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## Front Cover

The front page picture is taken by livestock photographer John Eveson and features a Swaledale ewe standing on a rock on Lee Fell near Lancaster. If you are a keen photographer and would like to see your photo on the front page, contact Joanne Briggs using the contact details to the left.



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# New Year's Greetings, Not for 2014 but the Coming Decade

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

**It was far from the news most sheep farmers wanted for Christmas, but just before Government offices closed for the festive season the announcements on modulation (the movement of funds CAP pillars) came in.**

In the end only Alun Davies in Wales opted for the maximum rate of 15%, with Owen Paterson in England announcing 12%, Richard Lochhead in Scotland going for 9.5% and Michelle O'Neill, having announced 7% without following the correct procedures in NI, being forced to go with 0% instead.

The NSA has worked closely with many other farming organisations to support calls for minimal modulation rates in line with Member States elsewhere in Europe and until it was

clearer what the money might be used for. However, in preparation for these modulation decisions we have, as most of you know, put a lot of effort into promoting a potential animal health scheme that would sit under Pillar Two's Rural Development Programmes (RDP) and financially incentivise farmers to adopt good practice health management and disease avoidance.

Our belief is that if modulation is to happen then the money should be made available directly back to farm businesses in a non-competitive way for activities that will increase productivity, avoid losses, reduce resource use and waste with consequential environmental gains, and help prepare meet some serious social and environmental challenges ahead. Now Owen Paterson and company have made their decisions, the task is to harness the enthusiasm evident amongst many for NSA's work to date.



through environmental schemes and regulation, and I won't need to remind anyone that it brings animal health and disease requirements and related sheep identification and movement controls.

So is felt wonderfully refreshing to attend my rather dry-sounding meeting to find it was asking fundamental questions such as 'Is a common agricultural policy needed for a single market to operate?' and 'To what extent are the policies meeting the original objectives of the CAP and how have those objectives changed?'

In preparation for the next round of CAP reform it is essential to first of all to create a framework of modern objectives that provide stability and security rather than lurch from immediate priorities in the way we have previously seen. More widely than the CAP, the next general election may result in serious discussions and decisions over our future relationship within the European Union. The Agricultural Report (which will be the outcome of the meeting I attended and a huge amount of other work in Defra) is likely to frame many important debates for the next decade and could have a profound impact on almost every aspect of farming and rural livelihoods.

I hope you enjoy this packed edition of Sheep Farmer and, as it is the first one of 2014, I will take this opportunity on behalf of everyone at NSA to wish all our members a successful and happy New Year.

## Contacting NSA

Phil and the team at NSA are always available to members and interested to hear opinions, concerns and areas of interest. You can call NSA Head Office five days a week on 01684 892661, or direct an email to one of the addresses below.

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## Long-term plans

Even deeper within the subject of EU policy, when I got invited to a Defra meeting in November called 'The Balance of Competences' it was a natural reaction to think twice before deciding it was a meeting worth attending! But it's often the case that the unexpected catches you unawares, and although the meeting title may not have you leaping from your seat, the content certainly would have. I recently said that once the ink is dry on the current round of CAP reforms policymakers will start immediately planning for the next round, but this meeting and the consultation that it relates to put my prediction into the shade.

Many sheep farmers will understandably see the CAP and EU policy as a pretty dry subject far removed from the farm gate. Working out feeding rations, health planning, the daily routine of shepherding, preparing for lambing and for the next farm inspection – all these things seem far more important and immediate. But while very few might choose to get involved most would agree that EU policies have had, and continue to have, a massive impact on virtually all aspects of farming and food production here in the UK. For sheep farming it affects land and rental values, it impacts

# News In Brief

## New addition to the NSA team



A New Year and a new staff member at NSA Head Office, Malvern. Caitlin Peck (pictured above) has taken on a new position within at NSA, doubling the size of our communications team in order to increase the service we provide to members. By working across our communication routes (this magazine, the website, NSA Weekly Email Update and others) Caitlin will be ensuring we provide more information to our members and strengthen the promotional message we put out to the wider public on behalf of sheep farmers. Caitlin will be part of the NSA team at various shows this summer (see list below) and looks forward to meeting lots of members through the year.

## Bookings Already Flooding in for NSA Sheep Event

The invitation that went to breed societies and commercial companies immediately after New Year to book trade stand space at the NSA Sheep Event has already resulted in a very positive response, with bookings already flooding

in to Event Organiser Helen Davies. If you would like to request a booking form or know someone who would, Helen's contact details are on the page opposite. Put the Wednesday 30th July date in your diary now, and watch this space for early bird ticket offers later in the year.

## Unprecedented demand for lambing placements

We have been overwhelmed by the number of veterinary and agricultural students contacting us looking for a work experience placement on a sheep farm at lambing time. We have 150 students signed up just to receive notification of when more farmers are added to our Lambing List!

If you are not familiar with the Lambing List, it is a service we offer to NSA members looking for help at lambing time. The list is hosted on our website and students looking for a valuable work experience placement contact NSA members on the list, who negotiate terms and conditions on an individual basis.

You can view the current version of the list at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk) and can be added to it by calling Head Office or emailing [gill@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:gill@nationalsheep.org.uk). We will need your name, NSA membership number, address and contact telephone numbers, plus the dates you require help to and from. Other useful information includes how many students/



helps you require, whether or not you will provide accommodation, if you require experienced help, the number of ewes you have, and if they lamb indoors or outdoors.

## New NSA recruitment campaign launched

You will all remember young Fraser Kerby (pictured above) of Usk, Monmouthshire, who was lucky enough to win the Rappa mobile handling system in the 2013 NSA membership recruitment campaign. You'll also be pleased to hear that a similar campaign this year offers everyone six opportunities to win instead of just one. We've got six 3in1 Advantage Feeders to give away and, just like last year, there is no limit to the number of times existing NSA members can get entered into the draw – the more people you recommend who join up, the more chances you have of winning. And with six draws running throughout the year, the earlier you enter the better your chances. Details

and a membership form to pass to a friend or neighbour can be found on pages 14 and 15.

## All Change for NSA NI Region



John Blaney (pictured above) has taken the reins as Chairman of NSA Northern Ireland Region. John, who is a Swaledale breeder from Cushendall, County Antrim, will be ably assisted during this two-year term by new Vice Chairman Campbell Tweed. Our sincere thanks go to Maurice McHenry, who did a tremendous job during his time as NI Chairman and leaves a longstanding legacy in the form of his involvement building up the NSA Sheep NI event. John's new contact details can be found overleaf on page 4.

## If we don't have your email address, you're missing out!

As part of the NSA subscription, all NSA members are entitled to receive our Weekly Email Update, which provides the week's news in short easy-to-

read stories, plus updates on NSA activity and forthcoming events. If you find you never have the time to sit down and read the newspaper, this is the ideal 'bite-sized'

newsletter for you! Please send your email address to [membership@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:membership@nationalsheep.org.uk), along with your NSA membership number and postcode.



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# Regional News

## Cymru/Wales

By Helen Davies,  
Development Officer  
**Sion and Claire Williams (pictured with me below), a young couple from Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, were presented with the NSA Cymru/Wales Young Achievement Award at the Welsh Winter Fair in December.**



We present the award annually to recognise the specific contribution of people under the age of 35 to the sheep farming sector, and Sion and Claire were selected not just for their incredible role in hosting NSA Welsh Sheep in May this year, but also their achievement in taking on a farming tenancy in 2010 and utilising IT, industry schemes and grant aid to make their sheep enterprise thrive.

Speaking about the award, our Chairman David Pittendreigh said: "Sion and Claire Williams, and not forgetting son Harri, took on a 10-year tenancy in 2010 and have achieved a huge amount already in developing a thriving sheep enterprise with the goal of producing exactly what the market wants. Their 100% focus on maximising lamb production off grass and kilograms of lamb sold per ewe is a lesson to everyone in the sheep sector, whatever their age. We all know the challenges for young people to get on the farming ladder and the way Sion and Claire work closely with their landlords – Alfor and Elwyn Thomas – in a relationship that benefits them both is an inspiration to young farmers who dream of farming in their own right."

NSA Cymru/Wales has attended a series of stakeholder meetings during

the last two months regarding CAP, six-day standstill, EID Cymru and sheep scab and actively put responses in on behalf of the industry on these issues.

We are now looking forward to our AGM, which will be held on Tuesday 18th February, 2pm at the Royal Welsh Showground. Following the formal meeting we will hear from guest speakers Dr Neil Mackintosh, vet Kate Hovers and Margaret Dalton on 'Experiences of dealing with liver fluke, including where drug resistance maybe a problem'.

Everyone is welcome to attend. Further details will be on the NSA Website, and an agenda and minutes are included in the NSA Cymru/Wales Report, which accompanied this magazine when mailed to Welsh members.

## Central

By Bob and Anne Payne,  
Chairman and Manager



**The back end of the year was warm and grassy but our scanning in the first week in December revealed almost exactly the same number of singles, twins, triplets and empties as the previous year. But the abundance of grass meant that instead of us pestering local dairy farmers for grazing they called us, as by then it was too wet for cattle.**

Our AGM was held at the Bluebell, Tissington, in November. Bob continues as Chairman for one last and final year, Anne continues as Regional Manager/Secretary and Helen Battye remains as Hon. Treasurer. Our English Committee

*continued on page 6*



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reps are Alastair Sneddon, Charles Sercombe and Matt Bagley and the Committee continues as open to all members.

At the AGM Charles gave an excellent report on the work of the English Committee, focusing particularly on EID and the English database, explaining SouthWestern are currently liaising with industry and Local Authorities. A paper-based system will still be available and this will also be run by SouthWestern. On CAP reform, following the closure of Defra's consultation on 28th November, modulation is now to be called 'inter-pillar transfer' – but whatever call you it will still mean an increase in deductions from SFP from 9% to 15%.

The main talk for the evening was given by Norbrook vet Dr Barry McInerney on liver fluke in sheep. This was an excellent presentation and there were plenty of questions from the floor. Our thanks to Barry and his colleague Sarah Franklin for sponsoring the evening and providing the supper.

Our second speaker was Joanne Briggs from Head Office, who gave an update on NSA activity over the past year with special emphasis on recruitment (460 new members this year, due in part to the successful Rappa promotion), the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group, and planned improvements to the NSA website, particularly in the Members Only area. The evening ended with 50 people tucking into steak and ale pie, chips and peas. Our thanks to all who attended and we hope you had a good Christmas and a Happy New Year.

## Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman

**Our most recent open committee meeting, my first as Chairman, saw a great turnout. Fresh new faces and seasoned NSA stalwarts allowed enthusiastic discussion on subjects such as CLA, sheep scab and the new movement database. We also managed to discuss the upcoming agenda for the English Committee meeting, which allowed us to truly represent the thoughts of the region when we travelled to London two days later. When you have meetings like this with good debate you realise that others have the same problems or concerns as yourself, as well as some new ones you hadn't considered before.**

We are hoping to organise a winter meeting in the middle of January so keep an eye on the website and Weekly Email Update for details. If you don't receive the NSA weekly email you are missing out on good information, so contact Malvern (membership@nationalsheep.org.uk) and they can put

you on the mailing list.

I have a sign on my sheep shed wall and it says "Welcome to ewetopia, another day in paradise."

Having done my figures and costings for 2013 it makes you wonder what is ewetopia? With 2013 production figures the best I've ever had I still look at the high costs involved in achieving these results and wonder where you draw the line with input versus output.

The UK sheep industry is diverse and the sheep is a very adaptable animal and fits into many systems, so I guess my mantra to find ewetopia would be to do the best with what you have got at all times and know your cost of production. Oh, and low feed costs and a high lamb price would also help!

*Kevin is our featured farmer in this edition of Sheep Farmer; find out about this business on page 22.*

## Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

**We are massively looking forward to the NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> December.**

We've built on the success of the event in 2012 and hope to welcome many of you to Melton Mowbray Market on the day. We are offering free entry to members this year, so remember to bring your membership card along. And why don't you bring a friend too? If they sign up to NSA on the day they will get free entry to the event and you will both get entered into the Advantage Feeders draw for one of six specialist sheep feeders. See page 9 for an event preview and page 14 for more information about Advantage Feeders.

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**We have a new Regional Chairman here in Northern Ireland – John Blaney, who will be assisted by Campbell Tweed of Cairncastle as Vice Chairman. John farms 600 acres of hill and 30 acres of lowland in the heart of Antrim Glens. He is well-known throughout Ireland as a Swaledale breeder, and has also been working with the Swaledale Sheep Breeders Society to help promote the breed since he took early retirement in 2001 from teaching for 30 years in a local secondary school.**

He has been an active member of NSA NI for a number of years, looking after the sheep breed entries at our Sheep NI events, and has been looking forward to his term as chairman after two years as Vice. He is already working hard to represent NSA and support the sheep industry at numerous meetings.

He has also been elected by the NSA NI Committee to represent them on the NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee.

John was elected during what was one of the most sheep farmer friendly autumns I can remember in NI, with mild weather and an abundance of grass right through into December. I have recently heard of some cases of fluke so once again we cannot be complacent, even though we have had a drier summer in 2013.

CAP reform discussions are ongoing, as our consultation responses have to be submitted by 21<sup>st</sup> January. Given the positive impact it would have on sheep farmers' Single Farm Payments, our Committee believes an immediate move to a full flat rate system would be one of our preferred options rather than waiting until 2024 to see everyone on the same payment level.

We hope to have a three-day trip to Wales in the week after Balmoral Show in May, when we will visit several of the top sheep producers in UK. Anyone interested should contact me as soon as possible, limited places will be available.

## Northern

By Julie Sedgewick, Manager

**The NSA Northern Region AGM will take place on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2014 at the Tynedale Function Suite, Hexham Auction Mart, Hexham, Northumberland at 7.30pm. At 8pm the AGM will be followed by an open meeting to which members, family, friends and non-members are all welcome.**

Guest speakers will be David Raine (Cumbrian farmer and NSA Vice President) and Phil Stocker (NSA Chief Executive), who will give a presentation on the cross-industry group who visited New Zealand in autumn last year.

The eight strong group, co-ordinated by EBLEX, met with counterparts in New Zealand to assess the current production outlook and share knowledge on business efficiencies. The key objectives of the group were to assess first-hand the current outlook for the New Zealand lamb industry, and understand more about the Meat Industry Excellence initiative, seeking to reform the New Zealand sheep industry.

