the slightly disappointing attendance figures for our 2012 South Sheep Event, we will also be considering holding the next event on a Saturday instead of mid-week. Any thoughts that you may have on the subject, please contact me or your local Regional Committee Member.

Bob Blanden, Secretary

Central

With farmers digging sheep and lambs out of 15-foot snow drifts, an army helicopter dropping hay onto

Kinder Scout, roads in hill area and rural lanes being impassable for days, and moor and hillsides inaccessible to farmers trying to find and feed their sheep, the heavy snow and extensive drifting affected our region for quite some time. And as though this wasn't bad enough, there have been some reports of dog worrying in the Peak District where sheep have been too weak to run away and have been found alive but ripped to pieces.

Everywhere the consumption of additional concentrates and blocks is common and supplies of straw and bedding are reaching crisis point. For the older generation, they cannot remember things being this hard since 1963. For the (slightly) younger generation, they are totally focussed on trying to deal with the challenges of lambing with limited resources and no grass.

The constraints of some stewardship schemes mean some farmers have been faced with other dilemmas about their upland flocks. One farmer whose sheep were due to be gathered ready for lambing said they had dug out gateways but the drifts were so bad they needed to use a JCB to clear a track – but if they did that they would be in danger of losing their subsidies, since they are not supposed to use vehicles on the moor as it damages the heather. Another said

he'd was trying to get a derogation on the rule there should be no chain harrowing beyond 31st March (to avoid damage to ground nesting birds) given conditions have made it impossible to follow any normal farming timetable.

Throughout all of this there have been requests for interviews from the media, and though we haven't had as bad a time as many others, we do feel a certain responsibility to act as a 'mouth-piece' for those who have and 'put the record straight' on behalf of our members – especially in response to listeners of the Radio 2 Jeremy Vine Show saying they had 'no sympathy with farmers, who shouldn't be allowed to keep sheep if they don't have enough buildings to put them in during bad weather'!

A telephone interview Bob gave to the Sheffield Telegraph, where he explained a good deal of the difficulties, merely acted as a lesson in dealing with the press. All that was reported was his final up-beat remark that 'farmers are a resilient bunch and they have encountered difficulties before and they will largely come through this', which did limit the picture somewhat. However, they did also include his suggestion that 'if you want to help, eat British lamb'. Let's hope some of the Great British public do just that!

Anne Payne, Secretary/Manager □

Royal Winner for George Hedley Award

HRH The Prince of Wales named as 2012 recipient

NSA has announced His Royal Highness (HRH) The Prince of Wales as the winner of the 2012 George Hedley Memorial Award, which is presented annually to recognise an individual for their outstanding contribution to the sheep sector.

John Geldard, NSA Chairman, says: "We are absolutely delighted to name HRH The Prince of Wales as a deserving recipient of this prestigious award. In its 52-year history the George Hedley Memorial Award has recognised a wealth of great people who have made incredible contributions to the industry, and it is a pleasure to add a member of the royal family to that list for the first time.

"No other individual can be said to have such a holistic approach to supporting the sheep sector as the Prince of Wales. Be it his patronage of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, various breed societies and industry organisations, his instigation of the Mutton Renaissance Campaign, forming the Campaign for Wool or championing young people through the Prince's Countryside Fund,



The Prince of Wales officially opening NSA Scot Sheep last year

his passion for the sector and upland sheep farming in particular is abundantly clear. Through all his initiatives he has sought to add value to our meat and wool to ensure better returns, but also raise the profile of our sector and demonstrate the environmental and wider benefits of sheep farming to the rural economy.

"The Prince of Wales' support of both rare breeds and young people shows he values the need to protect traditional ways of sheep farming but also strengthening our industry for the years to come. Similarly, he has been

there as a helping hand in times of crisis but equally encouraged the sector to look forward and innovate to ensure its future viability."

The winner of the George Hedley Memorial Award is voted for annually by NSA representatives, following nominations from a number of committees, organisations, breed and show societies involved in the sheep sector. HRH will be presented with his award in the summer, recognising him as the 2012 winner, and nominations for the 2013 award will be invited later this year.

The award is given to honour the memory of George Hedley, a highly respected farmer from the Scottish borders who was involved with the NSA (then the National Sheep Breeders Association) for many years. It was while he was Chairman of NSBA, travelling to a Council meeting in London on 26th January 1960, that he was tragically killed in a car accident. The NSA presented an award in his name that same year, and every year since.

Healthy Sheep, Healthy Profits

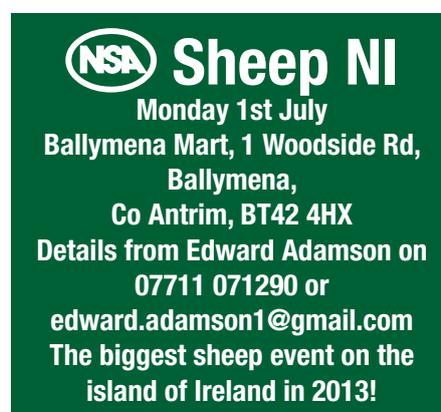
Preview of NSA Sheep NI 2013

Details are now being finalised by NSA Northern Ireland to hold its third major sheep extravaganza on Monday 1st July 2013 at Ballymena Livestock Mart, Woodside Road – and with a theme of 'Healthy Sheep, Healthy Profits' the plan is for a showcase of the entire sheep industry.

The NSA NI Committee, under the leadership of Maurice McHenry, aim to provide an entertaining and educational day for sheep farmers, their families and anyone with an interest in sheep and the rural community.

They say it will be a bigger and better event to that which was held in 2011, which attracted an audience of almost 2,000 people. In July an even larger crowd is expected, as news of the success of the 2011 Sheep event has spread amongst the farming community.

Many commercial trade stands have

A green rectangular poster with white text. It features the NSA logo at the top left. The text reads: "Sheep NI Monday 1st July Ballymena Mart, 1 Woodside Rd, Ballymena, Co Antrim, BT42 4HX Details from Edward Adamson on 07711 071290 or edward.adamson1@gmail.com The biggest sheep event on the island of Ireland in 2013!"

NSA Sheep NI
Monday 1st July
Ballymena Mart, 1 Woodside Rd,
Ballymena,
Co Antrim, BT42 4HX
Details from Edward Adamson on
07711 071290 or
edward.adamson1@gmail.com
The biggest sheep event on the
island of Ireland in 2013!

already been booked, as well as a range of different sheep breed societies. In line with the event's theme, there will be a sheep health area, as well as technical seminars. The sheepdog sale will go ahead too. A number of competitions will be held, including Young Shepherd

of the Year, open and YFC stockjudging and a wool fleece competition.

For other members of the family, there will be a major food and crafts section, as well as a cooking demonstration, a display of traditional crafts by the Women's Institute, and an animal farm with a variety of farm animals.

Mr McHenry says: "Sheep farmers play the crucial role of custodians of the countryside in managing diverse and rare habitats that are to be found both in hill and lowland areas. This event will allow for an exchange of views as well as an input from the professionals.

"The event has already received a boost in the form of major sponsorship deals with Autoline Farm Insurance, ABO Wind Power, McCaughan Animal Health, Novartis Animal Health, Shearwell, Caltech Crystalyx and Ulster Bank."

Perfect Location for Biennial Event

Meet the hosts of NSA Sheep SW 2013

Michael Snell put down the phone and told his wife Mary he had arranged a big party for her birthday – NSA Sheep South West.

Regardless of his wife's surprise, Moortown Barton, just off the Mid Devon Link Road at Knowstone, is a perfect location for this event on 11th June. It is both situated in the heart of the South West's sheep country and easily accessible.

At 274m (900ft), this exposed wet 121ha (300-acre) farm is not easy to manage. However, following the flock's regular 200% lambing percentage scan, these ewes have eventually turned out not far off that prediction.

The flock consists of 500 North Country Mules lambing down to Suffolk and Poll Dorset rams from 20th March, and 450 Suffolk crossed Mules topped by Texel and Charollais rams. This year

a Texel cross Charollais ram has been used successfully to produce lambs with thicker skins and good growth rates.

Alongside the sheep, 100 12-month-old Charollais cross and Simmental cross store cattle are procured from either Exeter or Sedgemoor markets in late spring. During the winter they are housed on 4.5kg (10lb) a day of milled barley, wheat and protein mix and ad lib silage. Some are ready to sell the following spring and the rest finished at grass by autumn. The ground is too heavy to support a suckler herd.

Up to 300 Poll Dorset ewe lambs are sold in the autumn either privately or at Exeter. This enterprise helps cash flow. There is no shortage of buyers for these strong lambs to go into early-lambing flocks.

Once weaned, at the beginning of August, the rest of the lambs are stored. They are creep-fed in batches from November onwards and some are moved to dairy farms to finish off grass.

"We don't push to sell in the autumn because trade drops with a glut of lambs," says Martin. "I am a liveweight man, proud of what we do, and I like to be in the pen with the lambs when they are all sold at South Molton Market. Most are 45kg; some heavier."

Attention to detail is the key to a successful lambing at Moortown Barton, he says: "It all starts when we keep back the best fields – which have been fertilised – to flush ewes. They go in three weeks prior to tugging (50 ewes to a ram) which gets them shining. And we always give them energy blocks with added fish oil."

The result is 970 ewes lambing in three weeks, which Martin describes as 17 to 18 'quite busy' days. This year, after three weeks, just over 30 ewes were left to lamb.

At scanning trebles are kept in; the rest of the flock is housed at the beginning of February. When lambing Martin is very successful at wet fostering any treble onto a single and using adopters. After 24 hours groups of six stay in a larger pen for another day – except this year when they have been housed for as long as possible. This ensures mothers are well settled with lambs prior to turn out. Again, high energy feed blocks with fish oil are introduced, but no cake. Salt and zinc blocks are also available in an attempt to keep orf at bay.

"The plan is to turn out so grass grows with the lambs," explains son David. "The farm is down to permanent pasture, which is annually dressed with urea and Grasstrac, which has definitely perked up stale pasture."

Five years ago lambing percentage started to drop off so Michael and David decided to invest in improving pasture. First they started liming and, again, immediately noticed an improved, sweeter sward. Now, they are concentrating on stitching in grass and clover mixes.

Fields shut up at the end of May are cut for silage in the last week of July, with 32ha (80 acres) producing 700 tonnes for the clamp. Weather permitting, 8ha (20 acres) is also cut for haylage and the same for hay. Dung is then applied and the aftermath grazed by weaned lambs.

Right now the Snells are praying for good weather – both for the event and to give them time to catch up preparing for it. Mary, however, has already received her birthday present – the house has been painted and she has been promised the windows will also receive the same treatment before the middle of June!