Also speaking will be the two young farmers, Tom Carrick of High Crossgill and James Raine of Randalholme, sponsored by the region to attend the Northern Farming Conference at Hexham in November. They will report on the conference and explain how they feel the information given will assist their farming ventures.

High postage costs mean we will not be posting out agendas this year, so to receive a reminder about the event please make sure NSA has your email address. If you currently do not receive the NSA Weekly Email Update send your email address to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk. Thank you.

## Scotland

By George Milne,  
Development  
Officer

**The last couple of months have all been about CAP, CAP, CAP! And rightly so, as decisions made over the consultation period will affect sheep farmers until 2020 and some beyond.**

Choosing Scotland's regions is likely to have a long term affect and may well stay for many years, so it is therefore vitally important that whatever the outcome it is for the long term benefit of Scottish sheep producers. I have attended several stakeholder meetings on this subject but NSA Scottish Region also held a conference (picture below) and intends to hold more meetings during January and February to collect farmers views. We visited Mull before Christmas to see first-hand their situation and the additional problems they have to contend with over and above the mainland.



I also spent two days in Brussels in December raising the controversial topic of convergence and the fact Scotland is being unfairly disadvantaged in comparison with the rest of the sheep farmers across the UK. The decision made by the UK minister is totally against the principles of the European Commission, which was to see farmers below the EU average basic payment receive an increase to bring them up to a level paying field. While there I took the opportunity to raise other issues, including minimum livestock densities to trigger active farmers, EID once again and also discuss the work being done by NSA Head Office on the relaxation of sheep controls on carcase splitting.

2014 is set to be a busy year with all

this going on and it is vitally important that the sheep industry has a loud and clear voice. We will be there to deliver this message on your behalf.

## South East

By Bob Blanden,  
Manager

**There is full report on the 2013 Sheep Breeders Round Table on pages 10 and 12, but I just wanted to say how proud NSA South East region was to end up supporting three young people to attend. I am pictured below with Sarah Blacklock, Will Hinton and Marie Prebble. The quality of the speakers and the depth of subjects at SBRT are amazing, with a vast amount of technical knowledge available and anyone attending cannot help but benefit.**



Our AGM took place at Plumpton College on 13<sup>th</sup> November, where all office holders remained in place and I was re-elected for another term on the English Committee. In addition Janet Knight was elected onto the Regional Committee and Lisa Dunning, representing the Hampshire Down Sheep Breeders Association, attended her first committee meeting prior to the AGM. A warm welcome to both.

Our AGM was also the fourth and final occasion that we had a presentation by MSD on Schmallenberg virus and a 'Stamp Out Scab' talk by a Westpoint vet. Our series of health and welfare meetings around the region were all well received, particularly with 'food' provided at the end!

Preparations are ongoing for NSA South Sheep 2014 on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> June at Blackcap Farm, Firle, Near Lewes, East Sussex. Please put this date in your diaries and start telling everyone about this event as a 'not to be missed' day. This year we are making it FREE for members to attend.

## South West

**We held a well-attended meeting in South Molton with the topic of rumen fluke at the end of this year, which was presented by Barry McInerney**

**from Norbrook, who also kindly sponsored the evening. Some farmers left the meeting wondering if maybe they had had the problem and not realised it, others concerned that this is another treatment we will have to administer. Our second speaker was Mike Credland, Chair of the English committee. Mike is involved in a very successful marketing group and left us with food for thought.**

Following on from our advertisements for a new Regional Secretary we were pleasantly surprised with the number of people who asked for details of the job and the eight applications we received. These were whittled down to three for interviewing with the successful person being Katie White from Wellington. Katie showed a good knowledge of the sheep industry and can balance the role with her job with an outward bound company (that maybe a social activity for us in the future!). We feel sure she will be an enthusiastic member of the NSA South West team when she takes over at the regional AGM on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> February, 7.30pm at Exeter Livestock Centre.

As I'm sure everyone knows the new Sheep Movement Database for England comes into effect on April 1st 2014. This is being administered by South Western Business Process Services Ltd and we are extremely fortunate that they have agreed to send a representative to our AGM to give a presentation. This will be an ideal opportunity to hear first-hand how this will affect sheep producers and get answers to the many questions that will no doubt be thrown up. This meeting is open to everyone, so please encourage as many as possible to attend. Phil Stocker will also be present to give an update on the NSA and its many activities.



# Resurrection of Contractors Meeting a Benefit for the Whole Industry

By Bob Blanden, NSA South East Regional Manager and sheep contractor

**There is no doubt that the joint NSA and NAAC Contractors Meeting held at the end of November last year was very successful in many ways and much appreciated by those that attended.**

There has not been a similar meeting for a number of years and was, therefore, overdue and heralds for a repeat annually, although perhaps a month earlier and in different locations around the country.

It was definitely a case of trying to fit too much into the Friday afternoon and we only stopped when it ran into the time we were due to sit down for our dinner! It was a great pleasure to hear guest dinner speaker, John Thorley, a previous Chief Executive of NSA, recount his long and varied career and finishing with an update on what he is up to now. It was so important for those who were not involved with the British Association of Sheep Contractors nearly 30 years ago to realise how instrumental John was in helping that organisation to start up.

## Shearing

The Friday afternoon programme of presentations had Colin MacGregor, British Wool Marketing Board shearing manager, inform us not only about shearer training and all the different facets to it, but also about the workings of BWMB along with its relevance and



*The Contractors Meeting was a mix of presentations, workshops and panel sessions.*

the importance of its continuation.

Peter Bates then gave us a very factual account of how we have to deal with sheep scab. Peter spent more than 30 years working at the Central Veterinary Laboratories on scab so it is doubtful that anyone else is more qualified to tell us 'as it is' when it comes to the issue. Although this was a 'Stamp out Scab' presentation funded by RDPE money, Peter was able to add in a lot of extras with relevance to contractors.

## Biosecurity

The session on 'biosecurity in a compensation culture' by Louise Silk, a vet from Salisbury, was hard hitting and made everyone realise they really have to address and minimise their risks in preventing the spread of disease by themselves and their equipment.

Old Mill Accountants had two young ladies encourage everyone to make use of their financial records to help them make business decisions as well as just providing information for a tax return.

Catherine Nakielny then gave us an encouraging talk on the future of the UK sheep industry, which left us in no doubt that there is one!

The panel for a question and answer session on scanning involved Scot Cowan from BCF, Mike Owen an experienced scanner from Kent, and Colin Ottery from Devon who has only been scanning for four years. There were a number of subjects covered, including the amount of time needed for training and mentoring, probe design and using gel or water as a couplant, to mention but a few.

## Sheep handling

Onto Saturday morning and livestock handling expert Miriam Parker held a handling workshop for us at Cirencester Market. Miriam made us realise we have to think of viewing everything from a ewe's perspective, which is definitely not the same as our own. She gave us various quizzes and crossword puzzles to make us realise that handling sheep can be a lot easier if we take into consideration those differences. Miriam's famous dark glasses were also passed around for us all to appreciate a 'sheep's eye view'.

The one aspect that was very clear from the meeting in general was that there is a lot to be gained by everyone in the Industry by having a group working in the sheep sector that can be consulted with and used for knowledge transfer.

*NSA and the NAAC would like to thank Agrimin, BWMB, Cirencester Market and Rappa for their generous support and all the speakers for their time.*

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*Miriam Parker (left) demonstrates how a ewe's vision is different to a human's by using special dark glasses.*

# Something for Everyone at the NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair 2014

Melton Mowbray Market will be the place for all sheep farmers to visit on Friday 31st January 2014, as NSA Eastern Region will be mounting their second biennial Winter Fair.

The facilities at the market make it ideal for such an occasion in our colder months, as the conference and banqueting facilities will be used for seminars and catering and all the inside trade stands will be housed in the warmer buildings on the site.

A wide range of trade stands will have their products on show – feeders, tags, handling equipment, software, feed, fencing, animal health products and much more. New stands on renewal energy and solutions for your farm will also be a feature, and different breeds of sheep will be on display alongside auctioneering companies.

Running all through the day will be a competition to test the skills of our Young Shepherds. Anyone aged 26 or under may enter and have the chance to share in the £500 prize money, generously sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers. Use the contact details in the panel to register your interest.

The seminar sessions will offer visitors the chance to hear the very



The Young Shepherd presentation on the NSA stand in 2012.



One of the practical demonstrations at the 2012 event.

best speakers on topics highly relevant to their businesses. The focus will be on practical aspects of improving the efficiency of your flocks through better feeding and best use of treatments and supplements. Speakers will include independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings, Adas advisor Kate Phillips and vet Harriet Fuller, as well as Novartis Animal Health and a commercial farmer talking about his experience boosting profitability in his flock. The work of the Campaign for Wool will be outlined and how it is helping lift the usage and price of wool around the world. In addition to Eblex's large display stand featuring a live lamb selection demonstration, Paul Heyhoe from AHDB/Elbex will give a talk on the outlook for the sheep industry.

Simon Haley, co-founder of AgriChatUK, has condensed his much-praised farming-themed seminar on using social media for business into bite-sized one-hour workshops. Benefitting from subsidised funding from Defra

## NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair Essential Guide

**Date:** Friday 31st January 2014

**Place:** Melton Mowbray Market, Scaford Road, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, LE13 1JY

**Timetable:** 10am-4pm

**Tickets:** FREE for NSA members on production of a valid membership card; £5 for non-members

**More information:** The event organiser is Jonathan Barber, NSA Eastern Region Manager, in conjunction with Ceres Solutions, Crogham Offices, Wymondham, Norfolk, NR18 0RR. Contact 01953 607860 or office@ceresolutions.co.uk.

through the Rural Skills Framework, the workshops will be a beginners' level introduction to social media, starting with simple steps such as how to set up your own account, how to connect with others in the industry and how to use popular social networking sites such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to promote your business. It's not necessary to own a smart phone or tablet to join in the workshops as Simon will demonstrate how it's all done, but please do bring your own device and join in the fun if you wish.

To register your interest for one of the four one-hour sessions running throughout the day, visit [www.va-training.co.uk](http://www.va-training.co.uk) and enter your details on the 'contact us' page. The workshops cost £5 plus VAT payable by cheque on the day or when you register online. Places are limited so please book in advance to avoid disappointment.



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# Debate Over the Future Use of Genetic Technology Continues

**A highlight of the Sheep Breeders Round Table in November, held in Nottinghamshire and attracting more than 170 pedigree and commercial farmers, scientists and industry representatives, was a debate over whether genomics is cost effective for the UK sheep industry.**

Genomics is the use of DNA to predict the performance potential of an animal before it can be assessed itself or has progeny to be assessed. New Zealand is often seen as the sheep genomics front runner and this was certainly the impression given by NZ speaker John McEwan, Senior Scientist in Animal Genomics at AgResearch.

Before the debate began he provided an overview of what was being done in New Zealand, including the DNA screening of huge numbers of lambs looking at traditional traits and new ones, such as yellow fat, myomax and the GDF9 fertility gene. He said genomic technology was partly responsible for the 84% increase seen in kilos of lamb reared per ewe between 1990 and 2013, despite the national flock being pushed to more marginal land as the dairy industry expands. Genomics



*Interactive sessions over the three-day conference saw votes on across-breed EBVs and the future of genomics in the UK.*

were allowing whole populations to be screened easily and cheaply and molecular breeding values to be used to provide 'instant progeny testing'.

Mr McEwan said genomic testing for a number of traits was far more advantaged than tests for specific genes (such as the MyoMax and LoinMax tests developed 10 years ago) and meant a new trait could be added at very little (or even zero) cost. It could bring a 'three-fold improvement' to the New Zealand sheep sector if its full capability continued to be explored.

In anticipation of the debate ahead

about the cost of genomics, Mr McEwan said: "In New Zealand this had been funded consistently for a long period of time. And we could do even more if we had more money."

The debate opened with Mike Coffey from EGENES and sheep breeder Rob Hodgkins arguing that genomics was cost effective for the UK, and Geoff Pollot of the Royal Vet College and Will Haresign of Aberystwyth University arguing it was not, before the audience was invited to participate too.

Those in favour of genomics spoke of the ability to speed up genetic improvement and select for difficult-to-record traits, such as meat quality, feed conversion efficiency and disease resistance. Those against it said the technology came from the dairy industry where less genetic diversity meant genomic predictions were easier to make.

Mr Haresign said the UK sheep industry had too many breeds and was too focussed on breed type over performance recording to able to justify spending money on genomic technology that might not reap any rewards. He

*Continued on page 12*

## Performance Recording in Sweden

**With a 40% increase in the Swedish national flock in the last 10 years and a high uptake of performance recording, there were some positive messages on offer from Jenny Strömme of the Swedish Sheep Association (SSA).**

The 40% increase still only takes the national flock to 300,000 ewes and rams, compared to around 15m ewes in the UK here, despite Sweden being twice the size and having a human population of only 9.5m people. The average flock size of just 30 ewes also makes a direct comparison between the two countries unrealistic, but the UK can still learn from the positive attitude towards performance recording in Sweden.

Performance recording is done through an online database called Elitlamm (Elite Lamb), which utilises performance information to produce EBVs but also acts as a pedigree register, flock register, farm



*Sheep in Sweden are typically housed for 180 days of the year (October to May) and are threatened by wolves, bears and lynx for the rest of the year.*

health planning tool and financial benchmarking tool. Farmers who do not use the internet to enter their own information can pay a fee to have their

paper records inputted.

Of the 9,300 flocks in Sweden, 1,750 use the system (19%) to record 32,000 pure ewes and their 62,000 lambs. This includes 40 flocks with more than 500 ewes and is in conjunction with independent sheep assessors certified by SSA and all five of the larger Swedish abattoirs automatically uploading carcase weights and grades.

SSA could be compared to NSA and Signet joining forces, in that it has responsibility for performance recording but also provides a voice for its 2,600 farmer members. Ms Strömme said a key lobbying area was the fight between farmed stock and predators (bear, wolves and lynx). Farmers feel the Swedish Government is prioritising wildlife over livestock, as bears are protected by law and shooting of wolves is highly limited. The only concession to farmers is grant funding of £5/meter to erect five-wire electric fences.

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► reiterated a common theme from the conference, that the industry must do more performance recording, not less, with the rise of genomic technology, as the reliability of genomics (the genotype) relies on the crunching of actual performance data (the phenotype) to ensure accurate predictions.

Mr Coffey acknowledged this but argued phenotypes could be bought from overseas or funding used to incentivise recording. Having been hypothetically offered £1m a year for 10 years, he said £10m over four years would be enough to source enough phenotypes and establish a system where a select number of sheep farmers/companies collected phenotypes each year to feed into the database and ensure reliability of genotypes for the whole industry. "We cannot afford not to do this," he said. "We're losing money already by not doing it."