Farm tours will be one of the attractions at NSA Sheep South West. See advert on facing page for more information. □

Farm Facts

- Michael and Mary Snell moved here 30 years ago. David (35) farms in partnership and is married to Vicky, younger son Peter marries Louise at the end of May and daughter Julia married to Philip Slade, mixed farmer outside Tiverton.
- 121ha (300 acres) of permanent pasture on culm clay at 274m (900ft), plus 81ha (300 acres) grass keep.
- 500 North Country Mules put to Suffolk and Poll Dorset rams, and 450 Suffolk Mules put to Texel and Charollais. Poll Dorset ewe lambs sold in autumn and everything else finished from Christmas and marketed liveweight at South Molton. Cull ewes fattened and sold at South Molton.

NSA Sheep SW Highlights

- Shepherd of the Future (£1000 prize money sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers)
- Student Shepherd of the Future (£500 prize fund sponsored by Eblex)
- Seminars: Defra report on EID and new sheep database; advice on avoiding blowfly strike; British Wool Marketing Board report
- Fleece and prime lamb competition
- Sheepdog sale
- Back fat scanning and butchery demonstrations
- 150 trade and breed society stands
- Farm tour





SCOTTISH REGION

HIGHLAND SHEEP 2013

THURSDAY 30TH MAY

DINGWALL AUCTION MART,
DINGWALL, IV15 9TP

By kind permission of Dingwall and Highland Marts.

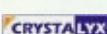
FEATURES INCLUDE: 9AM-5PM

SEMINARS. TRADE STANDS. SHEEP BREEDS.
DEMONSTRATIONS. COMPETITIONS.
SHOW & SALE OF PENS OF 2 HOGGS.

MAJOR SPONSOR:

Harbro

MAINLINE SPONSORS:



ADMISSION:

ADULTS - £12
NSA MEMBERS - £6
UNDER 16 - FREE

Further information from the Organiser Euan Emslie

Email: euan@appliedremedies.co.uk

Tel: 01430 441870 Fax: 01430 448432

Mobile: 07718 908523

www.nsascotland.org.uk

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Registered charity in England and Wales (249255) and in Scotland (SC042853)



NSA NORTH SHEEP 2013

Organised by the

National Sheep Association

NSA North Sheep 2013 will be held at
**Crimple Head Farm, Beckwithshaw
Harrogate HG3 1QT**
on **Wednesday 5th June**

By kind permission of J M Wilson & Sons

**Trade and Sheep Breed Stands
Seminars Farm Tour • Stockjudging
Educational & Working Farm
Demonstrations**

www.northsheep.org.uk

Further information please contact Julie Sedgewick

Tel: 01325 314650

Email: jas@nationalsheep.org.uk



your business your future



Sheep South West 2013

Organised by NSA South West Region

Tuesday 11th June

10am - 5pm

By kind invitation of Michael & David Snell & family,

Moortown Barton, Knowstone, South Molton. EX36 4RZ.



- * Farm Tour
- * Competitions
- * Seminars
- * Demonstrations
- * Shepherd of the Future - £1,000 prize fund
- * Student Shepherd of the Future - £500 prize fund
- * Trade & Breed Society Stands
- * Carcass Competition
- * Sheepdog Demonstrations & Sale
- * Fleece Competitions

**No Dogs on Site except Assistance dogs
& those entered in the sale.**

Admission - £12 Non NSA Members.
£6 NSA Members with current card & subject to conditions.
YFC members/Students £6 with current card.
Under 16 - Free.

Further information from Sue Martyn.
Tel: 01409 271385. Mob: 07967 512660.
Email: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk



Registered Charity in England & Wales (249255) and in Scotland (SC042853)



WELSH SHEEP 2013

TUESDAY 21ST MAY

BEILI FICER FARM, LLANSAWEL,
LLANDEILO, SA19 7JT

By kind permission of Siôn and Claire Williams.

FEATURES INCLUDE: 9AM-5PM

FARM TOUR. SHEEP DOG TRIALS.
SEMINARS. TRADE STANDS. SHEEP BREEDS.
DEMONSTRATIONS. COMPETITIONS.

MAJOR SPONSOR:



ADMISSION:

ADULTS - £12
NSA MEMBERS - £6
STUDENTS / UNDER 16 - FREE

Further information from the Organiser Helen Davies

Email: helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Tel/Fax: 01938 590535

Mobile: 07976 803066



www.welshsheep.org.uk

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Young People in the Sheep Sector

NSA provides encouragement and support

With the agriculture sector in the UK needing in excess of 60,000 new entrants in the next 10 years to remain sustainable, NSA can be depended upon to do its bit to help the next generation of sheep producers get their feet on the ladder.

In fact much more than that, NSA leads the way in providing help and support for new entrants in the sheep sector, providing encouragement and opportunities for the future leaders, shepherds and innovators within our industry.

NSA has a long history of encouraging keen young shepherds; the regional and national Young Shepherds competitions held across the UK at the NSA Sheep Events have been taking place for many years. These events, where competition is fiercely fought amongst competitors up to the age of 26, place great emphasis on best practice, ensuring the very best stockmanship is rewarded.

World Final

In 2011 the regional winners were rewarded with a trip as part of a UK team (facilitated by NSA and Eblex) to the first ever World Young Shepherds Championships in New Zealand – a wonderful experience with England returning victorious with Philip Derryman (a winner from NSA South West Sheep) taking the overall individual world title. Clearly our young shepherds can hold their own on the world stage, something we should be very proud of.

Aside of the practical competitive element of NSA's activities for aspiring young shepherds, there is a plethora of expertise and knowledge available to youngsters that join regional committees. Many regional committees actively encourage representation from YFC groups and younger members onto their committee – for example, NSA Cymru/Wales has forged a close association with the Harper Cymru group via a sponsorship arrangement which

supports the Welsh students at Harper Adams whilst they in turn promote NSA where they can.

Many NSA regions sponsor a young person from their region to attend the biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table Conference where they can hear first-hand speakers of the highest calibre, often from around the world, discuss the very latest technical innovation for the sheep sector and its practical and commercial implications on farm. NSA Northern Region supports young people from their region attending the Oxford Farming Conference, providing an eye-opening experience into the world of agri-politics and an invaluable networking opportunity.

Mentoring

Each year NSA Cymru/Wales Region celebrates a young person by the giving of an award at the Welsh Winter Fair to a young person who has made an outstanding contribution to the Welsh

The Youthful Sheep Event



Darley Stud, the host farm, lambs more than 1,000 ewes each year.

This brand new event will take place on Saturday 8th June at the Rutland Yard, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 9RF, by kind permission of the Darley Stud Management Co. Ltd.

The event will provide a 'meet and greet' opportunity for young people to be able to discuss their needs and ideas with those who have knowledge and experience to impart; it will provide help and moral support from the region, give access to information and contacts for young people who wish to 'get a foot on the ladder' and advance within the industry.

A key element of the event will be an Open Discussion Forum – a designated area within the event where young people can come and hear, first-hand, stories of how others have succeeded within the sheep sector and how they got started. There will be the opportunity to chat to representatives from a variety of situations within the sector, who all got started in very different ways.

Alongside this will be practical demonstrations, some hands-on training, the Eastern Region Young Shepherd of the Year Competition, and a BBQ and social evening. The event will be officially opened by Sir Jim and Lady Paice.

sheep industry, and is also currently investigating the possibility of putting forward NSA members to act as mentors on the YESS (Young Entrants Support Scheme) in Wales.

NSA Scotland hosts 1,000s of school children as part of their presence at the Royal Highland Show each year while NSA Central Region hosts an inter-schools shepherding and schools wool challenge at their event, to try to connect with the younger potential shepherds in the region. This list of examples is by no means exhaustive but gives a flavour of some of the many activities that NSA regions are delivering for young people.

New Event

The list of activities and opportunities available for young people via NSA is constantly evolving in response to demand – but one of the most valuable things NSA is able to offer is a willing ear to listen, and advice from those that have done it all before. The opportunity to talk to people who have learned through experience is also a key feature of a new event – the Youthful Sheep Event – which is being organised by the NSA Eastern Region, specifically for young entrants – see panel below.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive,



The first ever World Young Shepherds Championship saw a whole UK team compete.

says: “Adding this exciting new event to the mix of activities NSA undertakes for young people has highlighted the need for us to bring everything under one umbrella and really show the extent of our work. It is also important to emphasise everything NSA does as we look for funding to grow our activity and offer even more in the future.

“All the NSA regions and committees are 100% behind efforts in this area, some even volunteering funding already, as we also investigate potential partnerships with those outside of NSA to increase our ability to provide tangible benefits for young people wanting a future in the sheep sector.”



Andrew Foulds, NSA Eastern Region Chairman



Jonathan Barber, NSA Eastern Region Manager



Dan Phipps, Youthful Sheep Event host farmer



Sir Jim Paice, who will be opening the event

The venue has fantastic facilities and is managed by a team that believes in the importance of helping the next generation of sheep producers. Darley lambs a flock of 1,000 females, alongside 350 ewes for a sister company. The flocks are lambed in four groups, with roughly 450 lambing in January, 450 in late February/March, 350 in late March/April and 100 in May.

The January lambing is split between Mule Suffolk cross ewes and North Country Mules, which also make up the remainder of the flocks. In addition, 320 Mule ewe lambs are purchased and 100 home-bred ewe lambs kept and wintered.

The aim of the Darley flock is to farm a commercial and profitable flock whilst fulfilling an important role in the grassland management. This is done in conjunction with what is the primary business of breeding thoroughbred racehorses.

Lambs are marketed primarily through Randall Parker Foods via the Mayhill producer group. The sheep flock is managed by Dan Phipps, who is a member of the NSA English Committee and NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee

Andrew Foulds, NSA Eastern Region Chairman, says: “We are very excited about holding this event and hope that it

will be the first of many similar occasions. The importance of getting the right young people involved in our industry cannot be underestimated and we must all do our bit. We are very grateful to the Darley Stud Management Co Ltd for hosting the event and hope that many of you will join us on the 8th June.”

The Youthful Sheep Event is being organised by NSA Eastern Region for anyone looking to get started in the sheep sector, regardless of where they are in the UK. To register your attendance, or for any enquiries, please email youngentrants@nationalsheep.org.uk.



Sheep Worrying a Growing Problem

NSA pledges to continue efforts in this area

It is just over 12 months since the NSA launched its sheep worrying questionnaire, collecting information from sheep farmers directly affected by dog attacks – and the information collected is startling, suggesting more than half (57%) of attacks happened in private, enclosed fields with no footpath and, therefore, no permitted access to dog walkers.

The data also shows some farmers had up to 72 sheep injured during a single attack, while some had 30 killed. This provides an average of 3.2 sheep injured per attack and four sheep killed, with costs ranging from £60-£17,000 and providing (what NSA considers to be a very conservative) average of £1,580 per incident.