Mr Pollot injected a shot of realism, saying we had to adapt the technology to the current situation, not change the whole farming structure to be able to use the technology.

While it was clear no consensus was going to be reached, there was agreement within the audience that the lack of feedback from the meat processors was holding the UK back. Another area of general consensus during the day was in the area of across-breed EBVs – i.e. EBVs being applicable to all breeds, rather than the current system of a Texel EBV, for example, not being comparable a Charollais or any other terminal sire breed.

In an interactive session delegates look at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of working in this manner and concluded that the industry needed the best genetics, whatever the breed. It was also felt that pooling the data would allow better EBVs to be created because of the greater volume of data.

There were some concerns about accuracy and robustness, and a feeling that some commercial farmers were wary of EBVs without changing things. However, at the same time there was a positivity about improving the perception of EBVs and the ability to rate crossbred rams.

The conclusion was definitely a green light for Signet to look at running a single BLUP run for all terminal breeds and use that as the starting point to develop across-breed EBVs for the future.

*Sheep Breeders Round Table is a biennial conference organised by Biosciences Knowledge Transfer Network, Eblex, HCC, NSA, QMS and SRUC. The next event will be in autumn 2015.*

## NSA Next Generation Latest Seven sponsored for SBRT and 12 to be selected for Ambassador Group

**NSA regions proudly sponsored seven young people to attend the Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT) as part of the NSA Next Generation initiative supporting young people with a passion for the sheep sector.**

These seven were selected by regional committees and attended the three-day conference to both hear the speakers and meet likeminded people. A total of 18 young people were sponsored to go to the event, with the Charollais Sheep Society, Dawn Meats, Eblex Better Returns Programme, Innovis, Isle of Man Government, SBRT and Texel Sheep Society sponsoring a total of 11 individuals.

Sponsoring young people for the Sheep Breeders Round Table is just one example of NSA regions supporting individuals to attend events that will increase their knowledge of and interest in the sheep sector, with NSA Northern Region, for example, sponsoring Tom Carrick and James Raine from Cumbria to attend the Northern Farming Conference in November just gone.

### Go online

The NSA Next Generation initiative also has a dedicated website at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk) to help signpost young people to opportunities within the sheep sector – but the exciting newest part of the project is the NSA Next Generation 2014 Ambassador Group. We had an unbelievable 41 people apply to be considered as a 2014 Ambassador and as this magazine went to press the NSA regions were in the process of shortlisting and interviewing individuals as part of the difficult task of selecting just 12 to take part in the dedicated technical and personal development days being ran in 2014.

These days will cover elements



*NSA sponsored attendees at the Sheep Breeders Round Table (left to right) – Sarah Blacklock (NSA South East), Sara Jones-Richards (NSA South West), Sophie Barnes (NSA Central), Marie Prebble (NSA South East) and Claire and Sion Williams (NSA Wales). Not pictured is Will Hinton (NSA South East).*

such as market selection, food chain development, sheep husbandry, brand development and adding value, optimising genetics, time management, business planning, presentation skills, conflict resolution and promotion of the sheep sector. We look forward to publishing the names of the successful applicants in the next edition of Sheep Farmer magazine, along with details of the Ambassador Group plans for the year.

### Unique conference

In the meantime, we will leave the final word on the benefit of NSA regional support for young people to Claire Williams. She and husband Sion were sponsored to by NSA Cymru/Wales to attend the Sheep Breeders Round Table.

Claire says: "Sheep Breeders Round Table was a unique conference, a round table which brings individuals and organisations from science, academia, pedigree and commercial worlds together all for one common purpose – the future progression of the sheep industry. If you ever needed an example of where your levy money is being put to good use this is it. It was a fantastic opportunity for a young couple like us to attend a conference of this calibre and our sincere thanks go to NSA Wales Regional Committee for nominating us to attend."



# Cut Out And Keep Diary

See NSA at the following 2014 events



- 31st January 2013:  
**NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair:** Melton Mowbray Market, Leicestershire
- 14th-16th May 2013:  
**Balmoral Show** (with a NSA Sheep Centre): Balmoral Park, Belfast
- 22nd May:  
**Beef Expo:** Hexham Mart, Northumberland
- 4th June:  
**NSA Scot Sheep:** Quixwood Farm, Grantshouse, Berwickshire
- 5th-7th June:  
**Royal Cornwall Show:** Wadebridge, Cornwall
- 13th-15th June:  
**Royal Three Counties:** Malvern, Worcestershire
- 19th-22nd June:  
**Royal Highland Show** (with a NSA Sheep Centre): Ingliston, Edinburgh
- 8th-10th July:  
**Great Yorkshire Show:** Harrogate, Yorkshire
- 21st-24th July:  
**Royal Welsh Show** (with a NSA Sheep Centre): Builth Wells, Powys
- 28th June:  
**NSA South Sheep:** Blackcap Farm, Firle, East Sussex
- 30th July:  
**NSA Sheep Event:** Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire
- 4th August:  
**NSA Wales and Border Early Ram Sale:** Royal Welsh Showground
- 20th August:  
**NSA South West Ram Sale:** Exeter Livestock Centre
- 22nd August:  
**NSA Eastern Region Mixed Sale:** Rugby Farmers Mart
- 19th September:  
**NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale:** Melton Mowbray Market
- 22nd September:  
**NSA Wales and Border Main Ram Sale:** Royal Welsh Showground



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Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "We are delighted to be working with Advantage Feeders for this NSA membership promotion and I am excited about giving away not one, but six top prizes over a 12-month period.

"We will all benefit from NSA growing its membership numbers. It gives us a stronger and more effective voice, helps keep membership costs down and contributes to our resources so we can provide better support and services. The NSA provides a much needed voice for UK sheep farmers and also supports them by providing up-to-day information and best practice advice for their farming business."

For additional membership forms please visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw), which is where you will also find our terms and conditions. If you do not have internet access please call NSA Head Office on 01684 892661.

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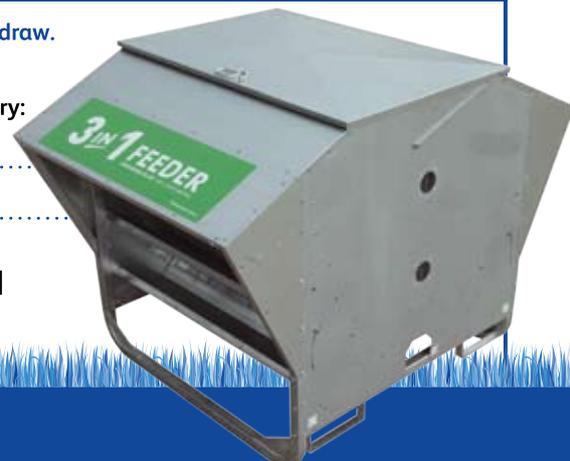
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# Less New Zealand Lamb to be Available for Export in 2014

By Phil Stocker, NSA

**With New Zealand releasing figures showing their second smallest lamb crop in nearly 60 years, NSA has been promoting a message that UK retailers needs to work harder to support domestic lamb suppliers because they will be unable to continue relying so heavily on cheap New Zealand imports in the future.**

The 2013 lamb crop is down 4.7% (1.3 million fewer lambs) on 2012, with export processing numbers expected to drop 6.8% to 19.5 million head. And this is at a time, according to information gained when I represented NSA on the Eblex-organised fact-finding tour of New Zealand this summer, when Kiwi exporters are beginning to prioritise emerging export markets, such as China, over more traditional markets in Europe.

## Volatility

Supermarkets here in the UK are going to see increasing volatility in the years to come as a result of changing weather patterns impacting global supply (as seen this year in New Zealand due to drought) and international demand for lamb increasing. As in New Zealand, there are increasing opportunities for UK lamb to be exported to developing markets, and so retailers will have to do more to secure domestic supplies.

I believe the answer is greater connection between our UK producers and the domestic market, part of which should be achieved by supermarkets paying more consistent (not always higher) prices to provide greater security and stability, and ensuring they stock UK lamb throughout the year. The



*NSA visited New Zealand as part of an Eblex-organised fact-finding trip in August 2013.*

practice of turning away from UK lamb in the New Year due to an assumption that it suddenly becomes 'old season' or 'hogget' cannot be justified. Lambs are regularly born from January through to May so to say they all become old season after one date is simply not right. With our major supermarkets talking publicly about shortening supply chains and supporting UK producers, in the interest of the entire supply chain including consumers, this wake-up call from NZ might finally result in some action.

## Sheep v. Dairy

New Zealand breeding ewe numbers have been under pressure for several years as a result of a rapidly expanding dairy sector. And the drought resulted in far fewer ewe lambs being bred and far lower conception rates in ewes.

To put the figures into context, 1.3 million fewer lambs in New Zealand is roughly 23,500 tonnes of lamb product. New Zealand exported nearly 63,000 tonnes of sheepmeat to the UK in 2012,

so that means more than 35% of that tonnage just will not be available for New Zealand to export in 2014.

This is a very over-simplified interpretation of the numbers, but at a time when the increasing wealth in China is providing demand for premium New Zealand lamb cuts, it is clear large volumes of cheap New Zealand product will no longer be available to UK retailers in the future. Maybe now they will realise the importance and high quality of the lamb available on their doorsteps.

## Retail sales

Another set of figures published in December were Eblex's Beef and Lamb Watch statistics for the origin of red meat being sold by retailers. They show a range of performance between the different stores, underlining the importance of NSA and others keeping up the pressure and not letting standards of sourcing slip.

## Vital NZ Stats

- 2013 lamb crop is the second smallest is almost 60 years.
- 1.3m (4.7%) fewer lambs available for finishing.
- Due to a combination of lower conception rates (down 3.8% at 1.208 per head compared to 1.246 in 2012) and fewer ewe lambs bred (down 17% cent with only 1.13m lambs born from ewe lambs)
- Export processing numbers expected to drop 6.8% to 19.5 million head.
- 2013-14 to have the third lowest export lamb total since 1960.

*Source: Beef and Lamb New Zealand Lamb Crop 2013 Report.*

Beef and Lamb Watch: Total British, Welsh and Scotch Lamb sold					
Retailer	Nov 2012	Aug 2013	Nov 2013	% change Nov 2012 to Nov 2013	% change Aug 2013 to Nov 2013
Aldi	100%	100%	100%	0	0
Asda	74%	71%	73%	-1.3	2.2
Budgens	100%	100%	95%	-5.3	-5.3
Co-op	94%	72%	85%	-8.7	18
Lidl	100%	58%	100%	0	71.4
M&S	100%	91%	87%	-12.6	-4.4
Morrisons	100%	100%	100%	2.5	2.5
Sainsbury's	89%	85%	97%	9.1	15
Tesco	74%	55%	75%	0.7	36.6
Waitrose	96%	88%	100%	4.1	13.9
Total	86%	79%	88%	2.7	0

Source: Eblex

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# New Markets Prompt 16% Increase in UK Sheepmeat Exports

By Jonathan Eckley,  
Eblex Export Marketing Executive



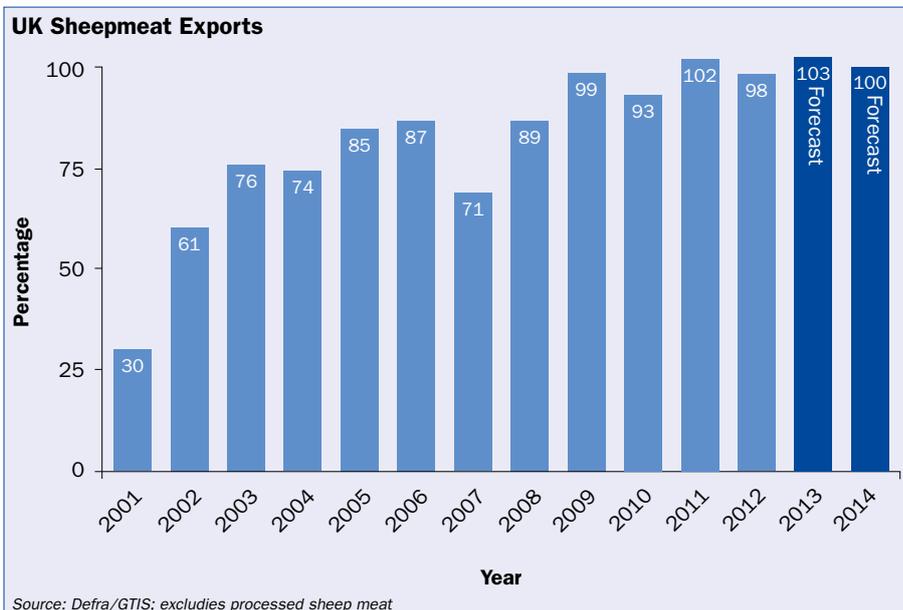
Since January 2010, as part of the UK Export Certification Partnership (UKECP), Eblex has contributed to the opening of more than 60 non-EU markets to UK beef and lamb exports, which has generated more than a five-fold increase in sales of sheepmeat to these markets.

This new international trade has created significant opportunities for livestock producers to reap the financial rewards of improved carcass utilisation, by developing markets for 'fifth quarter' products, or offal, for example. What only recently represented a £2.2m cost to the beef and sheep industry to dispose of parts of the carcass that have no appeal for the domestic consumer has been turned into a rising success, currently worth £15.5m in export sales. The benefits of this trade are myriad, as it makes a contribution to both reducing waste and improving sustainability, as well as the financial advantage.

The figures certainly paint a positive picture of UK sheepmeat exports. In January to September 2013 (the most



Owen Paterson at an EBLEX-sponsored dinner at the Hong Kong Jockey Club



recent figures available at the time of writing this article) exports were 16% higher year on year at 75,500 tonnes. This is partly the result of UK sheepmeat production in 2013 tracking above year earlier levels, up 5% on 2012, due in no small part to increased slaughterings at the beginning of the year as lambs were held back because of last winter's poor conditions. The considerable rise in imports for much of the year has also played a part, as imported product, primarily from New Zealand, has displaced UK sheepmeat on the shelves, increasing the availability for export.

The key driver of this increase has been trade with Hong Kong, with volumes almost triple what they were in the corresponding period of 2012, making it the second largest volume market for UK sheepmeat exports. The Far East offers an enormous opportunity for the industry, and while gaining market access for UK beef and lamb to the potentially huge Chinese market remains some way off, it's reassuring to see our work in this region bearing fruit.