It is very clear that more needs to be done to raise the importance of dogs being kept on leads at all times around livestock, and also to ensure dog owners do not leave their dogs out-of-doors for long periods of time to 'entertain themselves'. This latter scenario certainly seems to be a serious problem, as in 45% of cases reported to NSA, the owner was

Gillian Herbert

Linley Green, Herefordshire

"When a pack of small dogs, mostly Jack Russells, ran our lambs ragged I did some sums. We run a closed flock and have culled hard over the years to be left with breeding stock that has twins, lambs easily, makes good, milky mothers and produce an average of nine crops of lambs. On this basis, assuming first lambing at the age of two, twins every year and a 50:50 ewe:ram lamb split with ewe lambs retained for breeding, after 10 years the loss of one ewe would lead to the loss of 133 ram and 133 ewe lambs. Assuming 10% of the ram lambs were suitable to sell for breeding and the rest were sold at around the breed society prices then the loss would be well into five figures per ewe killed.

"I put this to a dog owner, who had previously suggested it my fault for not filling in the hole under the fence where the fox comes through, and told him that if it happened again I would be shooting the dog and taking him to court for reimbursement of lost income. The dog was always on a lead after that."



Dog attacks have received variable responses in local media not present.

The message that any dog can become a killer when it 'gets it blood up' is something that particularly needs to be emphasised, as many owners seem to think their own dog is not capable of such behaviour. Data collected by NSA suggests 52% of cases involve just one dog, suggesting it doesn't take a 'ring-leader' to initiate an attack. Occasionally two dogs (35% of cases) and involved by more than two dogs is rarer (13%).

Kevin Harrison

North Stoke, Gloucestershire

"Our land goes around Bath racecourse and near a golf course, which is very popular with dog walkers. The main problem is people walking on the golf course do not have a clue where their dogs are. Once a golfer chased a dog off because it had hold of a sheep's neck, but the dog started circling them both. The next day I went to check on the ewes and there another two dogs in there. I feel like I'm banging my head against a brick wall.

"If I go and say something I look like the grumpy old farmer, but if the police go and say something and increase patrols, as they have done over four weekends, it seems to get the message across."

NSA is therefore embarking on a sustained period of activity to raise the issue with regional and local media, as well as countryside magazines and publications aimed at dog owners. The data we have collected over the last 12 months will be vital to this, as well as case studies of NSA members who have been affected.

We are also in the process of engaging with more than 50 police forces around the UK, as one clear message that our questionnaire revealed was incredible variation in the way police forces and individual officers respond to sheep worrying reports.

For every questionnaire response telling us the local police force, community support officer or dog warden was helpful, we had another saying the police were simply just not interested. In fact, one NSA member told us a policeman had asked him what steps he had taken to keep dogs out of his fields. While the dogs involved on that occasion were lurchers and could probably clear an average fence with comparative ease, it is incredibly concerning that such ignorance about sheep farming (and indeed the law) appears to be in out there.

To be clear, while sheep farmers have a legal obligation to stop their sheep straying, the responsibility to keep dogs

Not just dog walkers

NSA has received very worrying ad-hoc reports of sheep worrying as a 'sport', with participants targeting enclosed fields of sheep with teams of dogs to inflict as much damage as possible. This does not appear to be widespread as yet, but it is vital to report any suspicions to the police so they are aware of the issue. NSA will assist members wherever possible to emphasise the seriousness of such activity. Footage of such incidents is incredibly difficult to obtain but can make a big difference, even if it's just filmed using your mobile phone.

Another problem NSA members report to us is sheep getting caught in the cross-fire during lamping expeditions for rabbit and deer. This is also incredibly difficult to tackle, but talking to your neighbours may help identify local culprits.

more information from affected farmers – so please contact us if you have an attack and encourage others to do the same. □

NSA is in the process of getting more plastic "Keep your dog on a lead" signs made; email joanne@nationalsheep.org.uk to register interest. You can also download a poster at www.farmersguardian.com/sheepworrying.

out lies absolutely with the dog owner. There are two pieces of legislation linked to this:-

- The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) Act 1953, which allows a fine of up to £1,000 to be issued if a dog is found attacking or chasing livestock or at large, not on a lead or under control, in a field or enclosure containing livestock.
- The Animals Act 1971, which states the keeper of a dog caught damaging by killing or injuring livestock is liable for the damage (i.e. can be sued for compensation).

Many readers will be aware farmers have the right to shoot a dog found attacking or worrying livestock, but NSA would urge caution, as this is the last resort if there are 'no other reasonable means of ending or preventing the worrying' and it is not unheard of for farmers to be taken to court as a result. Therefore, documenting all incidences on your farm and recording evidence where possible (even if it is just using the camera on your mobile phone) is always advisable.

While the NSA questionnaire results provide some really useful information on specific attacks, it by no means provides an overview of the scale of the problem.

For this a recent investigation by Farmers Guardian newspaper is useful, as they used information from NSA data but also sent requests to all 51 police forces in the UK (excluding the City of London) under the Freedom of Information Act to request information on the number dog attacks involving sheep. Results from the 28 police forces who responded showed 739 attacks in 2012, compared to 691 in 2011, although NSA thinks this masks some serious under-reporting.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "There is very little consistency in police forces throughout the UK about how they record the information, how they respond to calls and how they deal with incidences afterwards. No one knows what the police are prepared to do, so they don't bother reporting it."

"This year, where there have been so many losses from Schmallenberg, liver fluke and the weather, on top of feed shortages, farmers are not in the right frame of mind to deal with another added pressure. It also means some ewes are not in the condition they should be and will be less robust, making them an easier target for dogs."

This is why NSA will continue to work in this area, promoting the issue to the non-farming public and also gathering

Dog Worrying Statistics

NSA has recorded 101 separate dog worrying incidents in 35 counties in the UK and found the following results:-

- 75% of attacks were witnessed by somebody, even if it was not the farmer.
- The majority of attacks reported (57%) occurred in private, enclosed field with no footpath and no permitted access for dog walkers; 29% of attacks were in private fields with a footpath and the rest were on common/access land (9.5%) and country parks/nature reserves (4.5%).
- When a farmer was aware of the number of dogs involved, they usually reported just one dog attacking (52% of cases). Occasionally it was two dogs (35% of cases) but more than two dogs was rare (13%).
- 89 reports to NSA stated how many sheep were injured/killed. This showed a range of 0-72 for injuries and 0-30 for mortalities (including sheep euthanised for extreme injuries). On average, each attack saw 3.2 sheep injured and four sheep killed.
- 34 farmers were willing to give an approximate cost of the attack to NSA and these ranged from £60-£17,000, giving an average of £1,580 per attack.
- The most common additional problem

reported was abortion in early pregnancy, but other issues included prolapses in later pregnancy, injuries causing lambing difficulties, mis-mothering of young lambs, broken fences caused by fleeing sheep, blood causing flystrike, fat lambs suffering a check to daily liveweight gain, and injuries preventing fat lambs being sent to market.

- When a farmer was aware of the attack, the owner was present in just under half (45%) of cases. Usually (97%) the owner was local rather than a visitor.
- Where a farmer was aware of what happened to the dog(s) afterwards, 29% were reported as destroyed, 62% of those shot by the farmer.
- Of the cases reported, 77% were not the first incident experienced on the

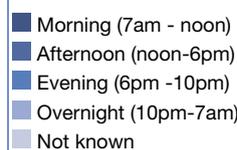
farm. Of those, the number of previous incidents ranged from 1-30 with an average of 3.8 previous attacks.

- Attacks happen throughout the day and night, although slightly more (39%) occurred in the morning than the afternoon (15%), evening (30%) or overnight (20%).
- Nearly half of all attacks reported occurred in winter, with attacks occurring in other months spread evenly between spring, summer and autumn.
- Very mixed reports of police being very helpful or completely disinterested, depending on the police force and individual responding. Local dog wardens are sometimes of more help, but this is also variable.
- Only six cases reported to NSA have been taken further and prosecution considered. The outcome of four of these is known, with two dog owners ordered to pay costs/compensation and another two dog owners given a formal police caution.
- Private settlements were pursued in 13 cases (some successfully) and an insurance claim made in another 14 cases, but not all farmers are insured for dog worrying and others have concerns about high excess charges (£750 in one case) or hikes in premiums.

Place of attack
(81 responses)



Time of attack
(101 responses)



The Legacy of the Snow

Managing grassland after the terrible weather

The snow may have long melted, but it has left a terrible legacy in its wake, including serious financial implications for farming businesses that lost a lot of stock and maybe buildings too. As Sheep Farmer went to press we were still waiting for the finer details of how assistance would be delivered to affected sheep enterprises in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (see panel) and we continue to think of those who were hardest hit.

Thoughts now will be turning to the future and getting grassland to perform and make up some of the season lost so far. Given a lot of grassland entered 2013 in an awful state, struggling with a wet summer, autumn and winter, the snow has made a bad situation worse on many farms.

Grass Damage

Liz Genever, Eblex beef and sheep scientist, recommends carrying out a grassland MOT to assess damage and help prioritise action (see checklist). She says looking at the soil first is always important, but ever more so this year when many fields were water-logged last autumn and winter (with many even suffering from standing water) before having to cope with heavy snow and considerable melt-water.

"There are many fields that have had standing water over the winter and into spring," Dr Genever says. "This may be the result of compaction or it could be that the land has reached its capacity. The only way to find out is to dig holes once the land is drier to identify whether compaction is the problem.

"Dig a hole about 30cm deep and examine the appearance, smell and texture of the soil. If the soil is tight through the profile then compaction is an issue and action needs to be taken to improve the soil structure. Providing the compaction is in the top 10-15cm of the soil, an aerator can be used. However, if it is deeper, it will require a sward lifter or a plough.

"Check how many worms you can see; a low number of worms indicate problems that can relate to poor plant growth. Soil that is rusty or grey mottled in appearance, or is foul smelling, indicates poor drainage (temporary water-logging) and anaerobic (oxygen-starved) soils. These factors lead to poor growth as the

Grass MOT check-list

Soil:-

- Soil tests
- Compaction
- Worms
- Root depth
- Colour
- Smell

Grass:-

Ground cover

- Broad-leaved weed cover
- Clover content
- Weed grasses
- Sward heights

Find the full Eblex Grass MOT document, with a traffic light system to help identify problem areas, at www.eblex.org.uk/returns.

soil will be colder and uptake of nutrients will be poor."

Dr Genever also recommends doing a soil test for pH, P, K and Mg every three to five years. "If the soil is significantly off-target yields will be reduced," she says, offering a reminder that targets are pH6.0-6.5, P2 (16-25 mg/l), K2- (121-180 mg/l) and Mg2 (5-100 mg/l). "A recent research project revealed that only nine per cent of fields were on target for pH, P and K."

Sward height

Only after looking at the soil, should attention be paid to the sward, she says: "Getting the sward height right is crucial to good grazing management. If it is too low, intakes will be reduced, while if it is too high quality will be lost. Animal performance will suffer either way. Address this by using a sward stick to measure sward heights weekly to check whether heights are on target. Stocking numbers or fence lines may need to be changed to get it back on target.

"Low ground cover, the loss of sown species, low levels of clover and high levels of weed grasses are all signs that the sward is under-performing. Always check soil fertility and structure before reaching for the bag of grass seed or nitrogen." □

Right: The legacy of the terrible snow will be felt for some time. NSA Central Region member Kath Birkinshaw took this picture in the Derwent Valley, Derbyshire.



Financial Help A quick guide

England

An announcement is expected from Defra early in May listing the postcode areas that claims will be accepted from to reimburse fallen stock disposal costs. With a pot of only £250,000, farmers may have to prove a certain number of losses to be eligible. There is hope that both NFSCo members and non-members will be able to claim and NSA recommends keeping all paperwork and/or receipts linked to fallen stock disposals in preparation.

Wales

The £500,000 package offered by the Welsh Government is being delivered by the three farming charities – see below for details – and we are still waiting for confirmation that the EU had given the green light for affected farmers in Wales to receive their Single Farm Payment in October instead of December.

Scotland

NFSCo members will receive reimbursements to the tune of £500,000 once NFSCo has confirmed its January figures to the Scottish Government. NSA understands Cabinet Secretary Mr Lochhead and officials are also considering additional support, including for non-NFSCo members.

Northern Ireland

Details of hardship payments are yet to emerge but it is thought that those farmers who benefited from free fallen stock collections will have that deducted from any payment given later. However, the situation is not clear at the moment on this or any element of how funding might be distributed.

Farming Charities

The three farming charities are accepting claims from farmers throughout the UK, as well as distributing the £500,000 of Welsh Government money. Call the Addington Fund on 01926 620135, RABI on 01865 727888 (0300 1114166 in Scotland) or Farm Crisis Network on 0845 367 9990. Find more information at www.farminghelp.org.uk.

A 1980s 'New Entrant' Shares His Farming Story

Joanne Pugh finds out more about NSA Central Region Chairman Bob Payne

From shovelling pig manure to flipping hamburgers in New York City; from working his passage to Australia to helping abused children in the cities of Birmingham and Sheffield – Bob Payne says whatever job he's done, he always had 'an itch' for farming.

He satisfied that itch in 1982 when he and wife Anne bought Carr Head Farm, Stocksbridge, on the outskirts of Sheffield and built up the Handbank flock of pedigree Texels. They soon became members of the NSA and, nowadays, many of us know Bob and Anne as the 'dream team' behind the NSA Central Region, working side by side as Chairman and Secretary to keep the region alive and running a highly successful Winter Fair every other year. But far fewer of us know how Bob, who made a career in social work, managed to progress from keeping a few chickens as a kid to owning his own farm.

Bob was born and bred in Oxfordshire and says he spent every school holiday on the farms of friends and neighbours. He worked on a couple of farms when he left school at the age of 17 and then went to Harper Adams to do a National Diploma in Agriculture (NDA). After successfully completing his studies Bob worked for the Pig Improvement Company (PIC), which back in 1964 was simply a newly formed syndicate of six farmers who wanted to modernise the pig industry, embrace the hybrid breeding approach and minimise disease. The ambition of such a project meant that, as a lowly herdsman, Bob simply had to cope with the daily difficulties of 'working in a building site' as the business rapidly expanded.

"At the time hitching hiking around the world was all the rage," remembers Bob. "When I heard friends talk of sleeping on the beach in Morocco and visiting a nudist colony in France I decided I didn't want to spend my whole life shovelling pig manure! So I sold my van and bought a one-way steamer ticket to New York."

Various jobs followed – checking (incorrectly!) passenger bookings for an airline, serving hamburgers and waffles to 'hippies and dropouts in the grotty end of Greenwich Village' and house painting – before Bob decided America wasn't for him.

"As soon as you were in the US for six months you had to register for the 'draft' and, with the Vietnam War going on around us, that wasn't a risk I wanted to take," Bob says, adding that his next move was working his passage to Australia as a deckhand on a German freight ship. Having managed to smuggle a 150cc Lambretta motorcycle on-board the ship, once Bob reached Australia he had the means to travel to a tiny place near Adelaide, where a friend from Harper was working on a farm. Bob quickly found a job on a sheep and beef station nearby and enjoyed experiencing agriculture on the other side of globe.

When he returned to the UK a few months later, by working his passage in the engine room of a Norwegian ship, Bob went to stay with another friend from Harper, who was running a sheep farm on Anglesey, North Wales. But despite quickly falling back into sheep work in the UK, Bob decided he 'had wandered enough' and steady employment was needed.

Handbank Texels

- Sires used are a combination of home-bred rams and AI.
- Ewes scanned in December and put any empties back to the ram, meaning lambing stretches from February to April/May. 49 out of 50 ewes will be lambed this year.
- Around two dozen ram lambs identified each year for breeding and sold as shearlings; half privately and half through Skipton, the NSA Wales and Borders Main Ram Sale and local marts.
- Up to 30 ewe lambs retained each year as replacements or to sell, either privately or at Skipton.
- Some showing (and carcass competitions) done over the years, but not seen as a priority and nowadays more likely to be to encourage the granddaughters in young handlers competitions.
- All stock housed over winter and usually turned out in March, but this year's weather and lack of grass has delaying things by a month.
- Any lambs not suitable for breeding finished and sold to a long-standing network of friends and colleagues wanting lamb for the freezer. Cull ewes also sold from home, with value added through the production of burgers and sausages.

"New York was the first city I'd ever lived in, which isn't bad for a boy from rural Oxfordshire," he says. "All those people in one place made me interested in social problems so I trained as a social worker and went to live in Birmingham, which is when I met Anne."

Promotion and a move to Sheffield then came – along with three sons Joe, Tom and Daniel – but still Bob could not shake the feeling that he was born to be a farmer. He says: "It's when I took a few days leave and went to help a friend lambing that I thought, 'This is an itch that I've got to scratch'."

Carr Head Farm, in close proximity to Bob and Anne's jobs in Sheffield, seemed *Nine-week old lambs with their mothers, the first to lamb at Carr Head.*



like the perfect opportunity for them, so they were bitterly disappointed to be beaten by someone else to purchase it. But luck was on their side and six weeks later the sale fell through, meaning Bob and Anne became the proud owners of the farmhouse and 31 acres in July 1982.

The couple admit the 1970/80s housing boom meant the sale of their suburban home provided a 'great dollop' towards purchasing the farm, but success only came as the result of incredible hard work. Looking back at those early days, Anne remembers the hardship of starting a new business while Bob still worked full-time, she worked part-time (also in social work), they had three young children to look after and both the farm and farmhouse were in a state of disrepair. A new roof for the family home took its place on a long list of jobs that included repairing every fence and stone wall on the place.

"I thought I'd married a social worker!" she jokes, suggesting she became a farmers' wife purely by accident. "Over the years I saw him go full circle and get to the point when he was farming again."

The biggest challenge for Bob and Anne is the same as is still faced by new entrants today – getting enough land to make the business viable. To this day they have never been able to compete with the surrounding dairy farms to acquire any additional acreage, and so the true evidence of their success is making a business out of just 31 acres and 'bit and bats' of land rented around and about. This has been possible through a small but dedicated pedigree flock, which has always had Texels at its heart.

Bob was an early enthusiast of the breed, having been drawn in by the talk of incredible muscling and high lean meat yield. He bought a part-share in a ram lamb in 1981, when the breed was still relatively unknown, quickly followed by a 'graded up' ewe, as pure-bred females were still very difficult to get hold of at the time. Handbank Texels grew from there, with Bob and Anne quickly identifying a place for themselves in the



Bob says investing in decent handling equipment 25 years ago has paid for itself many times over since.



Bob and Anne Payne at Carr Head Farm, near Sheffield.

market selling pedigree ram lambs and shearlings to commercial farmers.

"We soon learned there were a lot of Texel's about and the likelihood of selling one at Lanark for £100,000 is vanishingly small," says Bob. "But there is demand for commercial shearling rams, and an increasing demand for recorded rams."

Bob and Anne were very early adopters of performance recording, weighing eight and 21-week-old lambs from a very early stage, later adding birth weights and CT scanning as well as other parameters over time.

"I'd worked for PIC so I was used to keeping records on individual animals," Bob says. "They only had a very crude machine back in 1964 but they were scanning for eye muscle depth and back fat, so I did not see recording as a deterrent with the Texels. And of course I had a career filling in forms with Sheffield Social Services!"

Bob and Anne were one of the first members of Elite Texel Sires (ETS), the recording wing of the Texel Sheep Society (now known as Performance Recorded Texels), but came to realise over time that success was based on balancing figures with appearance.

"The more exalted pedigree names doing well at shows have got everything to lose and nothing to gain by objective recording of growth and muscle," says Bob. "But flocks who record do not help themselves if they chose on figures alone. We've learn best through our back pocket. People do not want plain-looking Texels, regardless of how good their figures are. People want their bread buttered on both sides – males with good figures and EBVs that also look the part and have tight skin, white faces, black noses and good carcass quality. It's taken a while for recording people to take on the message that buyers need a bit of both."

This balance of looks and figures (although a work in progress) appears

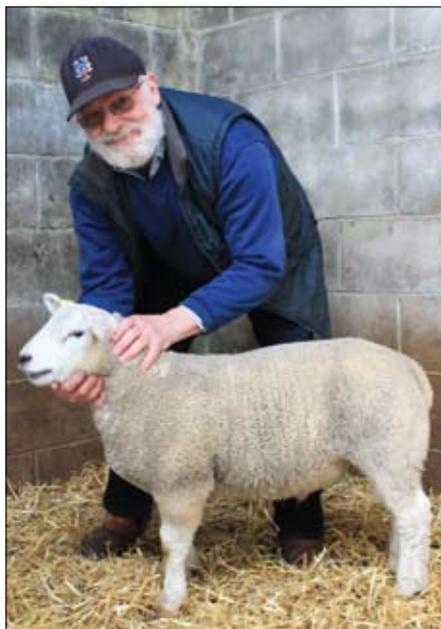
to be working for Bob and Anne – they always get at least two rams in the top 2% of recorded Texels each year, attract regular repeat buyers for their stock, and have several rams used extensively for AI. Highlights have been: the 2003-born Handbank Jack the Lad, who was much decorated in the show ring and used extensively for AI, siring 450 progeny in the UK, as well as having progeny in the US and Belgium; semen sold from Handbank Prince Charming to Norway; Handbag Rob Roy exported to Holland in 2012; and Handbank Supernova, who with a 'stonking great muscle EBV' was the fifth highest recorded Texel as a ram lamb.

Away from their success with elite genetics, Bob and Anne finish all their lambs not suitable for breeding and sell them as 'freezer lambs' directly to a network of loyal customers built up over the years. Anne explains: "Our jobs meant we had a ready market of probation officers, health visitors, social workers and teachers. We thought we would deliver the lamb in boxes but people didn't want that – they wanted to come to farm to collect it. Coming out to see some puppies or a lamb on the bottle became part of the deal."