There have also been significant developments in UK sheepmeat trade with West Africa, which is an interesting market due to its anticipated population growth, particularly for the export of offals. Sheepmeat exports to Ghana in January to September 2013 had virtually doubled year on year, making it our ninth-biggest export market. I recently led a delegation of UK exporters to Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Benin, providing the group with first-hand experience of these

markets and helping them establish valuable trade relationships.

There were also increased export volumes sent to most other important markets, with high value northern European markets in particular recording stronger performances. France, which is our largest export market for sheepmeat and accounts for half of all exports, Germany, Belgium the Netherlands and Norway all showed considerably higher volumes. One of the clearest indicators of our success in these markets is the fact that UK lamb can now be found on the shelves of many European retailers

## Lower value

While the latest figures show an increase in sheepmeat export volumes, average values for the same period were lower, largely reflecting the rising importance of the lower-value Hong Kong market and subdued prices in early 2013. The average unit value of exports in January to September 2013 was down 3% year on year at almost £3,800 per tonne. Overall, the value of UK sheepmeat exports over the period was up 12% on year earlier levels at £285.3m.

Looking ahead, we have a busy calendar of trade shows and missions planned for 2014 both close to home and further afield, including activity in Paris, Moscow, Hong Kong and Dubai. It's safe to say our efforts to develop market opportunities for UK lamb and maximise the return to sheep producers are showing no signs of slowing.

# Clever Thinking to Increase ‘World Wide Appeal’ of Welsh Lamb

This year will see Hybu Cig Cymru (Meat Promotion Wales) move forward with a major new project designed to increase the world-wide appeal of Welsh Lamb.

The project hopes to see the shelf life of Welsh Lamb extended without compromising the qualities that have made it a sought after brand.

“I am proud that here in Wales we produce a high quality, world-class product that consumers across the world want to buy,” said Dai Davies, HCC Chairman HCC Chairman (pictured right).

“I believe that we are at the dawn of an exciting new era for Welsh red meat. Consumers across the world are increasingly looking for quality products, and that explains why Welsh Lamb is in so much demand in places as far apart as Canada, Europe, the Far and Middle East. After all, there is no substitute for excellence. So the challenge is how do we meet this demand in a sustainable way, which is certain to grow in the years to come?”

“HCC is keen to protect Welsh Lamb’s reputation as a premium quality product It has served the industry well for the UK and European markets, and it will continue to do so. Now with greater prosperity among consumers in emerging markets such as Russia and the Far East, the demand for premium quality products is springing up all over the world. As an industry, we in Wales must find a solution to capitalise on this demand.”

This work had been boosted thanks to the support of the Welsh Government who in 2013 awarded HCC a £1.2m grant over three years to further expand the export drive for Welsh Lamb and Welsh Beef. Exports last year were worth more than £218 million to the Welsh economy.

“Part of that money will be spent on the extended shelf life project,” said Mr Davies. “It will examine how we can extend the shelf life of Welsh Lamb so that it can reach these far flung markets, adding to its reputation as a premium



quality product.

“As our export volumes rise, so too does the question of transportation. The most efficient way to transport large amounts of Welsh Lamb is by ship, which means that extended shelf life plays a vital role for long haul destinations.

“But an enormous amount of work needs to be carried out first. We have already had very positive meetings with farmer and processing representatives, I am confident that with goodwill and some effort on all sides the industry can rise to this challenge.”

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# Technical Performance Drives Better Sheep Margins Once Again

By Howard Walsh,  
contributor

**It is a somewhat familiar message, but after a costly 2012/2013 it is perhaps rarely more pertinent – more lambs born and reared was the main contributor to the better flock margins in England, Scotland and Wales.**

Annual costings from the three levy boards – Eblex (English Beef and Lamb Executive), HCC (Hybu Cig Cymru) and QMS (Quality Meat Scotland) – all paint a similar picture. The higher margin farms in virtually all the different sheep enterprises produced more saleable lambs per ewe from the 2012 crop, sold them sooner and in many cases at higher weights – but not necessarily with higher cost implications.

There is some variation in the changes recorded from the three organisations compared with the previous year, but in general margins were down and the gap between top third producers and the rest increased. On a brighter note, there is a hint of improved margins for the current year based on a more favourable cost-price balance up to this point in the year.

In England, the higher lambing percentages of the top third lowland flocks for 2012/2013 (165% against 153% average) and increased growth rates drove an extra 11% of output, or £11.40 per ewe.

## Live lambs

Gross output after replacement costs was £104.69 for top flocks compared with £93.19 in average flocks. But it was not all down to the number of lambs born, as according to AHDB/Eblex Senior Analyst Carol Davis, keeping lambs alive was clearly crucial. Top third flocks had 12 more lambs per 100 ewes to sell or keep as replacements.

So what contributes to a better scan and fewer empty ewes? Eblex Senior Livestock Scientist Liz Genever suggests body condition score management from weaning onwards, to ensure ewes are at a condition score of 3.5 for tupping, certainly helps.

A closer look at the lowland flock figures also shows top third flocks achieved 1.3kg higher average liveweight for their lambs whether finished, sold as stores or retained as replacements



*More saleable lambs, quicker finishing times and higher finishing weights marked the difference between bottom and top third producers.*

– and they were 12 days younger at 128 days. Dr Genever said better lamb growth rates were not driven by higher creep feed use but more likely by the use of good genetics, better grassland management and parasite control.

## Labour costs

Another key factor affecting sheep farmers' bottom line are labour costs, and the experts are urging producers to examine their systems and question whether or not the way they have always done things is necessarily the most cost effective. Paid and unpaid labour amounts to £32.37 per ewe for average performers but £24.33 for top third flocks.

Eblex provided these ideas to help contain costs:

- Consider contractors for specialists tasks (save equipment costs)
- Can you 'take the sheep to the feed' rather than vice-versa
- Keep sheep on a smaller area so they are quicker to check and gather; grazing a small area and moving sheep on can also benefit grassland management
- Invest to save – improved handling systems needing fewer people

Among Scottish sheep enterprises of all types the percentage of those producers achieving positive margins was down. Falling margins saw just 19% of hill flocks returning a positive margin

(down from 57% last year), 47% of upland flocks (100% last year) and 83% of lowland flocks (also 100% last year). Store lamb finishers fared no better with only half of them showing a positive net margin compared to 92% last year.

Stuart Ashworth, QMS Head of Economic Services, told Sheep Farmer: "The message is basically the same whether you are talking about sheep or sucklers. Get a live lamb or calf and do it well, and in some cases that might well mean one good single lamb rather than two poorer ones. What matters is the weight of lambs (or calf) you can sell from each productive breeding animal."

## Scottish figures

Mr Ashworth did acknowledge seeking improvements was easier said than done in the case of the real hard hill farms running Blackies and Cheviots and living with a sub-100% lambing percentage. He said: "I continue to be concerned about the ability of these units to survive without support and yet for all the environmental reasons we know about, they really must be enabled to survive."

These LFA hill farms cover some of the most disadvantaged land in Scotland and the poorer performers tended to be in the North West Highlands and Islands where climate and topography make it difficult for farmers to sell anything other than store lambs, with only three lambs per 100 ewes sold finished. The

sample as a whole covered 26 flocks farming more than 18,300 ewes – see panel. The store lamb finishers sample covered 13 businesses, selling some 8,750 lambs.

It was a similar overall picture from the Welsh sheep flocks, collected by Aberystwyth University and presented by HCC. The average gross margin per ewe on hill and upland farms during 2012/13 fell by 30%, a reduction of £11 per ewe on hill farms and £18 per ewe on upland farms compared to the previous year. On lowland sheep farms, the gross margin declined by 20%. This was as a result of the enterprise output declining by 6-13% while costs increased by 10-14%.

## Welsh Figures

This was coupled with 'subdued' lamb prices that meant many enterprises faced economic uncertainty in the last financial year, said John Richards, HCC's industry and market information officer. Mr Richards said that when returns on the 124 sheep farms sampled were analysed, only 87% of the production costs were covered and the largest costs were, once again, feed and forage, followed by power and machinery.

## The Scottish Figures

### LFA flock facts

- Average lambing percentages – under 70% to 120%, average 99% reared
- Average gross margin £26 per ewe
- Average net margin -£13 per ewe
- Just five producers within group made a small positive net margin

Within the top third in this category, the better performance was attributed largely to:

- Higher number of lambs reared
- Higher proportion sold finished – 40% compared to average of 26%
- Higher proportion sold for breeding
- Result - 35% more lamb produced per ewe and net output £20 per head higher than average.

### Store finishers facts

- Average gross margin £1 per lamb
- Net margins averaged -£3.50 per lamb in a range of -£12-£6.50 per lamb
- Average finishing period 100 days (range 46 days to 175 days)
- Average finisher added 7kg to purchase weight of 32.65kg
- Average mortality 2%



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Welsh lamb production costs 2012/13			
p/kg liveweight	Average	Bottom Third	Top Third
Feed and forage	67	78	53
Vet and medicines	11	12	9
Other	16	17	14
<b>Total variable costs</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>76</b>
<b>Flock replacement</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>9</b>
Paid labour	6	9	4
Power and machinery	46	64	33
Financial and farm costs	37	50	26
Rent	7	14	4
<b>Total fixed costs</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>151</b>
Own/spouse labour	41	54	34
Unpaid labour	9	8	9
Flock size (head)	642	681	579
Lambs reared (per ewe)	1.32	1.18	1.44
Lamb weight (kg per ewe)	52	42	60
Lamb liveweight (kg)	39	36	41
<b>Total return (p/kg lw)</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Costs covered by return</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>121%</b>

Source: HCC

# Significant Feed Bill Justified Within Successful High Output System

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

**Kevin Harrison gives himself a hard time about the feed bill at Church Farm, North Stoke, Bath. But the high inputs are rewarded every year with high output and a reputation for producing top quality Suffolk cross lambs out of his 800 North Country Mules.**

“Our feed bills are dreadful but it’s too straightforward to just look at the cost of the creep feed and put it against what the lambs averaged,” says Kevin, who took on the role of NSA Marches Regional Chairman in September last year.

“It would be easy to knock £15 a head off the lamb price because of the feed and think ‘could I have made more without it’, but the feed means your stocking rate is higher and your ewes can get back round to tugging earlier and that reflects in your scanning rate. Most parts of this farm are only suitable for sheep. That’s why there are sheep here and that’s why we creep feed everything.”

## Marginal land

Kevin describes the location as ‘a hill farm in a lowland area’, roughly one-third arable and two thirds grassland, with the 70ha (180 acres) of prime arable encompassing 32 ha (80 acres) of River Avon flood plain, and the 120ha (300 acres) of grassland running from improved leys through to marginal hill land and deteriorating into scrub in places. The land is Cotswold Brash, which ‘burns off to a billiard table’ in the summer but is more manageable than heavy land in wet weather. It runs from



Church Farm (pictured behind) runs 800 North Country Mules.

20m (65ft) at the river to 230m (750ft) at the highest point and is very exposed to the elements in the winter.

But this is not a traditional hill farm ‘out in the sticks’. Perched between Bath and Bristol, Church Farm backs onto a racecourse on its one boundary, has the Cotswold Way running through it and public footpaths in 26 of 35 fields. It is a dog walkers’ paradise and Kevin is NSA spokesperson on sheep worrying by dogs, appearing on television and in the press to raise awareness of the problem.

Dog worrying is a specific action area for NSA as a result of members highlighting it to regional committees. Another issue being taken up this year will be awareness of caseous lymphadenitis (CLA), a disease Kevin has struggled with in bought-in rams and referred to the NSA English Committee,

which referred it to the NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee. This dialogue within NSA’s structure is something Kevin hopes to encourage further as regional chairman, holding all his committee meetings as open forums.

**“I had a vision in my mind of what I’d do if it was my flock ... and the good fortune to work for an employer who allowed me to do it.”**

*Kevin Harrison*

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Kevin Harrison

Kevin lives with wife Karen and their two teenage children on the Marches Region's extreme southerly boundary, but the farm (two miles away) is in NSA South East Region, and Kevin comes originally from NSA South West Region! With no farming background, he has achieved his childhood ambition to be a farm manger by taking on increasing

responsibility at each of the farms he has worked on around the UK.

He became Farm Manager for J.T Baylis Farming 14 years ago, inheriting two full-time staff, considerable owned machinery and a hefty annual contracting bill. He streamlined the business and intensified the sheep enterprise by not replacing staff when they left or machinery when it deteriorated, selling the cattle and focusing the arable.

"I've always taken the good points and the bad points from the farms I've worked on and had a vision in my mind of what I'd do if it was my flock. The sheep here were on home mix and silage when I came, but I had that vision of what I wanted to create and the good fortune to work for an employer who allowed me to do it. They have given me the time and the money to invest in this system and a great deal of autonomy," Kevin says, detailing the good faith J.T. Baylis Farming had by providing funds for a mobile sheep handling and auto drafting system, creep feeders and considerable concentrates bills before any results were seen in the form of fat lambs. He suggests the change-over has 'only paid off' because of the decent lamb price in recent years, but it is clear Kevin has a grip on all his costings and is looking for efficiencies at every stage.



Ewe lambs graze fodder crops at the top of farm, overlooking Bristol in the far distance.

## Farm Facts

- Kevin Harrison has been Farm Manager for J.T. Baylis Farming for 14 years.
- Sole employee at Church Farm, North Stoke, Wiltshire
- A Hill farm in a lowland area, working within the limitations of marginal land and a location on the urban fringe
- Running 800 North Country Mules plus 150 bought-in followers
- Arable land used for spring barley (for sale) and forage rape and stubble turnips (for the sheep)

## Scanning rate

A total of 807 Mules were scanned in autumn 2012 at 214%, with 205% born alive in March 2013 and 191% sold finished. These 1,541 lambs averaged 20.3kg deadweight and £89.38 per head, leaving a gross margin of £65.59 per ewe after all costs, including 150 tonnes of concentrate feeding.

Kevin has been working with independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings on his costings on his last two farms, but also uses the figures for his involvement with the May Hill Lamb Group, which not only acts as a collection centre but also provides a discussion group function for the farmers it sources lambs from. May Hill sells to Randall Parker for supply into Sainsburys and Kevin's sells all his stock this way, finding the Suffolk lambs out of Mules ewes fit the required specification well.

## Strong runners

Kevin maintains his 800-head Mule flock by purchasing 150 'strong runners' each year from Leyburn, Yorkshire. He chooses not to breed these replacements as ewe lambs, as 800 ewes at lambing is the maximum his labour resource and shed space can cope with, and he can graze inaccessible

*continued on page 24*



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continued from page 23

areas all winter not suitable for in-lamb ewes or ewes and lambs. His ewes average five lamb crops before being sold deadweight as culls.

Lambing is indoors in three weeks in March with the assistance of a self-employed local man who helps at busy times through the year, a paid night lamber and two vet students. Ewes are winter-shorn into the shed in December/January and grouped according to week of lambing and number of lambs. Triplets are married onto singles where possible, but extras (130 in 2013) are machine reared.

Feeding is ewes foraging for high quality nuts from a floor of home-grown straw feed/bedding. Against the cost of concentrates, Kevin lists benefits of no silage/hay contracting bills and ewes staying very clean with little disease or feet problems and fewer prolapses.

Kevin has moved away from using hardening-off yards post lambing to turning everything straight out after 24 hours using a custom-built trailer with individual pens, enabling each ewe-and-lamb unit to be turned out to a different part of the field to reduce mis-mothering.

Lambs get creep feed from an early age, meaning growth rates aren't checked by weaning at 11 weeks. They



A different raddle colour each week allows accurate grouping the lambing shed

get vaccinated for clostridial disease and drenched for nematodirus at around five weeks, but are only wormed subsequently according to faecal egg counts. With the majority of 2013's lambs sold between the middle of June and the first week of August, and just 160 moved onto forage rape to 'tickle along' until finishing in October, a lot of lambs only get wormed once.

As a believer in 'mild EID' and with no control over the breeding of his females, Kevin uses electronic eartags to record liveweight gain and make management decisions about feeding and selection of finished lambs, as well as recording drug use and movements. The tags also communicate with the auto drafter to

speed up handling and selecting.

So from a 13-year-old's ambition to be a farm manager, to enacting his vision of how to manage a sheep flock, and now adding his role as NSA Marches Regional Chairman to his achievements too, Kevin has a lot to reflect on.

## Diverse industry

Looking back, he says: "You can have a good career in farming if you want one. I've realised through my involvement in NSA how big and diverse the industry is. There is still so much for me to see and learn, but I've spent my whole life acquiring knowledge and it's a natural progression to give a bit back now I have the flock where I want it."

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# Plan to Avoid Nasty Tax Surprises

By Richard Haines, Old Mill Accountants and Financial Planners

**With the constant battle to maintain gross margins, for many farms the surprise of an unforeseen tax liability is never a pleasant New Year gesture.**

The extremely difficult 2013 spring for many sheep farms will only show through within the current year, and if it took place after your financial year end we could well see tax bills payable for many with already stretched cash flows.

The sting in the tail comes as HMRC also require you to pay 50% tax up front in January as well, using the profits from the previous year as the basis. However, it is possible to reduce this amount down where you do know profits have dropped – and therefore clearly understanding your exact position for 2013/14 early in January is extremely important if unnecessary tax is to be avoided, even if you do have the scope to recover these payments in the future.

Many businesses require investment and, where farms are committed to the industry, 100% tax relief is still available on qualifying plant and equipment up to a total spend of £250,000. This provides an extremely valuable tax break for anybody needing items such as handling systems, tractors and other relevant plant and equipment, which all qualify.

## Tax breaks

Often buying machinery in a difficult year going against the grain but this can generate taxable losses to recover tax that has been paid. Provided any assets purchased are either paid for outright or under a hire purchase arrangement, the allowances are available on the full purchase price, despite not paying for it completely within the year.

Farmers also have available to them 'farmers averaging', which allows a good and a bad year to be equally taxed across two years and can provide another useful tax break where an individual has suffered higher rate tax of 40% in a good year and is only utilising basic rate tax bands at 20% in the following or preceding year. Other planning opportunities can take into account the timing of stock sales and repair expenditure, both of which can help to minimise the outflow of tax.

The Chancellor has also continued to reduce Corporation Tax rates and even large companies will soon only be paying 20% tax on all profits. This does provide a valuable opportunity, particularly for profitable farms with very few partners, as profits can be capped at a tax rate no worse than a 20% level, the lowest rate possible for trading profits.

It is also worth ensuring you utilise ISA allowances and indeed personal allowances for non-tax paying individuals who are involved in the business, which can be done in a variety of ways. At Old Mill we work with our clients to understand profitability over the year, holding an additional meeting where needed to discuss tax planning ahead of the year end to position the business in the strongest place to maximise future opportunity.

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# Battling with Bracken for the Benefit of Flora, Fauna and Sheep

**The ban of asulam in December 2011 was a bitter blow in the battle against bracken, and although the chemical's continued use has been facilitated through 120-day 'emergency authorisation' windows, it adds to the challenge of turning the tide of bracken invasion.**

Even when asulam use was not restricted, it was not as simple as just applying the product and knowing the bracken would die off, otherwise we wouldn't still have the problem with bracken that we do. The plant has a huge network of rhizomes under the soil and chemical treatments have to be followed up with repeat treatments and on-going management.

But the challenge of controlling bracken is not just about dealing with a difficult plant and limited chemical options, but a political backdrop that is giving bracken a huge boost.

## Stocking density

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "There are several reasons that have led to sheep numbers in the uplands seeing dramatic cuts, but I feel we have a major problem with many conservation bodies and policy makers not understanding the symbiotic relationship between sheep farming, biodiversity and land management. This has been bad news for sheep farmers while being great for bracken, especially at a time when the warming of our climate is even seeing bracken move up the hill in places.

"Bracken-infested land benefits no one – it creates a monoculture that discourages plant and wildlife diversity, it makes land unproductive and poses a human and livestock health issue. NSA is working hard to show the vital importance of getting sheep numbers right on commons and hill land, and



*Geoff Eyre uses a combination of whole moor spraying (above) and spot spraying of re-emerging bracken fronds (left).*



*Geoff Eyre*

while we are seeing some change in attitude, we are still facing a situation where bracken is currently spreading."

This is something Geoff Eyre, a Derbyshire farmer, agronomist and heather restoration expert, agrees with. He says: "People who visit the Peak District to walk and enjoy the view would far rather see moorland vegetation than bracken and yet little is being done to even slow the pace of encroachment, which I would put at a 3-5% increase every year."

## Control sequence

Geoff has been experimenting with different methods of bracken control for over 20 years and generously shares what he has learnt. His recommended sequence is:-

- Exercising extreme care, burn at the end of the burning season in March and April when the bracken is dry.
- Spray in early autumn, using cheap

glyphosate if the vegetation beneath is of no interest or asulam otherwise. Geoff recommends using four five-meter horizontal spray pattern flood jets covering 20 meters, to 'rain' gently onto the plant with no more than 30lb pressure per square inch to stop drift and leave vegetation below the bracken canopy largely untouched.

- Burn again in the winter when it is sufficiently dry.

"I have four five-meter spray nozzles mounted on high booms with a 1,100-litre tank that, by covering 20 metres per bouts, does 5ha per tank," says Geoff. "This is all mounted on a soft-track for steep slopes. I map the areas with my satnav in the winter when there is no vegetation cover, so I miss rocks and deep holes when I'm spraying and the bracken is as high as the cab. On extreme slopes I get in a helicopter.

"Follow up is either on my soft-track using glyphosate if fronds are returning close together, when I can do 12ha a day usually. Or on a UTV using a labour force between two and five, which is ideal for odd, dotted about fronds and can easily cover 25ha a day. I go for zero tolerance of bracken and after three years it is often just a hand spray bottle on a quad. George Thompson from Spaunton Moor in North Yorkshire influenced my zero tolerance approach, having proved it was possible to clear 2,500 acres of bracken.





Geoff Eyre is tackling bracken (in the foreground of this picture) and has already restored large areas of land to a variety of habitats (in the background).

## Burning vital

“Burning is also vital when controlling bracken. My observations suggest that burning bracken somehow changes the chemical composition of the soil, which makes it possible to establish other plants afterwards. Moss usually colonises where the bracken has been and I can establish a variety of plants into it because it acts like blotting paper for all the seeds,” says Geoff, listing heather, cross leaved heath, crowberry and bilberry as plants he has established instead of bracken, as well as species-rich acidic grassland with

harebell, tormentil and heath bedstraw. Geoff believes ridding more areas of bracken would also increase the carrying capacity of large areas of the uplands. His own moor near Brough in the Hope Valley should be able to summer at least twice as many sheep once the new vegetation is fully established.

## Fencing

“I fence off the areas that were formerly bracken for several years after seeding because this allows the desirable vegetation to re-establish more quickly and it will be to the benefit of the grazing



Burning improves re-establishment, as the increased re-growth on this burning strip shows.



Production land that Geoff has created where previously there was nothing but bracken.

animals in the long-term. Once bracken is vegetated with grass and heath I have summered one sheep to the acre and in the future will double this as vegetation increases. So after three years without grazing a once monoculture bracken area can carry at least two sheep per acre in the summer. Apply that to 1.5 million acres of bracken infested land in the UK and that’s summer stocking for three million extra sheep.

“Last year eight pairs of curlew bred on the moor here and many lapwings have also returned. We now have a good population of grouse as well as meadow pipits and skylarks too numerous to count. These species had virtually disappeared when the moor was covered in bracken. My methods create better habitat for wildlife and much more productive ground for livestock production, but because the environmentalists are blinkered about it, bracken is increasing and becoming so dense it is inaccessible to all species, so scrub is following at an alarming rate. Surely they should be supporting at least control of bracken?”

*Our thanks to farm and environment consultant Chloe Palmer for her help in compiling this article.*

## Bracken Q&A

### Why is bracken such a problem?

- Covers at least 1.5m ha of the British countryside.
- Very difficult to control as is robust, native and well suited to UK conditions (although it can be affected by water logging, high altitude and severe frosts).
- Fronds are toxic, particularly at the newly emerged stage.
- Agri-environment schemes limit control in some scenarios; check your agreement before you start any control work.

### Why do we need to control bracken?

- Can cause a number of health problems in sheep, including tumours/ulceration, thiamine deficiency and deterioration of the retina (more commonly called ‘bright blindness’).
- Harbours ticks, a sheep parasite but a human health risk as a vector of Lyme disease.
- Sheds millions of carcinogenic spores in late summer/early summer that are

a risk to humans, and has been linked to an increased risk of gastric cancer.

### What are the restrictions surrounding asulam use?

- There will be an emergency authorisation this year and this is expected to permit asulam to be purchased between 19th May and 16th September and applied between 1st July and 31st October.
- The Bracken Control Group anticipates permitted application routes to include helicopters, mounted spray booms, boomless sprayers, knapsack sprayers and hand lances, but not weed wipers or drift sprayers.
- Visit [www.brackencontrol.co.uk](http://www.brackencontrol.co.uk) to keep abreast of the situation.

### Will the ban on asulam ever be lifted?

The manufacturers are in the final stages of (re)registering asulam, but if it is approved it is not expected to return to its previous status until 2016. It is hoped annual emergency authorisations will be granted until then.

# England Moves Closer to Electronic Database - But Limits Tagging Options

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

**NSA was disappointed, although not entirely surprised, by the new at the end of last year that Defra was removing the option to use the non-EID slaughter tag in England from 1st January 2015.**

But if there is a silver lining to the cloud it is that we are a step closer to understanding the full extent of the changes coming our way, that Defra has indicated it will take on board NSA's recommendation that the changes will put us in a better position to apply for a level of tolerance from the EU to avoid financial penalties, and that Defra should now be able to implement many of the Task Force recommendations surrounding the six-day standstill and related movement controls.

It does appear that (almost) everything is on-track for a 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014 start date, with SouthWestern (the sheep movements database provider working on behalf of Defra) working hard to get the necessary infrastructure

## An Update for Wales

The April start date for an electronic database in England means Wales will soon be the only nation in the UK not to have such a system in place. Alun Davies, Welsh Government's Minister for Natural Resources and Food, made a long-awaited announcement on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December that Wales would go ahead with its plan to adapt the Scottish database (ScotEID) into 'EIDCymru' with a start date of January 2015. There was no mention in the announcement of a third party being brought in to run the database, only that 'the Welsh Government will continue to work closely with the Scottish Government and Defra to exchange information on cross border movements'. There was also no reference to changes to ear-tagging, but NSA is anticipating a consultation on this next year to bring Wales in line with England and remove the option of the visual slaughter tag for lambs. We will keep members informed as and when we get any more detailed information.



*Movement reporting rules will change on 1st April 2014, with more changes from 1st January 2015 for slaughter lambs and older breeding animals*

in place for the 'aRAMs1' (Animal Reporting and Movement Service) system to be launched.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April a 'web portal' will be available for farmers to go online and electronically report sheep movements, supported by a dedicated farmers' telephone helpline. There will also be a new paper-reporting system for individuals who are not ready/able to 'go digital'. This will involve a new aRAMs1 form to replace the existing AML1 form, which farmers will need to post to SouthWestern at Milton Keynes rather than your local authority.

### Phased roll-out

It was originally planned that markets, collection centres and abattoirs would also start making electronic submissions to the new database from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, but instead CPRCs (Central Point Recording Centres) will go through a 'phased roll-out' between March and June. This is to allow time for businesses to integrate their computer systems with the new database.

The next key date after that will be 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, after which the non-EID slaughter tag (visual tag) will no longer be permitted for use. Defra has confirmed to NSA that any lambs tagged with a visual slaughter tag before 1<sup>st</sup> January will not have to be automatically re-tagged with an electronic slaughter tag on that date, as there will be an accepted 'lag-time' while lambs born in 2013 and not electronically identified work through the system. However, NSA urges members to be aware that markets will not be allowed to take non-EID tagged slaughter lambs from 1<sup>st</sup>

January 2015, and abattoirs will have the choice whether to or not. This means farmers need to consider selling options when tagging lambs *this year*.

The rules during the 'lag time' from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, as non-electronically identified slaughter lambs work themselves out of the system, will be:-

- It will be *illegal* for markets to accept sheep without an electronic tag (be it an EID slaughter tag in lambs or full EID in breeding animals).
- It will be *legal* for any other keeper to receive a non-electronically identified animal but it is the keeper's responsibility in law to check identification and re-identify the animal correctly once it is on their holding.
- It will be *legal* for abattoirs to accept a non-electronically identified animal, if they can satisfy themselves as to its provenance.

January 2015 will also see a critical change for older breeding stock, as 1<sup>st</sup> January will mark the end of the EU derogation exempting the historic flock (pre 2010) from EID rules. It will not be mandatory for older ewes and rams to be electronically tagged from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2015, but they must be individually recorded on movement documents. This means that any of these older ewes kept on farm after the normal culling period next year (summer/autumn 2014) would be best to be re-tagged with full EID by that point.