The flock today totals 50 females, which is a reduction from a peak of 80 about 10 years ago, and the result of changing personal circumstances and a realisation that chasing around the district for rented land had its disadvantages.

"Over the last 30 years we've taken land all over the place, but when someone phones to say your sheep out and they're three miles away it's a

continued on page 18



One of Bob's favourite lambs born this year, already earmarked as having potential at eight weeks of age.

Greening of the CAP

How easy might it be to get 30% of your Single Farm Payment?

No farmer in the UK can have escaped the startling 30% figure that the EU is linking to future greening requirements under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). With pressure already on budgets, an incredibly complex series of hoops to jump through to qualify for such a massive chunk of your Single Farm Payment (SFP) is a daunting prospect.

But with all the tweaks and additions being made in Europe to the original proposal, how much of a challenge will it really be to meet the three criteria (crop diversification, retention of permanent pasture and ecological focus areas) or take up one of the alternatives?

Crop Diversification

The original proposal stated that any farm over 3ha (7.5 acres) with more than 15ha (37 acres) of arable land would have to have at least three arable crops. None of those three crops should cover more than 70% or less than 5% of the area.

The more recent version has raised the ceiling for the size of farms affected (it now applies to farms over 15ha (37 acres)) and also provides an exemption where 75% of the farm is permanent grassland. This is expected to help a large number of sheep farms that previously would have been severely penalised if they were growing a few forage or fodder crops for home-use.

It is unclear what the final version of the proposal might look like, as the European Parliament is also proposing a two-tier system where no diversification would be needed on arable land up to 10ha (25 acres), two crops would be required for 10-30ha (25-74 acres) and three crops for more than 30ha (74 acres).

Permanent Grassland

The original proposal stated that grassland more than five years old would be classed as permanent pasture from 2014 onwards and farmers could convert only 5% of it (although it was never clear if this was 5% per year or 5% indefinitely).

There was considerable concern over this definition of five years, as many grass leys are maintained for up to 10 years or more before being replaced. It was also difficult to see the logic behind the proposal, as 5-10-year-old-leys are not considered to have significant biodiversity value compared to older permanent pasture, which also acts as carbon storage.

One positive tweak to the permanent grassland criteria is that the original requirement for grasses or herbaceous vegetation to dominate has been revised to include any land that can be grazed, meaning upland pasture is now included.

With upland grazing included, the

75% permanent pasture exemption mentioned above could help a lot of sheep farms meet their entire greening requirement. The challenge is that the European Parliament would prefer to limit the remaining 25% to only 50ha (124 acres). Again, it is impossible to predict what influence MEPs might have on the final version of the policy. However, there does seem to be some optimism that the final definition of permanent grassland will be 10 years instead of five, as NSA is very certainly in the majority when it comes for pushing for this.

Ecological Focus Area

Opponents of ecological focus areas see them as nothing short of set-aside with no place under the first pillar of CAP, which needs to be geared towards food production. On the flip-side, supporters see it as a way to deliver environmental benefits at the same time as food production. In an era of growing populations and shrinking resources, NSA has serious concerns about taking areas of land out of production and thinks it is just one example of how the greening requirements are far too complex to effectively implement.

The original proposal states that 7% of a farm (excluding areas of permanent grassland) must be ecological focus areas but permanent grassland does not qualify. Again, given the biodiversity of

continued from page 17

real pain, and even more so if you're at work in Sheffield at the time," says Bob, adding that he went part-time just two years after taking on the farm, becoming the first Sheffield Council employee in a managerial position to 'job-share' with another person, and continuing with this arrangement until his retirement in 2002.

Having more time on the farm allowed Bob and Anne to build up to 70 pedigree Texel females and 20 pedigree South Devon cows, but juggling rented land, buying in straw and corn to intensively finish bulls, and Bob 'knocking on for 60' meant they dispersed the suckler herd between 2000 and 2002. Now they just rent land near the farm and a mixture of summer lets and a FBT with Yorkshire Water gives them an extra 20 acres. Immediately after the cows went, sheep numbers rose to 80, but five years ago Bob and Anne completed a barn



A lamb born towards the end of the lambing window, at three weeks of age.

conversion, gave the original farmhouse over to their older son Joe, his wife Alex and their daughters Ella and Clara,

and welcomed horses (a love for both granddaughters) to the farm for the first time.

"It's been a bit of an adjustment, especially given what ponies do to your grassland," jokes Bob. "But life has to change."

Not resisting change has clearly shaped Bob's life over the years, be it taking the opportunity to widen his horizons by travelling abroad, or never giving up the hope of one day having his own farm. There is surely a lot to be learnt from a man who was a 'new entrant' long before we used that phrase and, as Chairman and Secretary of a NSA region that strongly supports young people in the sheep industry, Bob and Anne have at least two qualities they can share – determination to get started and dedication to make a business work within the physical constraints placed upon it. □

older pasture, there's a lack of logic here. There is considerable pressure to allow individual EU Member States to decide what qualifies as an ecological focus area, and certainly some parts of the UK (i.e. some devolved nations) would include permanent pasture. It also looks likely, as with crop diversification, that ecological focus areas would not apply where more than 75% of the farm was permanent grassland.

Currently under negotiation is a gradual transition of 3% in the first year and 5% in the second, before moving to the required 7%. And indeed there is still negotiation about the top figure of 7%, with no foregone conclusion that this high threshold will make the final version of the policy.

Alternatives

Instead of farms having to meet the three criteria for crop diversification, permanent grassland and ecological focus areas, two alternatives are now being discussed in Europe. These are agri-environment schemes (more below) and 'environmental certification schemes'. The latter would be a new certification scheme that might include nutrient management, energy efficiency, biodiversity actions, water management, soil cover and pest management plans.

Considerably more interest has been shown in the second alternative, which is that participants in agri-environment schemes would automatically be seen as fulfilling their greening criteria. However, there is no suggestion that all agri-environment schemes would qualify and each would have to be assessed by the EU first. So, as a purely hypothetical example, it might be that Glastir in Wales qualifies but not the Entry Level Scheme in England.

But of even more concern is the issue

of double-funding, as it is possible the Commission will not look favourably on farmers using agri-environment to gain 30% of their SFP and still get paid for it under Pillar Two. This is one of the most important things awaiting clarification, as if it were deemed to be double-funding we would essentially see the most basic agri-environment schemes moved to Pillar One and become a mandatory part of the SFP.

Pillar Two

Under no circumstances would NSA like to see agri-environment schemes come under Pillar One instead of Pillar Two, but it does further support our argument that Pillar Two is a vital area of activity for agricultural stakeholder groups. Yes, the priority has to be arguing against modulation of funds from Pillar One to Pillar Two and pushing for a less complex approach to greening, but that does not mean Pillar Two should be neglected.

Whatever your opinion about agri-environment schemes, at least they are a part of the Pillar Two Rural Development Programme (RDP) that means Pillar Two funds are essentially 'ring-fenced' for farmers and land managers – i.e. you cannot access that money unless you are farming or managing land and can prove you are providing public goods. This is important when you consider the broad range of rural issues covered by RDP (housing, transport, employment and community projects etc) and how much money is soaked up by project managers and consultants. Agri-environment has become an important part of the viability of many upland and lowland farms, and it has to be said they have also incentivised environmental improvements and increased understanding.

Regular readers of Sheep Farmer and the Weekly Email Update will be aware of

NSA's proposed animal health scheme. This would broaden the remit of Pillar Two to bring it more in line with today's social needs, and facilitate access to funds in a way that gets money right into farmers' pockets, providing tangible on-farm benefits and delivering 'public goods' such as improved resource efficiency and tackling climate change.

Heath scheme

Our proposal is for a scheme that works in a similar way to agri-environment, in that farmers would collect points to qualify for an annual payment. Points might be on offer for farm health planning, advisory visits by the vet, involvement in monitoring and health schemes, biosecurity measures, quarantine procedures and attending registered meetings/training courses.

NSA has worked hard to progress this idea in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (a different approach is needed in Scotland, where a similar scheme was available under Land Management Options). We are meeting with real enthusiasm in some quarters and will continue to speak to Ministers and civil servants as Rural Develop Programmes are discussed in more detail.

NSA and others will fight tooth and nail to prevent agri-environment schemes moving under Pillar One, now or in the future, but the very fact it is being talked about shows how vital it is that structures are in place to help Pillar Two money get to farmers – and that those structures are in place as soon as possible.

 By Joanne Pugh, NSA Senior Communications Officer. For more information on NSA's CAP activity or proposed animal health scheme, email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

What looms on the horizon for sheep farmers as the 2014-2020 CAP package continues to be developed?



Sheepdog Showcase at Stoneleigh

Judith Sheen gives a preview of the International Sheepdog Trials

Sheepdog competitions (or trials) are one way the International Sheep Dog Society (ISDS) fulfils its mission of promoting and fostering the breeding, training and improvement of the shepherd's dog.

ISDS registered itself as a charity in Scotland in July 1906 and the first international sheepdog trial was held in August that year, with handlers from Scotland and northern England competing. Today the society organises four national sheep dog trials in the UK and hosts the international and the world Trials.

In the 'home' nations of England, Ireland (including the Isle of Man), Scotland and Wales, a maximum of 150 handlers per nation compete annually in their respective national sheepdog trial. To be eligible to enter a national sheepdog trial the dog must be entered in ISDS's stud book before 1st June in the year of that trial and have attained each nation's minimum qualifying points. The 15 highest placed competitors from each of these four national trials then meet together in competition at the International Trial for the very desirable supreme champion award.

The top two brace handlers at each national trial also go forward to represent their nation in the international brace competition, along with a dog selected from each national team to compete in the international driving competition. In addition, to encourage and foster the development of youngsters, a young handler competition, for those aged 19 years and under, is staged during the international trial, with a representative

selected from each of the four nations. In total the trials bring together 72 competitors.

The first two days of competition at the international competition are qualifying trials. Each of the 60 dogs, 15 representing each nation, runs a course of the same size and number of sheep as is used for the nationals. The runs are scored by four judges, one representing each nation, and the highest placed 15 competitors, irrespective of nation, go forward to the third day to compete for supreme championship.

On the third day, for the supreme champion competition, the course is lengthened to around 800yds and the dog has to fetch one packet of sheep and then go back for a second – making a total of 20 sheep to be guided around the course. The runs are scored by the same four judges, and in addition merit points are awarded by taking the ranking of competitors by each judge, with the coveted title of supreme champion being awarded to the highest scoring dog. The greatest achievement!

The 2012 supreme champion was Boredale Gus handled by Ian Brownlie. Ian from Alloa, Scotland, joins a small exclusive group of handlers who won their national trial in the same season as the International.

Over 13,000 visits were made to the 2012 international trial at Bonvilston, near Cardiff. Not only were visitors and tourists attending from Wales and the local area, but the event attracted a selection of international visitors, from USA, Canada, Switzerland, Finland, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Germany, South Africa, Saudi

Arabia, New Zealand and Australia. A special guest at the event was ISDS Patron, HRH The Princess Royal. Her Royal Highness attended on the morning of the first day of competition and, besides meeting society officials, competitors and members, spent time sitting in the grandstand enjoying watching the runs.

The 2013 international trial will be held at Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire, from Friday 6th September to Sunday 8th September. This is the first time the international trial has been held at Stoneleigh and preparations are well under way for three exciting days of competition. The society is also delighted to announce that this year's event is being supported by very generous sponsorship from JCB Ltd.

The team from BBC Alba/MNE TV have confirmed that they will be attending and filming throughout the competition. This will be the 6th international trial that they have filmed and the 6th series of the popular Farpaisean Chon-Chaorach.

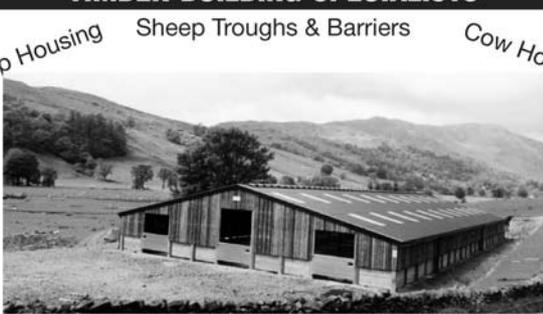
ISDS has extended an invitation to all NSA members to the International Sheepdog Trial on 6th-8th September. For more information on this and the four national trials, visit www.isds.org.uk or call 01234 352672.

□

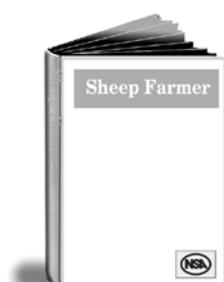
Judith Sheen is the Chief Executive of the ISDS and has extended an invitation for all NSA members to join ISDS at the International Sheepdog Trial on 6th-8th September. For information on international or national trials, visit www.isds.org.uk or call 01234 352672.

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Nematodirus & Fly Strike Warnings

Two new warning systems now in place

Now the weather is (finally) warming up, SCOPS is warning of a mass, synchronised hatch of nematodirus larvae and a real threat to lambs.

Therefore, the SCOPS website now includes regional warnings – see www.scops.org.uk/news-detail.php?NewsID=21.

The website hosts an interactive map marked with red areas (high risk; consider action), amber areas (significant hatch expected) and specific sites where outbreaks have been reported. It is based on work being undertaken by Bristol and Liverpool universities together with information for Eblex (soil temperatures), AHVLA, SRUC and ABFNI (lab reports) and case reports from vets around the country. NSA members can also feed in their own information via the website's 'contact us' box.

Be on guard

Lesley Stubbings, independent sheep consultant and SCOPS co-ordinator says: "Sheep farmers must be on their guard against nematodirus now that the weather has warmed up. Such a sudden change from cold days and frosty nights is when nematodirus is at its most dangerous with a mass hatch of overwintered parasites forecast. Farmers are urged to consider the risk factors, consult their vet or adviser with regard to local risks and treat lambs that are at risk."

Nematodirois is a particularly nasty disease in lambs, causing a high number of mortalities and stunting the growth of many others. It can strike very quickly in certain climatic conditions, with little or no warning, as the nematodirus battus worm has a different life-cycle to other sheep worms. Development to infective larvae takes place within the egg and infection passes from one lamb crop to the next year's crop. Cold weather delays hatching, so a sudden change in trigger a mass hatch.

Ms Stubbings says: "Because this disease strikes so quickly we can't afford to have a 'wait and see' policy with nematodirus. The damage is done by large numbers of immature larvae



that are not producing eggs, so faecal egg counts (FECs) are also not reliable. Farmers must act quickly on the basis of risk assessment and advice on the level of challenge in their area."

Risk factors

The main risk factors to consider are:-

- A sudden, late cold snap followed by a period of warm weather
- Lambs grazing pasture that carried lambs last spring
- Lambs that are old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass (generally 6-12 weeks old but this year may be younger with ewes struggling to milk)
- Groups where there is also likely to be a challenge from Coccidiosis
- Lambs that are under other stresses e.g. triplets, fostered, on young or older ewes.

If farmers feel their lambs are at risk and they need to treat for nematodirus, SCOPS recommends a white (1-BZ) drench, but warns that it may be necessary to treat lambs more than once depending on the spread of ages in a group and subsequent weather conditions

Fly strike

A similar web-based system is also in place for fly strike, although this regional warning system is reliant on farmers inputting information if they see a fly strike challenge on their own farm. NSA is urging members to contribute to this service, as changing weather patterns are disrupting age-old date-based

predictions.

SAC Consulting (part of the new Scottish Rural College (SRUC) formerly SAC) had created the website. John Vipond of SAC Consulting says: "The late spring will delay the occurrence of fly strike. Compare this with last year when March which was exceptionally warm and it makes a nonsense of any fixed-date based preventative programmes for fly strike. Conventional wisdom says the flystrike season is 16 weeks, yet I met a farmer in England whose lambs were struck in April, while some ewes were caught out unexpectedly in

November. That's double the accepted time."

It is very simple to report a challenge from flies on your own farm, simply by going to www.flystrikealert.co.uk and filling in the form with your postcode, age of sheep affected and the severity of the attack.

Protect not treat

Mr Vipond says: "We would all much prefer to protect our sheep than have to treat them, hence the decision to create this map-based website to inform farmers when there has been a problem in their area. Starting from this year it will build up a database showing the pattern of fly strike in the UK from season to season. We are asking farmers to report their own cases of flystrike and, while you are asked to use the first four digits of your post code, your entries will be anonymous.

"The more effectively farmers treat their ewes for flystrike the fewer flies will be about. The insecticide treatments available are powerful and very effective, but they should be used in a targeted manner to avoid fly larvae developing resistance and to limit any adverse environmental effects."

Find the nematodirus website at www.scops.org.uk/news-detail.php?NewsID=21 and the fly strike website at www.flystrikealert.co.uk. Links for both can also be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk.

A Cautionary Fluke Tale

By NSA Scotland member Hamish Waugh

We dosed all our sheep (around 800 in all) for fluke during the third week of January. We used a closantel-based product, because the cold weather led us to assume snail activity would be nil and we would only need to kill mature fluke in our sheep.

Despite the treatment I could see condition dropping off ewes on two of five hefts towards the end of February and in early March, and then we started to lose the odd one on the same two hefts. At first we put it down to the severe

weather, as when the snow receded a cold easterly wind made the hill more reminiscent of a desert than a South of Scotland grassy hill farm.

Having concentrated on the problem directly in front of us we looked a little wider and it then became apparent that the problem was localised to the two hefts we dosed on the last day of our dosing programme. We decided not to take any chances and dose the whole flock again.

It was at this stage we discovered the root cause of our problem. To my horror, although the dosing gun was set to 12ml, it was only spitting out 8ml. So we

have come to the conclusion that during the week that we dosed our sheep in January the gun developed a fault, as the first three hefts seem fine when taking the weather into consideration, and it is only among the last 260 sheep where we are suffering losses.

The moral of the story? Keep checking the efficiency of your dosing gun on a regular basis by recalibrating it at least after dosing every 100 ewes. This now leaves us worried that perhaps we may have created a situation where fluke may develop a resistance to closantel – only time will tell on that front.

Stamp Out Scab Update

As part of its commitment to engage everyone in the English Stamp Out Scab campaign, Adas has been running a series of meetings for farm service providers since April. There are still some meetings to be held, so go to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or call 01432 820444 for more information.

To give the initiative the best possible chance of success it is vital that everyone involved in the sheep sector is involved in the project, not just farmers, so NSA is keen to spread the word to shearers,

scanners, hauliers, auctioneers, field officers for markets and abattoirs, assurance scheme inspectors, Trading Standards, AHVLA and RPA officers, pharmaceutical representatives and others.

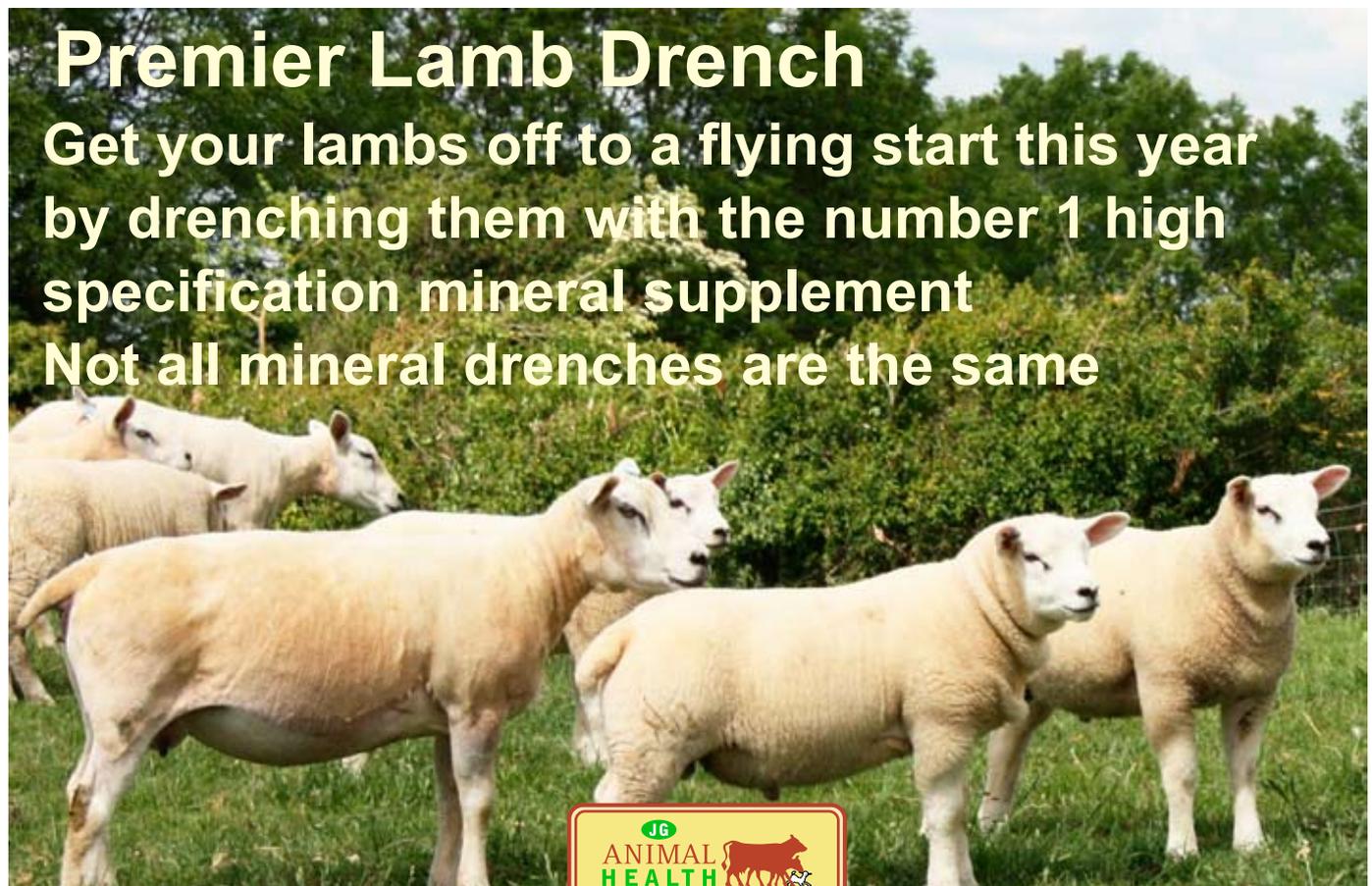
The Stamp Out Scab project is being delivered in England throughout 2013 by Adas consultants and veterinary surgeons on behalf of Eblex (AHDB), as a result of funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), for which Defra is the Managing Authority, part funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Meetings for farmers, vets and SQPs will follow in June/July onwards.