*Given the changes taking place, NSA is planning a series of meetings in the coming months to help keep members informed. You can also find additional information on the Defra/SouthWestern website – [www.arams.co.uk](http://www.arams.co.uk).*

# Tracesure-bolused ewes produce strong and fit lambs

A sheep farmer who boluses his ewes with the Tracesure traffic lights system says lambs are born stronger and fitter.

Aled Jones (pictured) runs 1,500 ewes on a low-input system at Tregeiriog Farm, near Llangollen.

He winters sheep on deferred grazing and boluses with Tracesure to ensure good utilisation of energy and protein in the grass.

"We bolus at scanning in preparation for lambing to ensure we get the best colostrum for the lambs. We find that they thrive well when they are a month old and they don't have a growth check, they seem to keep going," says Aled, who farms in a contract partnership with Rupert Greenwell.

The flock grazes on land that rises



to 1500 feet, land that is deficient in cobalt and selenium. "Grazing at this altitude, we know there is a deficiency in the grass therefore by bolusing we know the sheep have the correct trace elements in their system for up to six months," Aled explains.

The ewes produce more colostrum and that benefit passes to the lambs. They are born with more vigour and grow rapidly in the spring, achieving high weaning weights which means they can be sold earlier, says Aled.

He has been using Tracesure traffic lights for three years. "Once you start using a product and it works you never want to stop."



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**Iwan Davies (North Wales) 07790 372 828**

**Tom Rayner (North of England) 07769 694 427**

**Tim Nixon (South of England) 07500 048 392**

**Neill Acheson (Northern Ireland) 07795 434986**

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# Livestock Markets Being Regenerated for the Modern Era

Livestock markets are going through an unprecedented period of regeneration and modernisation, which includes a series of recent mergers and relocations around the country.

In the last ten years there have been developments or relocations at Cockermonth, Thirsk, Rugby, Cirencester and Aberystwyth and more recently at Hereford, Wigton, Sedgemoor and Welshpool. Holsworthy is currently in the process of being re-located, and Chelford, Darlington and Barnard Castle all have upgrade plans in the pipeline.

Previously known as Abergavenny and Newport, Monmouthshire Livestock Auction is the latest example of this drive to meet the challenges and requirements of modern farming.

## Moving out

The site, which is seven miles from Abergavenny at Bryngwyn, near Raglan, comprises a livestock sale facility which can accommodate up to 3,500 sheep and 800 cattle, and took over business from the town centre location in December.

Keith Spencer, Company Secretary of the newly-formed company, said the new state-of-the-art facilities are coping well with the business's throughput and should attract new business as well.

"The site has been built to the highest modern standards taking into account animal health and welfare and is able to offer a much improved service to



Investment in new facilities at the J36 Rural Auction Centre and others around the country have regenerated and modernised markets for the future.

our customers," he said.

"Our town centre location had become somewhat outdated to meet the needs of our business. With the closure of Monmouth market in 2002 and Newport in 2009, the volume of livestock has become too large for it.

## Better access

"The new site is far better for access and parking and we believe it will attract stock from the wider area, as well as more local producers who have been using more up to date facilities," he said.

The site has been developed by  
Monmouthshire  
County

Council at a cost of around £5 million.

The facilities also include a support building, administration offices and a cafe. The old site is to be sold off for a supermarket development in Abergavenny town centre.

## One-stop shop

John Hughes, Manager of NWA Property and Professional, is the land agency division of the L&K Group, which was created in 2005 from the merger of Lancaster Farmers Auction Mart and Kendal and District Auction Mart. The company offers land agency, farm advisory and stewardship matters, as well as livestock sales. It is a full rural services company which is designed as a one-stop shop.

Lancaster was one of the early 'out

*Out of town locations make transporting stock in an out much easier, hence the location of the new J36 Rural Auction Centre close to the M6.*



of town' markets and still operates successfully, but Kendal was still in the town centre and was dated both structurally and the way it met modern welfare requirements.

Mr Hughes said farmers had less time to spend in the marts because of the demands on their time and businesses, so it was a case of finding ways to improve services and attract them back to the markets.

"Our previous location in Kendal was in the town centre and this was difficult in terms of access and for both buyers and vendors, so we started looking for a re-location. We found an

ideal site at Junction 36 of the M6. The J36 Rural Auction Centre is now a showpiece offering up-to-date facilities in a prime location, and the business is expanding as well, if not better, than was envisaged."

### General trend

Other premises were built on the site and these are currently leased out to veterinary surgeons, accountants, solicitors, feed companies, a tyre service, animal health suppliers and the Scottish Agricultural College.

Chris Dodds, Executive Secretary of the Livestock Auctioneers Association,

said the move reflected a general trend in the industry of modernisation.

"Many businesses within the livestock auctioneering industry are undergoing a process of transformation, which is seeing premises being upgraded to meet high standards of health and welfare, and businesses merging to create a newly efficient and vibrant sector," he said.

"There is a large amount of regeneration work going on in the sector and Abergavenny and J36 are prime examples of this. Their new facility is well-placed to meet the challenges of the future and I wish them every success."

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# Welsh Mountains Take Next Step by Combining Performance Data

## By Signet Breeding Services

For many years Welsh Mountain breeders have been able to identify breeding stock with superior genetics for commercially important traits using the Sheepbreeder recording service provided by Signet and supported by Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC).

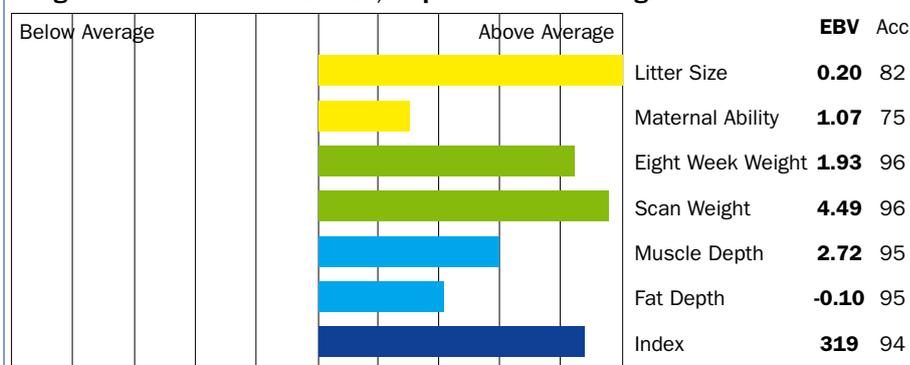
Many of these flocks have achieved high rates of genetic gain, but to date the wider uptake of these genetics within the industry has tended to be limited. One of the reasons for the limited commercial uptake is the operation of several different breeding groups within the breed, whose results were not directly comparable. This meant the EBVs produced were more difficult to interpret and put into context.

### Combined data

For the first time in 2013 the two remaining Welsh Mountain breeding groups (see panel on page 34 for breeders involved) agreed to combine their data to create a single breeding evaluation for the breed. This method of analysis is similar to the approach initiated in 2004 for many of the numerically larger breeds, such as the Texel, Lleyn and Scottish Blackface. 'Whole Breed Analyses' combine and analyse performance data from all of the recorded flocks within a breed simultaneously, allowing for better comparisons of the genetic merit of animals in different flocks.

The combined Welsh Mountain dataset is massive, containing just

A high index Welsh Mountain ram, as presented on the Signet website



under 200,000 animal records. Using a dataset of this size will produce more accurate predictions of the breeding potential of the animals within each flock and thereby allow for faster genetic progress, through the easier and more reliable identification of high (or low) performing animals within the breed.

### Genetic linkage

Signet-recorded Welsh Mountain breeders will continue to be encouraged to develop genetic linkage between their flocks, swapping and sharing stock rams to ensure breeding lines are being accurately compared in different flocks. Work undertaken by SRUC (formerly SAC) indicates that the existing levels of flock-to-flock linkage are similar to those seen in other breeding schemes and recommend that it could be further improved through the use of a series of planned ram sharing exercises between the flocks.

The new analysis aims to provide a single, easily understood marketing message that can be put forward to breeders and commercial ram buyers to

promote the development of the Welsh Mountain Breed.

Recorded Welsh Mountain flocks use the 'Welsh Index' to improve the genetic potential of their sheep for maternal ability, growth and carcass attributes. This index works as a guide for the selection of stock rams and ewe replacements with the aim of producing a flock that not only produces lambs with a superior and heavier carcass but also ewes that can get their lambs off to a good start in life.

### Welsh Index

These two selection goals are weighted equally within the breeding index and represented as follows:

- *Maternal ability* of the ewe – represented by the maternal ability EBV and taking into account the performance of lambs to eight weeks of age.
- *Lamb growth potential* – assessed through scanning measurements of fat and muscle depth combined with liveweight at scanning. Therefore this

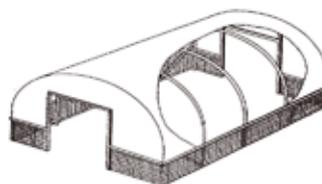
*continued on page 34*



Using a 'Whole Breed Analysis' had allowed for the creation of more accurate EBVs, plus less confusion for commercial buyers.

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# 3IN1 FEEDERS – revolution in creep feeding

## REVOLUTIONARY SYSTEM

The 3IN1FEEDERS Creep Panel revolutionises lamb creep feeding by simplifying the system and reducing potential harm to stock. The Creep Panel (Patent application number: 2010903466) works by acting as a guard over the trough denying ewes access to the feed as their head is too large.

The Creep Panel is able to be pivoted to allow the feeder to operate either as a standard feeder or a creep feeder. The Creep Panels are permanently attached to the feeder - this makes repositioning the 3IN1FEEDER easy. The system is cost effective because it consists of 1 part.

## SAFE FOR EWES AND LAMBS

The 3IN1FEEDERS Creep Panel is safe for both ewes and lambs as the Creep Panel discriminates based on head size, and not the size of the animal. Many farmers report that when the Creep Panel is engaged the ewes stand back from the feeder because the ewes know that they cannot access any feed.

### Testimonial

*I have tried a lot of makes of creep feeders and had a number of issues - ewe or lambs getting their heads stuck, not being able to keep ewes out after shearing, getting muck in the trough, creep falling out when I move the feeder and having to fill them with 25kg bags.*

*I saw the 3IN1FEEDERS system and was suspicious about the creep feeding system working. Since I have had an 1800 model, I have not had an injury to any ewes or lambs. The new lambs took to the system very easily.*

*When I was using the 3IN1FEEDER as a creep, I could notice the lambs coming back and forth all day. I had it set so the lambs would eat a little bit often - bunches of lambs were very consistent.*

*The 1800 model feeds three times the amount of other creep feeders so the initial outlay isn't that much more. With all the other benefits, including feeding hoggets and pregnant ewes, the choice of creep feeders is easy.*

*I have bought more feeders for this year's lambing.*

**Rob Watkins, Lower Park Farm, Vowchurch, Herefordshire**

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- ▶ selection goal is related to the EBVs for scan weight, muscle depth and fat depth.

Despite the genetic gains that have been made in the Welsh Mountain breed over recent years, ram buyers have yet to fully embrace the information that is available from breeders and via the internet. Every Welsh Mountain animal in the analysis (past and present) has EBVs that can be accessed on-line; the Signet website ([www.signetfbc.co.uk](http://www.signetfbc.co.uk)) also produces charts which provide a far simpler way to assess an animal's breeding potential.

The chart on page 32 for a high indexed Welsh Mountain ram is available online and clearly displays his EBVs, which are all above well average and have high accuracy values.

The message to commercial ram buyers is clear:-

- There are large genetic differences between animals within the Welsh Mountain breed, even between those reared in the same flock.
- These genetic differences can't be observed by eye alone and so EBVs should be used to assess an animal's genetic merit, particularly for maternal traits
- The use of Recorded Welsh Mountain rams with superior EBVs provides an important way for producers to lift the commercial productivity of their hill flocks.

## Welsh Mountain flocks involved in the new analysis.

Camda Cynwyd Ltd, Conwy.  
Tel: 01690 770209

J.T. Jones, Gwynedd.  
Tel: 01678 540554

I.M. Joyce and E.A. Kensler, Ceredigion.  
Tel: 01970 890477

J.J.S. and M.J. Lloyd Williams, Ceredigion.  
Tel: 01970 832888

T.C. and A.J. Tyne, Gwynedd.  
Tel: 01758 721898

D.O. Williams and Co, Carmarthenshire.  
Tel: 01550 740230

Edward Williams, Powys.  
Tel: 01874 676298

WM Nucleus Flock, Gwynedd.  
Tel: 01758 721898

## Case Study:

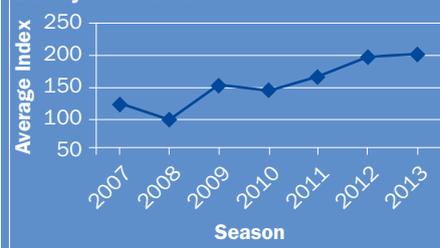
### Tim and Dot Tyne, Pwllheli, Gwynedd

**Tim and Dot Tyne began recording their Welsh Mountain flock with Signet in 2007, looking to improve the carcass quality and maternal attributes of their lambs.**

They have maintained the same type of management for their 200-ewe closed flock but, through the use of high index rams and careful selection of female replacements using EBVs, have greatly improved the performance of their flock. They were very excited about joining the first ever whole breed analysis for Welsh Mountain sheep.

Mr Tyne says: "With more flocks recording the rate of genetic progress will be even quicker in the future."

**Average Index of lambs within Tim and Dot Tyne's flock**



One of the main ways the Tynes have improved their flock's performance is through the selection of replacement ewes, with all retained ewe lambs selected solely on their EBVs and the primary criteria for culling or drafting older ewes out of the flock being their index. This has led to an increase in the average index of the lambs within the flock of 100 index points since 2008 (see chart). With the average index now at 200, this closely equates to the top 10% of the breed.

Mr and Mrs Tyne have seen



*A ram used within Tim and Dot Tyne's flock.*

the commercial benefits of this improvement through the changes in the lambs they have been sending for slaughter. Despite having made no significant alterations to their management system, they have observed carcass weights increase from around 10kg to many now consistently achieving 18-20kg deadweight.

Not only have the lambs increased in weight and growth rate but the couple have seen great positive advancements in the specific EBVs for muscling within their flock. Their lambs now average a muscle depth EBV within the top 10% of the breed, a major increase compared to just six years ago. This has led to their carcass grades improving from predominantly O and P grades to an increasing proportion of R and even some U grades.

Mr Tyne says: "We have seen the improvements that are achievable through performance recording first hand and would very much like to encourage more sheep farmers, both within our breed and outside, to take up performance recording and improve the data available."



*Typical terrain for the Welsh Mountain flock near Pwllheli, Gwynedd*

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thomas  
  
fontaine

# Test, Treat and Test Again - The Golden Rule for Triclabendazole Use

**A survey using a specialist faecal egg count reduction test (FECRT) on liver fluke has shown that of the 16 Cumbrian farms involved a large proportion had reduced efficacy to a triclabendazole-based flukicide. This highlights the need for testing to make sure drugs are working effectively on individual farms.**

An FECRT involves testing dung samples for liver fluke eggs before sheep are treated and then testing again after treatment, to see what reduction in egg numbers treatment has had. The same technique is also used for roundworms, and for a drug to be considered effective we would expect the reduction in egg numbers to be more than 90%. Less than this can suggest an incorrect dosing technique or dose rate or, in the worst case scenario, drug resistance.

## Farmer Network

For this survey the Cumbria Farmer Network, working with Professor Diana Williams of Liverpool University and supported by Norbrook Laboratories and Penrith AHVLA, organised a standardised FECRT on 24 adult ewes from 16 flocks (a total of 384 head) in August last year and again, 21 days after treatment with a triclabendazole-based flukicide product, in September.

Three of the farms did not have enough fluke eggs present in the first test to be able to show a reduction in the second, five saw an egg count reduction below 90% (the highest of the five was 79%), and the other eight saw no reduction or even an increase.

It is important to note the survey did not include enough farms to make it statistically significant, and that several factors can cause a poor result in addition to triclabendazole resistance, such as incorrect use and the fact no flukicides have any persistency (so sheep will become re-infected as soon as they return to fluke-infected pasture) – but the project does serve as a useful reminder of the role of testing whether a drug has worked within a flock.

Triclabendazole is a very important tool in fluke control, as it is the only flukicide active that kills all three stages of the fluke parasite (early immature, immature and adult). This project has encouraged the participating farms to work more closely with their vets to plan future flukicide use and, for those who do not have triclabendazole resistance, to protect it by integrating it with other flukicide options.

## Ask for help

John Rowland, Newton Rigg College Sheep Manager, was involved in the project. He said: “Before February 2012 we had never dosed for fluke at Newton Rigg and I can only think we brought in the problem from the college’s hill farm. I’m certainly not frightened of asking for advice anymore, as when you go into a field and see 10 dead sheep it really makes you think.”

Sam Rawling of Ennerdale said: “We lost a quarter of our hogs away wintering last year and we got on top of it by changing our drug regime. We know there is no point in us using

triclabendazole now, as it would just be a waste of time and money. I now give out when I sell my sheep that we have triclabendazole resistance and I’ve got buyers that have come back to me and bought more a year later, having seen them do well when others bought elsewhere had died. We think you just have to tell people.”

## Top tips

Prof Williams and Rebecca Mearns from Penrith AHVLA provide the following tips:-

- Do not assume you have triclabendazole resistance – if you are sure you used the product properly (correct storage, weighing, gun calibration and dosing technique) and suspect a problem contact your vet and ask about FECRT, then act accordingly in developing a plan.
- A liver fluke control plan should change annually to reflect the level of risk and be specific to your farm – what works for your neighbour will not necessarily work for you.
- Know what stages of fluke each product treats and at what time of the year you should be using them.
- Think about other farmers when you sell and buy stock, and when overwintering consider if you are aware of the other farm’s fluke history and if they are aware of yours.
- If you have triclabendazole resistance don’t over-rely on closantel-based drugs, as resistance is a consequence of over-using any drug. Also, several doses of closantel in a short period can cause blindness in sheep so always consult your vet or health advisor.
- If you don’t have triclabendazole resistance, protect it by introducing other drug groups where possible, as once you have a problem you have it forever.
- Split your farm into high risk and low risk pastures to help to keep sheep most susceptible to fluke at particular times of the year away from riskier fields. Fencing off wet areas where possible may reduce risk.
- Have post-mortems done to check for damage to liver and ask for detailed abattoir feedback where possible.



The Cumbrian project is similar to work being done by George Milne, NSA Scottish Regional Development Officer, on his own farm. Read regular journal entries from George on changes and improvement he has made at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk).

NSA encourages all farmers to talk to their vet or animal health advisor about liver fluke and to visit [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk) for guidance.

# Weight Matters! Understanding the Impact of Weight Differences Between Ewes

By Catherine Nakielny

**The collection of more than 4,000 ewe weights and body condition scored has revealed a massive 40kg difference between the lightest and heaviest females in a flock, highlighting the problem of providing veterinary medicines to an average weight.**

The figures, which were collected by Farming Connect from eight flocks encompassing a range of breeds and farm types, also showed a 20kg difference between the average and heaviest ewes in the flock, demonstrating just how easy it is to under-dose animals.

Further examination of the results shows that typically 45% of ewes are actually heavier than the average weight of the flock. While this seems an obvious conclusion given that an average will always be lighter than the maximum, the amount of variation which exists in ewe weight around the average value demonstrates the danger of using this value on which to base treatments.

## Worms and fluke

With industry concerns over treatments options for liver fluke, sheep scab and worms and many flocks having suffered significant problems particularly with liver fluke over the last 18 months, ensuring that treatments given are effective is vital. With increasing cases of resistance to animal health products, avoiding under-dosing could make the difference between being able to sustainably farm sheep in the future versus dealing with significant animal health issues.

For example, a 12ml product treatment based on a 60kg ewe (1ml/5kg) will mean that an 80kg ewe in the same flock will be under-treated by 4ml. This assumes that a drench-gun is dispensing the correct amount. Unfortunately, this is often not the case

and it is easy to see how an animal can end up getting only half of the required amount.

By weighing large numbers of ewes, the project also showed how difficult it is to assess weight on visual assessment only. I know weighing every ewe before treatment is not practical, but getting to know both the average weight and, just as importantly, the heaviest ewes in the flock is well worth the effort. Along with a simple syringe calibration of the drench gun (every time it is used) and with treating to the heaviest animal in the group it is perfectly possible to ensure animal health products are used effectively and cost-efficiently.

## Knowing weights

Under-dosing is not just limited to flock treatments and the importance of individual treatments such as antibiotics and pain relief medication on maximising animal health and survival means that getting to grips with ewe weight will pay dividends.

Further benefits of knowing and

## Key Points

- Get to grips with flock health through health planning
- Calibrate drenching equipment
- Know your ewe weight – treat to the heaviest in the group, and with different breeds or ewe sizes consider prior sorting
- Set targets for flock performance and monitor progress
- Consider the impact of ewe weight on key drivers of flock profitability

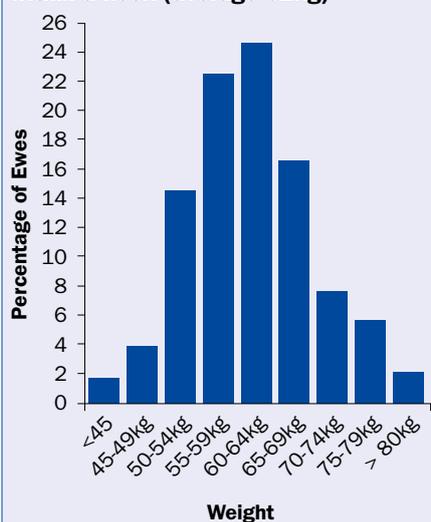
monitoring ewe weight will also come from better feed budgeting. Forage utilisation can also be improved by providing a ewe with her daily requirements which are related to her body-weight. Results from the project also showed that ewe weight affects prolificacy and maximising 'efficient' lamb production requires ewes to be at optimum weight rather than too heavy or too light.

## Flock management

So all in all, knowing ewe weight and understanding how this affects key elements of profitability is an important element of flock management. With a relatively simple job of weighing at least a proportion of ewes able to provide so much useful information this should be considered as a routine part of lamb production.

*Catherine sits on the NSA Cymru/ Wales Regional Committee, which she also represents on the NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee. She is happy to offer members tips on 'key performance indicators' and benchmarking on 01558 685808 or catherine@knconsulting.co.uk. To learn more about Farming Connect services in Wales contact 01970 636282 or visit [www.menterabusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect](http://www.menterabusnes.co.uk/farmingconnect).*

**Typical distribution of ewe weight within a flock (average 62kg)**



Results by flock				
Flock	Average weight	Ewes heavier than average weight	Ewes heavier than average weight	Potential under-dosing if treating to average
1	45kg	63kg	42%	40%
2	55kg	72kg	53%	31%
3	58kg	82kg	42%	41%
4	58kg	85kg	41%	47%
5	60kg	87kg	40%	45%
6	61kg	90kg	46%	48%
7	69kg	89kg	54%	29%
8	78kg	102kg	38%	31%

Source: Farming Connect (Autumn 2012)



While weighing all ewes individually is not practical, knowing the average and the heaviest is vital.

# Assess In-lamb Ewes to Maximise Lamb Output and Survivability

The nutritional status of breeding ewes should be monitored at key points throughout the year, and especially so in the lead up to lambing, say vets Russell Fuller of Tyndale Vet Practice in Gloucestershire and Joe Henry of Alnorthumbria Vet Group in Northumberland, giving their recommendations on determining the right level of feeding for ewes to help maximise the numbers of lambs ultimately reared.



Russell explains: “Too often in-lamb ewes are fed silage and concentrates in the same quantities as a matter of routine from year to year. But silage quality – the energy and protein content – will vary from season to season, field to field. Even big bales from the same field can feed differently. With silage such an important factor in feeding in-lamb ewes, its quality should be analysed each season.

“The body condition of ewes as they approach the last six weeks of lambing may also differ from season to season. This will determine how much energy and protein they will require in the final run-up to lambing.”

## Condition scoring

Russell and Joe both recommend that ewes are always body condition scored and have blood samples taken to reveal their metabolic profiles so their nutritional requirements can be more appropriately met.

Russell continues: “With lowland flocks, and also small flocks, there’s a tendency to overfeed ewes in the run-up to lambing. It’s important to prevent ewes from becoming over-conditioned for two reasons – fat ewes are more likely to have a difficult lambing and it’s a waste of money on feed. If silage quality is very good there is scope to cut back on the amount of feed fed without the risk of twin-lamb disease. Alternatively, feed cost savings could be made by replacing

Target body condition scores			
	Hill ewes	Upland ewes	Lowland ewes
At weaning	2.0	2.0	2.5
At tupping	2.5	3.0	3.5
Mid-pregnancy and at lambing	2.0	2.5	3.0

Source: Eblex



Metabolic blood profiling of a whole flock can cost less than one dead ewe, so is worth carrying out pre-lambing.

an 18% crude protein blend with a lower protein one.”

In hill and upland flocks a shortage of energy and protein supply is frequently more of a problem than overfeeding. Metabolic blood profiling provides an objective measure of an animal’s energy and protein status. It is used by dairy farmers to routinely monitor a herd’s nutritional requirements and can also be of great value to sheep flocks.

## Scanning

Joe says: “Ewes should always be scanned at between 60 and 90 days of gestation, so they can be grouped and managed according to the number of lambs they are carrying. But in addition, in the last three weeks, it’s crucial to determine the energy and protein status of each management group to tailor feeding regimes.”

Russell adds: “Ewes that are in poor condition are more likely to succumb to twin-lamb disease, which is frequently fatal. However, metabolic blood profiling can be carried out for the whole flock for less than the cost of a dead ewe. So it really is worth doing!”

Blood sampling needs to be carried out around three weeks before lambing is due to start. Any earlier than this and ewes are not yet in the high risk period. Any later and it will be too

late to make the required nutritional adjustments. Energy status is determined by measuring the levels of beta-hydroxybutyrate (BHB) in the blood. These increase when the animal is short of energy and is mobilising its body fat reserves.

Joe says: “Ewes showing low energy status need to have their feed ration increased. However, ewes can only consume a maximum of around 2-2.5% of their bodyweight in dry matter. That’s around 1.6-2.0kg DM for an 80kg ewe. So the ration must be of an energy density to enable this.

### Consequences of poor ewe nutrition in last 4-6 weeks of pregnancy in the ewe:

- Twin-lamb disease
- Hypocalcaemia
- Mastitis
- Poor quality colostrum
- Less milk produced
- Fewer lambs reared

### In the lambs:

- Lighter birthweights
- Reduced survival rates
- Hypothermia in newborns
- Water mouth/rattle belly
- Joint ill/navel ill
- Scour
- Pneumonia
- Longer time to finish



Grouping ewes according to body condition score ahead of lambing can help avoid nutritional problems.

“If there is a big variation between ewes in a group a review of the feeding system may be needed. Is there enough trough space? Can the shy feeders (the thin ones) be run in a separate group? In some cases, it may be necessary to feed ewes three times each day instead of two, to ensure they have the appetite to consume the required rations.

“In late pregnancy a shortfall of protein will reduce the ewe’s milk production and this impacts on lamb health and growth too. So a ewe’s protein status is also important and again metabolic blood profiles are invaluable.

“Two measures are used: urea levels indicate short term protein status, whilst albumin levels represent the longer term historic picture. If albumin levels are low but urea level is normal, this indicates the presence of parasites, such as liver fluke or worms. Where urea level is low but albumin is not the remedy is straightforward – simply increase dietary protein intakes by feeding more cake and/or increasing the protein content of the cake.”

### More lambs reared

The consequences of inadequate ewe nutrition follow through into the survival and growth rates of lambs – see panel.

Russell explains: “A ewe’s milkiness is influenced by her energy and protein status and directly impacts on lamb survival rates. Where these are low, not only will her milk yield be low but her colostrum – an essential factor in lamb survival – will also be poor quality. This then predisposes lambs to more neonatal diseases such as joint ill and watery mouth.”

Joe echoes this: “The aim has to be to maximise the number of lambs reared per ewe tugged, so always assess silage quality and body condition score the ewes. Ask your vet about metabolic blood profiling. Ask yourself whether you are feeding the same quality and quantity as last year, and previous years, and whether that’s the right approach to be taking.

“Making informed decisions – from knowing the nutritional status of ewes – allows a more economic use of concentrates, and promotes good lamb viability, maximising the lambs per ewe reared.