Welsh Update

NSA has been involved in the Sheep Scab Task and Finish Group, which was commissioned by the Chief Veterinary Officer for Wales to find the best way forward to control to disease. The group has made its recommendations, which include making scab a notifiable disease, and costings are now being more fully investigated.

Find advice on getting to grips with scab on page 26.



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Keeping Records Simple & Meaningful

Iain Richards, XLVets

For a lot of NSA members lambing will now be over for another year. For many the sigh of relief will be larger than usual, as it has been a challenging time to say the least, with potentially poor forage from last year's rain sodden summer and the bitterly cold weather that arrived at the end of March.

Compared to the latter, the effects of Schmallenberg virus seem relatively benign, although some farms have undoubtedly been hit very hard. One of the unanswered questions about the virus is the likely duration of immunity and if affected ewes be immune next year?

Late spring and early summer is a good point in the sheep year to look forward – and to start by looking back. That may seem a contradiction but the information contained in your records, be they high-tech and computerised or the little notebook in the top pocket of the jacket, is very useful in planning the coming year. It is worth remembering that tupping is only between four and six months away.

Correct targets

Targets can be useful in assessing the performance of your flock and shortfalls should be regarded as a cause for concern. However, you have to be careful to use the correct target and this is where benchmarking is useful. For example, a hill flock should only compare itself to other hill flocks, not to a highly intensive lowland system. The levy bodies (Eblex and others) produce some good guidance to approximate figures and these can be used as a starting point.

The risk of using figures as targets is the old 'lies, damned lies and statistics' phrase, as simple figures can be meaningless. So, if you achieve a lambing percentage of 120% but normally get 150% something has obviously gone wrong – but what?

If we take the last year as an example, it would be all too easy to blame bad weather and Schmallenberg for the poor results. However, if there is an underlying problem such as enzootic abortion, this will be missed and, more importantly, will still be present the following lambing time. This is where looking at your previous records can help pin down when these losses occurred. In fact, this



Recording the number of sheep put to the ram and the number of lambs they scan for are both useful exercises, but only if figures later in the cycle are also recorded.

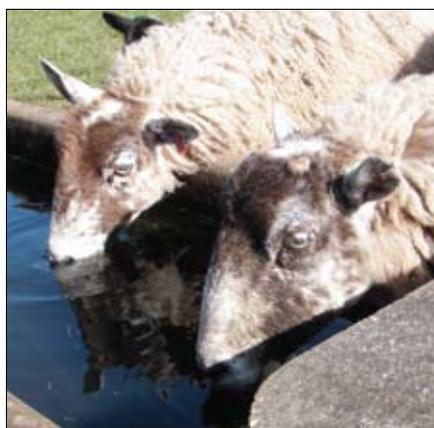
is the whole point of keeping records – using the information.

Records are no more than a series of figures that are the last thing you want to be bothering with during a busy lambing time. However, the information within those figures can make your life easier in the future.

What to record

To get the best from your figures you have to know exactly what those figures mean. For instance what do you understand by 'lambing percentage'? I've seen lambs born, lambs surviving to 48 hours, lambs marked, and lambs sold, all used to define this crucial figure.

What to record (and when) is just



So many variables can cause performance to increase or fall that a history of the farm and changes to ewe management, are vital.

as important. Too much information becomes clutter; too little information and it is difficult to pinpoint crucial moments.

The Eblex Sheep Better Return Programme Manual 14, "Reducing Lamb Losses for Better Returns" contains a very useful guide to five points in the lamb production cycle where the recording of straight forward figures can give powerful information. The five points are ewes tupped, lambs scanned, lambing percentage, lambs turned out and rearing percentage.

An example

Let's work through an example. A flock of 200 upland Mule ewes reared 280 lambs (140%). The farm normally rears about 145% so, with the bad weather, they assume that this is normal. However, they had scanned this year and the scanning percentage was 160%. They had also employed a student for lambing time who, as part of her university project, recorded the number of lambs born as 290 (145%).

You can see from the above example that the losses from birth to reared lambs were small and may indeed have been due to bad weather. However, the recorded figures have shown a big difference between the scanned number of lambs and the number of lambs born. The student was sensible and had recorded all lambs born (alive or dead), so the loss has to have occurred during pregnancy and at some time between scanning and birth. The flock had very few abortions, so this again moves the time the losses were occurring to early pregnancy.

How to use the information

The next step in the process is to sit down with your vet and go through the figures to try and work out what has caused the losses. Laboratory work can be used in some of these cases, although sampling a ewe potentially five months after the event may not be helpful.

This is where understanding the farm history can be helpful. If, for example, the above farm had a few more abortions than usual last year, but without diagnosis, and now they are recording early foetal death, something like toxoplasmosis would be high up on the list of potential causes.

Variations

Exceptions occur in every situation, but while some can be ignored, others are more important. Therefore it is advisable to look at the exception and ask the question 'why'? For instance, most vets would regard greater than 2% abortion rate as a trigger for investigation. However, if your abortions all occur in a short space of time (a cluster) that is also a reason to investigate.

The KISS Principle!

Record keeping, data analysis, benchmarking, audit and statistics can be desperately dull and futile, or incredible powerful and useful. Almost all businesses record information, the successful ones use that information to make their lives easier. For a system to work, it has to be straightforward and uncomplicated (Keep It Simple, Stupid!).



Many losses occur inside the lambing shed and careful record keeping can reveal a great deal.

The Eblex suggestions are just that – five recordings that are easily performed and give a valuable insight into the health of the flock. It's worth noting that vets are similar to farmers in a dislike of figures. However, many of us have

come to realise the value of this information, which is why we see the value in recording and analysing the information and recommend it to our farm clients. □

XL Vets is a group of farm animal-committed vet practices that work together, alongside commercial research and manufacturing companies. They aim to share best practice advice and disease-prevention initiatives.

To obtain the Eblex Sheep BRP Manual 14 mentioned in this article call Eblex on 08702 418829 or download it at www.eblex.org.uk/returns/Better-returns-sheep.aspx.

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Getting to Grips with Scab

Quarantine essentials for sheep scab control

Sheep scab, or psoroptic mange, is an allergic skin condition caused by infestation of the skin surface with the scab mite. Sheep scab has been identified as one of the five most important diseases for sheep farmers from both financial and welfare perspectives and is considered to be the most contagious endemic ectoparasitic disease of sheep in the UK, costing the industry in excess of £8m per year, including costs associated with lost performance, preventative measures and treatment.

The economic losses associated with lost performance are the result of ewe condition, lamb growth rate, reduced quality of sheepskins and wool damage. Untreated infestations of sheep scab can, in some cases, be fatal. Sheep scab used to be thought of as a disease of autumn and winter, and although the majority of outbreaks still occur between September and March, it is now however common throughout the year.

Transmission

The sheep scab mite is usually transmitted by direct contact between sheep. However, because mites can exist off the sheep for up to 16 days and infested animals seek relief from

the irritation by scratching and rubbing on fence posts, trees, bushes, farm equipment etc, these can also be a source of infection. Scab can also be introduced from neighbouring flocks, the introduction of new stock, animals returning from wintering or from shows, and this has implications for treatment, quarantine and biosecurity.

Studies have shown that one of the biggest risk factors for the introduction of sheep scab is the use of common grazing, which increases the likelihood of a flock contracting sheep scab nearly 10-fold. The two other major risk factors are having neighbouring farms with sheep scab and having a high frequency of contact with neighbouring sheep.

Quarantine matters

Ultimately, it is wise to assume that all sheep being brought onto the farm from whatever source (be it purchase, returning from away-wintering or summer grazing, stragglers etc) are infested and should be treated (see below) and held in a secure area for quarantine for at least two weeks before mixing with the main flock.

During quarantine observe for signs of infestation (nibbling, rubbing, scratching, deranged wool, areas of wool loss etc).

If sheep scab is suspected then the sheep should be examined by a vet who will professionally identify the parasite and advise on the correct course of treatment.

Treatment options

For effective treatment of sheep scab, only injectables and plunge dippers can be used. Organophosphate (OP) dips based on diazinon and injectable macrocyclic lactones (endectocides, MLs) are the only remaining practical treatments. In terms of product selection, this should be discussed with your vet and/or licensed animal health distributor or SQP to ensure effectiveness, economic usage and also adherence to legislative guidelines.

Integrated measures

One important consideration when using injectable MLs is the integration of the treatment with parasitic nematode control (worms). The MLs are broad spectrum anthelmintics as well as being highly effective against sheep scab mites, allowing scab mite control and worming to be integrated but also providing a means of the acceleration of selection for anthelmintic resistance in parasitic nematodes if the compounds are routinely used for scab control. It should be noted that while ML oral drenches are highly effective anthelmintics, they are less than 50% effective against scab when administered by this route.

The advantages of using ML injections over plunge dipping with an OP, (i.e. safety, ease of use, less stress on the animal, reduced need for specialist facilities and reduced environmental impact) must be weighed against their disadvantages.