Looking ahead to post lambing, Russell says: “Over a 12-month period, breeding ewes will tend to spend three months rearing lambs, four months dry and five months of being pregnant. They need to be managed so their body condition scores can be raised or lowered to the targets – see table – in a gradual and ‘safe’ manner.

“So when the lambs are weaned, ewes should be condition scored again. Thin ewes can then be given extra feed or good grazing so that they can regain condition and be fit again for tugging – this will help increase the potential number of lambs conceived.”



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# Hygiene and Quality Colostrum Critical in Fight Against Joint Ill

By The  
Moredun  
Foundation



**Joint ill is a debilitating and sometimes fatal disease of young lambs. It is caused by bacteria (usually strains of streptococci) and leads to swollen painful joints. Affected lambs have difficulty standing or walking and will be reluctant to feed. The damage to joints can be permanent if not treated promptly.**

Joint ill can be seen in lambs less than a week old, though it is not usually seen until the lambs are two-three weeks old. The bacteria that cause joint ill survive in the environment and it is not fully understood how they enter the lamb's body. It has been suggested however that the bacteria could gain access to the lamb either via the navel or through wounds such as docking or castration, or being accidentally ingested when the lamb suckles ewe's teats that may be dirty.

The bacteria travel to the joints in the lambs legs and infected fluid and pus forms, which leads to hot, swollen and very painful joints. More than one leg can be infected and affected lambs will show significant discomfort. They will spend a lot of time lying, unable to feed and will be weak and ill thrifty as a result.

The disease is often associated with poor hygiene in lambing pens or when lambing outside in inclement weather, although problems can also occur when hygiene is good. Large number of lambs can be affected at any one time, despite good hygiene and colostrum management, and it is not uncommon

## Tackling BVD in cattle

NSA regularly distributes sheep-specific Moredun newsheets with Sheep Farmer magazine, but the first newsheet of 2014 is on BVD and Moredun has agreed to mail it directly to NSA members who request it, as not all our members have cattle. To request the BVD newsheet or discuss membership of Moredun, please contact the Moredun Communications Team on 01314 455111. More information at [www.moredun.org.uk](http://www.moredun.org.uk).



*The supply of good quality colostrum in early life is vital to help protect the lamb from the bacteria that cause joint ill.*

for joint ill to reoccur on the same farm year after year. It is vital that lambs receive good levels of quality colostrum, particularly in the first twelve hours of life, in order protect themselves from the bacteria that cause joint ill and other environmental pathogens.

It can be hard to find the affected joints in the early stages until the joint swelling becomes obvious. Feel and compare the same joints in both legs of lambs where you suspect joint ill. Some lambs may also have swollen, infected navels and/or liver abscesses while others may have symptoms of pneumonia or meningitis.

It is important to treat affected lambs as quickly as possible to reduce the risk of permanent damage to the joints. Treatment with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs can have some success, however joint ill is best prevented though good hygiene and colostrum management. Therefore:

- Try to lamb in a clean environment with plenty of fresh bedding and clean dry pens.
- Thoroughly clean and disinfect lambing pens or lambing areas between lambings.
- Disinfect navels to prevent environmental bacteria infecting the lamb. Strong iodine should be applied to the whole of the navel cord immediately after birth to dry it up. Navels should be checked every 24

hours and more iodine applied if the navel is not dry.

- Make sure lambs receive sufficient colostrum as soon as they are born. Ideally lambs should receive 250ml/kg bodyweight of good quality ewe colostrum in the first 24 hours of life.

At every lambing there will be ewes that cannot produce enough colostrum for her lambs, or too many lambs, so it is essential to have a readily available store of colostrum or substitutes.

Possible colostrum substitutes include:-

- Surplus ewe colostrum – always the best and cheapest option. Farmers just need to find time to milk out ewes with surplus colostrum supply. Any not needed immediately can be frozen and thawed at a later date.
- Commercial powdered colostrums – readily available and convenient to use (just needs mixing) but can be expensive.
- Goat colostrum – goat colostrum is similar to sheep colostrum and can also be frozen until needed. There are some diseases that spread from goats to sheep however so try to ensure the health of the goats you source any colostrum from.
- Cow colostrum - Readily available but contains less energy than ewe colostrum so larger volumes must be used. Can cause anaemia in some lambs, but mixing cow colostrum from different cows will reduce this risk.

# Smarter Disease Surveillance?

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

**With AHVLA centres at Langford (Somerset), Luddington (Lincolnshire), Newcastle (Tyne and Wear), Preston (Lancashire), Truro (Cornwall) and Sutton Bonington (Nottinghamshire) ceasing to provide disease surveillance work during 2014, and Winchester (Hampshire) stopping in 2015, there has been much concern over recent months about the future of disease surveillance in England and Wales.**

The recent arrival of Schmallenberg and the ever-present FMD threat highlight how vital effective surveillance is to the sheep sector. There is no doubt that future surveillance being undertaken only at AHVLA Bury St Edmunds (Suffolk), Carmarthen (Carmarthenshire), Penrith (Cumbria), Shrewsbury (Shropshire), Starcross (Devon) and Thirsk (North Yorkshire), plus Lasswade (Edinburgh) as a poultry surveillance centre, is a huge reduction in 'manpower', however the shakeup at AHVLA is aiming to better use the expertise and resources of private vets, universities and the livestock industry – thinking smarter rather than just cutting services.

When it became clear budgets were being cut, suggestions of how to make the current system more cost effective were sought in a public consultation that received more than 400 responses, including from NSA. An independent Surveillance Advisory Group assessed these and recommended that, instead of Government staff carrying out post-mortems, they should instead focus on gathering and assessing information from places that are already carrying out PMs, such as private vets and knacker



*A network of vets offering post-mortems is being developed in lieu of closing AVHLA labs in England and Wales. yards.*

Simon Hall, AHVLA Veterinary Director, says: "Better co-ordination and exploitation of these alternative sources of intelligence will enable a more comprehensive threat picture to be drawn than is presently the case. Livestock keepers and their vets are primarily interested in achieving a diagnosis that allows better management on the farm and better animal welfare. There will be continued provision of an AHVLA diagnostic support service to private vets and their farming clients."

The AHVLA labs ceasing to carrying out surveillance and not a field services centre will close, meaning vets and farmers will be disadvantaged by the loss of good staff members they are familiar with dealing with, but with budget cuts making lab closures inevitable, this change in focus appears to be a logical alternative.

In addition AHVLA has promised to: develop species-specific expertise; establish a network of non-AHVLA post-mortem providers and, while this is being done, provide a carcass collection service for three years in areas where facilities have been closed; ensure availability of vet training; and work with the fallen stock industry to encourage

## What about Scotland?

The equivalent assessment of disease surveillance in Scotland saw recommendations made in the Kinnaird Report in November 2011 – but we have heard little about it since. This is an area of frustration that Professor Julie Fitzpatrick, Moredun Research Institute Director, raised at Moredun's annual press briefing just before Christmas. Prof Fitzpatrick said a centralised diagnosis and surveillance centre made a lot of sense, and there was no point in building something new when Moredun already had all the facilities needed and could offer efficiencies by using them in collaboration with partners for the benefit of all Scottish farmers. We wait to see if her public criticism of the lack of progress will see announcements made in early 2014.

expansion of basic, local services.

This final point about utilising information from fallen stock better is something NSA particularly supported during the consultation period, and we also hope the move towards an increased emphasis on private vets will see more PMs carried out and better price competitiveness. For example, we hear XLVets are working with the National Fallen Stock Company to develop a service at just £25 per ewe - and while Defra uses language like 'shared responsibility', if it sees more farmers order PMs then it's good news for both disease surveillance (new and re-emerging disease) and endemic disease control on farms.

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# Falling World Production Helps Lift Wool Prices

By British Wool Marketing Board



**Wool prices are on the up again, according to British Wool Marketing Board Chairman Malcolm Corbett, and it is partly due to a fall in world production, with New Zealand recording its lowest clip for 50 years in 2012.**

Speaking at the BWMB annual conference in Derry-Londonderry, Mr Corbett said the wool market was much more buoyant than it had been 12 months ago and, with supply easing across the globe and demand once again on the up, the outlook was positive.

## Volatile market

“But the wool market is a volatile one so we can make no assumptions about future prices or demand,” he said. “Current demand levels are strong and follow on from strong demand at the end of the last selling season, which saw some sales cancelled due to a lack of wool.”

As also speaking at the conference, BWMB Chief Executive Ian Hartley said the world supply of wool had fallen just as demand was once again starting to lift, with the work of the Campaign for

Wool in 20 countries worldwide starting to bear fruit.

“While it is difficult to relate wool prices directly to Campaign for Wool, what is clear is that the ongoing activities and profile generated through its work, particularly the association with the Prince of Wales, is invaluable.”

Mr Hartley said increasing volatility in the wool market was something which had emerged in the last five years since prices started on an upward trend.

He says: “If you look back to the 2008/09 selling season the difference between the highest and lowest indicator price at BWMB auctions for the season was just 9p/kg. Fast forward to 2010/11 and the differential was 73p/kg, a difference of 62% on the lowest indicator price. Since the end of the last season, the indicator has risen by 30p/kg.”

Mr Hartley said the overall picture was healthy and strong clearance rates of up to 100% in early season sales had resulted in sale averages well ahead of the same point 12 months earlier.

“The cumulative average to the end of November was 150p/kg compared to 116p/kg seen at the same time in 2012. On top of this BWMB has sold some 49% of the total 2013 clip by the end of November, compared to 31% of

the 2012 clip sold by the same point that year.

“This bodes well for increased producer payments for the 2013 clip, with payments likely to be significantly ahead of those published in the Price Schedule earlier in the year,” he added.

## Wool positivity

Looking ahead to 2014 Mr Hartley said he believed there were many reasons to remain positive, with worldwide wool production and supply low for two consecutive seasons and likely to remain so. “Additionally, Chinese economic growth is stabilising at 7-8% and there is a trend across the world towards natural fibres and wool. Increasingly consumer confidence is returning in a number of economies too and wool is benefitting from active global promotion through Campaign for Wool.

“There aren’t some factors which will hamper trade, notably slow growth in Europe and wool’s weak price competitiveness. Overall though I believe the price falls of 2012 were an over-correction following very high prices in 2011. Current prices are more sustainable and should deliver a minimum average price of £1/kg for producers.”



Pictured at the BWMB annual conference (l-r): Edward Adamson (NSA Northern Irish Region), Malcolm Corbett (BWMB), Harry Sinclair (Ulster Farmers Union), James Murphy (Irish Farmers’ Association) and Sean Fitzpatrick (Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association). Photo by Kevin McAuley.

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# On My Farm - The Next Generation

*Sheep Farmer is proud to present a new feature for 2014, in which we meet a different young person active in the industry in each edition of the magazine. We kick off the new series with*

*Marie Prebble (25), who runs a tenanted farm near Dover, Kent, with her parents. Marie sits on the NSA South East Committee and won first place in the Young Shepherd of the Year competition at NSA Eastern Region's Youthful Shepherd event in June 2013.*



**Having spent the day helping pregnancy scan ewes on a blustery hillside overlooking the Romney Marsh, it is a pleasure to be sat by my fire looking forward to another hopefully successful year on my parents Ministry of Defence tenancy in Kent.**

Thinking back to last winter a feeling of déjà vu confronts me as I recall the horrendously wet winter weather and the immensely cold, challenging spring we all faced. I spent three weeks in early February lambing a local Romney flock and, while in Kent we were spared the worst, I had plenty to keep me occupied working on my own through the long nights. We were full to capacity with very poor weather conditions making turning out ewes and lambs a challenge.

They say things can only get better, as well things did, and once the grass grew and the sun shone lambs performed well and at home I was pleased to finish a lot of my lambs off grass and clover alone. Having said that, at market it was the better fleshed lambs finished with hard feed that attracted premium prices, as remained the trend throughout the selling season, highlighting to me



Marie is looking forward to her third season shearing this summer.

the importance of accurate costings to achieve the best returns possible.

As a new entrant to the industry keen to learn from more experienced producers, particularly during the shearing season when I see a lot of different sheep systems, I am certain it is those farmers with attention to detail on their flock husbandry and health, efficiency of handling, knowledge of grassland management and feeding, and accurate costings who perform better.

Last summer's weather was in our favour for shearing, with my second season as the third leg of a two-stand gang improving my technique no end. I always enjoy the challenge of shearing and the accompanying anecdotes that entertain even the most exhausted shepherd at the end of a season in the sun. With the sunshine came haymaking at home and a successful few weeks for my father and I, with the majority baled and in the barns without rain. The drought was felt on the sheep side particularly with a lot of cull ewes sold in plain condition at depressed prices due to shortage of forward grazing.

## Replacements

Once ewes were sorted at home and the majority of lambs sold I was ready to purchase stock for the coming breeding season. I bought two mobs of Romney ewe tegs off farm and another smaller lot from Ashford market on Romney day in early October. These have been put to Lleyn rams to increase my flock of Kent Halfbreds at home and improve the maternal line. Using performance information recorded last year, I put a terminal flock to Texel tups, ensuring I have plenty of lambs to sell fat next year both to Ashford and through direct sales.

The rams went in at the end of October so we will be scanning at home in mid-January. I am hoping for similar results to the 163% average we scanned last year. Of course it is the all-important



Marie Prebble

number of lambs weaned with an increasing focus on kg lamb produced per hectare that is crucial to profitable sheep production. I will continue to record everything I can, looking to expand my flock within the next 10 years to a number sustainable on our current permanent pasture and rented grazing arrangements locally.

## Next Generation

Having been fortunate enough to speak at a NSA Next Generation event in Wiltshire this autumn attended by over 60 new entrants to the sheep sector I am confident the industry is in good hands, provided innovative approaches to grazing and finance arrangements are considered, perhaps looking more closely at share farming to allow some security, progression and returns of investment for new entrants.

Sheep continue to provide an opportunity for entry into a competitive industry and with the launch of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group this year I hope to see increased support for the many committed, skilled and ambitious new entrants I have met over the past year. I hope 2014 is a successful one for everyone working in the industry.



Romney and Kent Halfbred ewes form the backbone of the flock at Boyington Court Farm.



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<sup>1</sup> Agneessens et al. Build up of immunity after Diczazuril treatment in calves. Poster at World Buiatrics Congress, France October 2006

<sup>2</sup> Cieslicki M, Diczazuril (Vecoxan<sup>®</sup>), ein neues produkt zur metaphylaxe und therapie der kokzidiose des schafes, Tierärzt Prax 2001; 29(G): 73-77

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