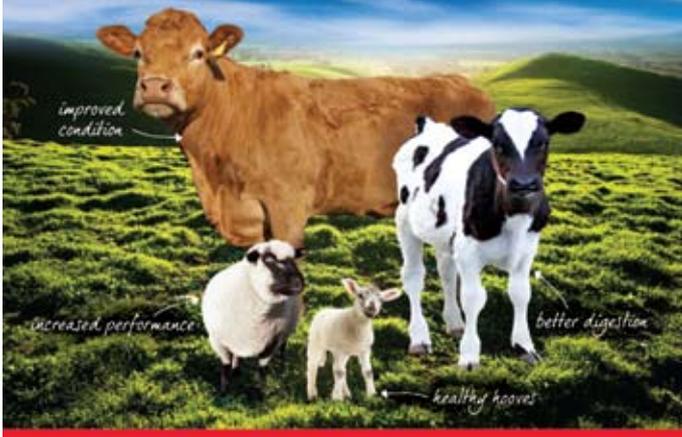


Dr Al Nisbet is a principal scientist at the MoreDun Research Institute, Edinburgh. MoreDun runs a membership scheme to keep farmers, vets and SQPs up to date with developments in animal health research. If you would like a free factsheet on sheep scab or are interested in becoming a MoreDun member, contact the MoreDun Communications Team on 01314 455111 or visit www.moredun.org.uk.



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Wool Update

Tough wool market conditions are easing

A difficult 12 months in the wool market means producer payments from the British Wool Marketing Board (BWMB) will be lower than in 2012. But recent sales have seen significant improvements in trading conditions and, crucially, stronger clearance rates, explains BWMB Chief Operating Officer Mark Powell.

He says: "Selling conditions were difficult for a large part of 2012 but an increase in demand in late 2012 and early 2013 has resulted in improved clearances."

The reasons behind the dip in demand in 2012 are many fold, but largely relate to reduced consumer spending and, therefore, lower sales of wool products.

Carpet sales

Mr Powell says: "The ongoing global financial troubles, and in particular the Euro-zone crisis, have meant consumers have been making fewer significant home improvement purchases, such as new carpets. With about 70% of British wool going in to carpet manufacture this reduction in carpet sales has had an obvious impact on demand for wool at BWMB sales. The likelihood is that 2013 producer payments will on average be 40p/kg lower than in 2012."

It is yet to be seen what the impact on the market will be from the recent administration of Axminster Carpets, but there is every reason to suspect it will have some impact on the wool market and anything which removes a buyer from the market is obviously a concern for a marketing organisation such as BWMB. Additionally, at the start of the 2012 selling season, BWMB had a 6m kg carryover of wool from the 2011 selling

season.

Mr Powell says: "This undoubtedly had an impact on the early season sales, as we were having to market more wool than usual and this resulted in lower prices. However, this wool has been cleared from the stock and BWMB is now in a strong position, having sold both the backlog and an increased weight of the current season's clip than at the same time last year."

Wool Promotion

Stimulating demand is, as always, hard work when times are tough and household budgets are tight, but BWMB continues to be at the forefront of wool marketing and through its involvement with the Campaign for Wool (CfW) is helping to stimulate wool demand both domestically and internationally.

Ian Hartley, BWMB Chief Executive, says: "The continued work of Campaign for Wool is vital to increasing global demand for wool products, and recent activities have helped highlight wool's remarkable versatility and adaptability."

For farmers wanting to understand more about the wool market and the role of CfW in the global wool market there will be several opportunities this summer with BWMB and CfW sponsoring a number of key sheep events across the UK.

NSA Sheep Events

Mr Hartley says: "BWMB and CfW are supporting NSA Highland Sheep, North Sheep, South West Sheep and Welsh Sheep in 2013, and the presence of both organisations at these events will provide an ideal opportunity for farmers to come and learn more about how CfW



Campaign for Wool's work focuses on top quality interiors, showing a wide range of products wool can be used for, in addition to carpets.

is helping drive demand for wool.

"Because so much of CfW's work is consumer-facing many wool producers might not have seen much of its activity. These events provide the perfect opportunity for them to learn more and take the time to speak with BWMB staff and representatives.

"Activities at the events will also include a fleece competition at NSA South West Sheep and a BWMB seminar at NSA Welsh Sheep, so farmers will have plenty of opportunity to interact with BWMB this year and gain a better understanding of the modern wool market."



British Wool Marketing Board auctions have cleared a six-million tonne backlog and sold more of the current wool clip than this time last year.

Making Money from Wool

Lesley Prior, farmer & artisan advisor to Campaign for Wool



There was a time when the wool cheque paid the farm rent – or so we are told. Wool and meat weighed much the same in the balance of farm income, and farmers valued and were proud of both.

Times have changed. The world discovered synthetic fibres and the farm income balance shifted more and more towards meat. Today, despite increasing wool prices over the last couple of years, partly due to the work of The Campaign for Wool, most farmers regard wool as a by-product, or even a waste product. Shearing is done for welfare reasons rather than in hope of making real money.

Does it have to be this way? No one in their right mind would suggest we could return to an equal balance between meat and wool income on all sheep farms, but is there a way of making more from what we've got?

Taking care

At its simplest there is much we can do by just taking a little more care. With increasing clip prices from the BWMB over the last couple of years, it makes sense to present wool as cleanly as possible to the depot. Many farmers have no idea how their wool has graded and only look at the bottom line figure they are getting. But by not looking at those gradings you could be missing out. A brief look at the table provided shows the massive difference in value between clean and contaminated fleece of the same grade (in this instance grade 430, typically a Mule fleece).

Grade 430: Cross ewe and wether	2011/12 Clip Value
430 - Top grade	150p/kg
434 V - Vegetable matter	50p/kg
434 H - Excess paint marks	27p/Kg
434 F - Water/fly strike damage	27p/kg
434 T - Dip coloured	33p/kg

At a fleece weight of up to 4kg, losing £1 or more per kg is very significant over a flock and is largely avoidable. Baler twine and wire cause thousands of pounds worth of damage to processing machinery and every effort is made to reject contaminated fleece to make sure customers still want to buy British wool.

Rolling fleeces as recommended by the Board is good, but rolling them on a filthy floor covered in straw and dung is not. Whatever it says on the tin, marker

sprays are not easily washed out and any fleeces heavily covered in spray will go into a 'stains bin'. Keep spray to a minimum.

'Special' sheep

For those who want to go further, keeping a few 'special' sheep can work. Local breeds, well known for their wool quality, are found all over the UK. Everything from Llanwenog to Teeswater produces a wool that hand-spinners and other craft workers will be eager to buy. The BWMB is quite happy for farmers with small numbers of speciality sheep to sell their fleeces outside the system, but a derogation must be obtained so the Board can keep wool merchants informed of any reduction in volume of certain types of wool. Simply contact Mark Powell at markpowell@britishwool.org to organise this.

By selling privately to local hand-spinners each fleece can fetch many times more than it would by going through the auction system. Keeping 20 'specials' could add considerably to your clip value. Some breeds are already in plentiful supply, particularly Jacob and the other small native breeds, but many others are hard to find and will attract a premium price. One phone call to a Guild Secretary is often all that is required to get customers flooding to the farm gate.

Spinners will travel remarkable distances to find quality rare wools. Or fleeces can be sold at special Fleece Fair days held at local Guild centres. Help with choosing your breed and with contacting local crafting organisations can come via Tim Booth at BWMB (email timbooth@britishwool.org.uk) or myself, as Artisan Advisor to Campaign for Wool.

For some farmers, wool has become their passion. With the right breed, good marketing skills and understanding of the wool processing chain, a few have made wool their primary source of income, turning fleece into finished product. This is certainly not an option for many but the potential is there.

My Merinos

For some farmers, like myself, wool has become a passion. I run the Superfine Merino flock in Devon. Based on the old Macaulay Institute Bowmont flock, the sheep have been refined and developed further by the importation of more genetics from Australia and New Zealand

and now produce top quality Merino wool in the range 14 to 18 microns. This is much in demand by the fashion industry in the UK and the whole clip is sold each year on a regular contract to a high end surf-wear company.

Obsession with quality and detailed understanding of wool science is required to make this kind of system work, but even here there is scope for collaboration with less wool-orientated farmers. Wether flocks of Bowmont Merinos are run on two other farms and the wool is bought back by the central farm each year at an excellent price. Extra value from wool without extra effort is the name of this game.

British wool is a valuable and valued commodity and 60% of it is suitable for fabrics of one form or another, rather than just being fit for carpets. Manufacturers and designers are increasingly looking to what we can produce for them right here on their doorstep and are coming up with new and exciting ideas using British wools in all their variety.

Prices are improving, but we need to make the most of what we have by taking more care during shearing and, if appropriate, thinking about other breeds and options. It's time we were proud of our wool again!

Lesley Prior can be contacted at lesley@devonfinefibres.co.uk for help and advice. (She thanks Tim Booth and Stephen Spencer at BWMB the British Wool Marketing Board for their help compiling facts.)

Avoiding straw and other detritus can make a big difference to the value of a fleece.



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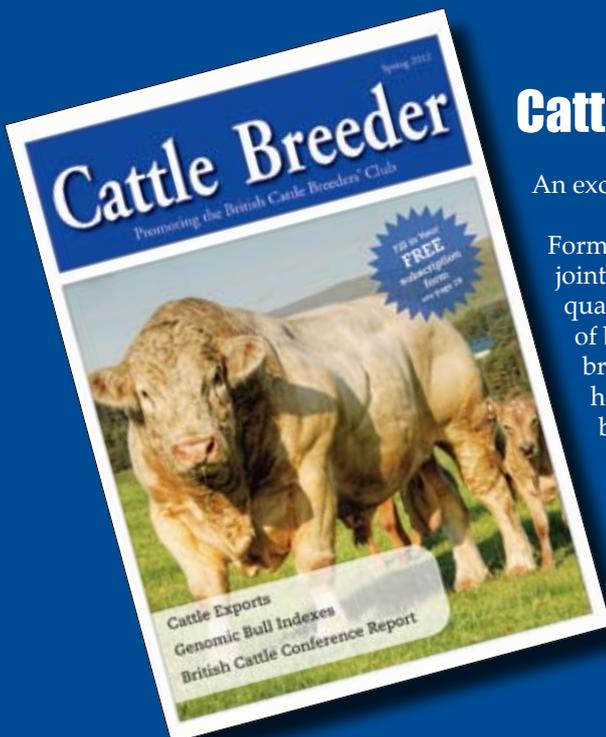
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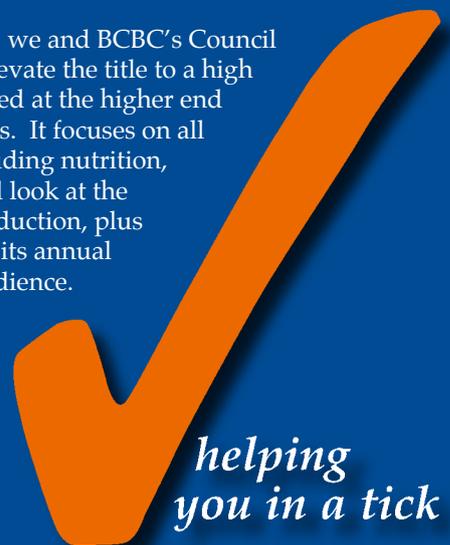
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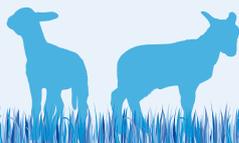


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