

Sheep Farmer

DECEMBER/JANUARY 2014/2015



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

**SPECIAL FEATURE ON
THE UK DOMESTIC LAMB
MARKET**

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Front Cover

The picture on the front page is of Scottish Blackface ewes running with the tup in the Glens of Antrim, Northern Ireland. The ewes are part of a newly established share farming arrangement between Samuel Wharry, an NSA Director Trustee, and James Davison, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador. Don't miss the February/March edition of Sheep Farmer to learn more about this new venture.



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Challenges to overcome due to market and climate volatility

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Wind the clock back 12 months and we were not in a very pretty place. Lamb prices were low and had dropped by some 30% on the back of low-priced New Zealand lamb supplies and, even worse, shelf promotions on NZ but not UK product. Our export conditions were not great and the phones in the NSA office were hot with many members asking what could be done.

Think back even further and I suggest we would see the cause of the pain was the poor weather that stretched back over the previous 18 months culminating in low lamb numbers and high losses (both directly and indirectly, through poor nutrition and liver fluke in particular).

Fast forward to where we are now and, for the autumn months, the SQQ shows lamb prices have been even lower than 2013, although improving now the



relates to volatility in the marketplace, affected by global markets and turbulent economies, sheep farmers (more than most) are also massively affected by volatile weather conditions. Market volatility has always been with us, but there is no doubt global markets make it more difficult than it used to be to influence prices and to control many of our costs. Similarly with the weather, whether you are a believer in climate change being accelerated by man's activities or not, there seems to be few years or months go by without extreme weather records being broken.

Changing climate

On the ground we can see the changes even in our short life spans, with sheep parasites popping up in places they would not formerly have been seen, and changes in bird and insect activity (often blamed on farming without considering the impact of climate change).

When I started my farming career it was possible to tighten the purse strings when times were tough. But things have certainly changed in this department and farmers, as with most others in society, are tied into increasingly expensive and committed expenditure.

The question remains – what can we do to make things better? While increased costs are with us, there are always things farmers can do to try to improve margins. To a large extent it's about increasing productivity and reducing losses, although this has to be within the context of understanding cost and reward implications. Climate, topography, location and skills mean many sheep farmers are limited in terms of changing their sheep systems, but there are others who can, even though it's difficult to step away from global market influences.

Managing volatility

I struggle to accept there is nothing we can do to guard against market or climatic volatility and while the words 'It's not the strongest of the species that survives nor the most intelligent, it is the one that is most responsive to change' were not actually those of Charles Darwin, they do make a lot of sense.

It is that time of year again when I would like to wish all readers a good Christmas – but even more I wish you a very good 2105 and hope it brings similarly favourable weather conditions that we have enjoyed in the year to date.

seasonal volumes have worked their way through. The year on an average basis has been good, with returns and demand strong up until early autumn. Since then, and hopefully a sound investment, store prices have shown optimism with cull ewe prices enabling an investment in strong value replacement stock.

Export conditions

However, looking at averages is one thing, dealing with low prices when you are one of those who have few alternatives is another. The export conditions haven't been any better this autumn than last and while we have continued to see NZ lamb on our shelves pretty much all year round, at least the pricing and promotions have been less aggressive (arguably for the long term benefit of NZ farmers too). Lamb prices over the last few months may have been lower than 2013 but interestingly our phone lines have been quieter on this subject and the mood amongst sheep farmers is far more upbeat – surely due to the fact weather conditions from tugging last year and throughout the spring and summer have been almost as good as you could get and losses and costs have been kept low.

It's no wonder all the talk is about volatility, and although most of the debate

Contacting NSA

Phil and the team at NSA are always available to members and interested to hear opinions, concerns and areas of interest. Call NSA Head Office (Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm) on 01684 892661 or direct an email to one of the addresses below.

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News Update

Delay to Welsh identification rules

As this edition of Sheep Farmer went to press the Welsh Government announced EID Cymru would not go live on the intended date of 1st January 2015. The sheep movements database has been delayed until November 2015 for livestock markets and abattoirs and January 2016 for farmers. This means non-EID slaughter tags will still be permitted for use in Wales until 1st January 2016, despite no longer being allowed in England for lambs born after 1st January 2015. NSA is disappointed that two different systems will operate in England and Wales and urges Welsh farmers to be more careful than ever when deciding which tags to use in store and finished lambs, in order to maximise selling options.

Movement reporting changes **for the whole of the UK** also come in on 1st January 2015, with ewes from the historic flock (those tagged before 2010) having to be individually listed on a movement record unless they are moving direct to slaughter. Retagging with EID tags may be of benefit in some situations to maximise selling options.

Regular updates and reminders about tagging rules are provided in the NSA Weekly Email Update. If you do not currently receive this useful newsletter send your email address to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk to be added to the database.

More help online

The members-only area of the website has been updated with more technical information. The factsheets available on animal transport legislation have been expanded with the addition of assistance on understanding the lorry CPC rules. And a collection of guides to the online world has been started with a factsheet on downing apps for smart phones.

Changes to farm assurance

Members of Quality Meat Scotland's cattle and sheep assurance scheme should have now received the updated standards. QMS says the document sent to scheme members should be more user-friendly and practical than previously, and clearly explain the new requirements relating to health planning (recommended annual vet visit and vet assessment of flock health plan) and bulk organic fertilisers (formerly referred to as recycled waste products).

In England Red Tractor introduced changes to its standards from 1st October to encourage a similar review of the health and performance of flocks. All assured members should have received a template they can use, but Red Tractor has asked NSA to stress to members that they can use their own system instead if preferred, as long as it includes a documented review of treatments and mortalities, and identifies issues to target.

Business efficiency workshops

There are still half a dozen Business Efficiency Training workshops set to run over the next few months in England, so don't miss your chance to sign up. The events are run by NSA and Farming4Prophet to look at enterprise costings and the performance indicators essential to the long-term profitability of a successful sheep unit. The sessions are informal, friendly and interactive, and funding has been obtained to offer them at £58+VAT per person. Download a booking form at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or call NSA Head Office.

Young shepherd world finals

There was plenty of cause for celebration among the UK competitors at the 2014 World Young Shepherds Challenge, which was held in France at the start of October. A win in the over-21 individual contest for Sam Bullingham from Okehampton, Devon, put England top of the team leader board, while all four home nations were placed in the top seven of the 16 competing countries. Northern Ireland took second, Scotland seventh, and Rhydian Thomas helped Wales to fourth place by securing second in the individual over-21 section.



Left to right: Team Wales (Guto Roberts and Rhydian Thomas); Team Scotland (David McClean and Euan Orr); Team England (Sam Bullingham and Richard Carter); and Team Northern Ireland (Adam Crockett and Jonathan McKelvey).

All eight UK contestants were selected through regional rounds of the NSA Young Shepherd of the Year competition, held at NSA events over the past two years, and through the national final at NSA Sheep 2014 in July.

NSA Young Shepherd of the Year Competition national final organiser Helen Davies says: "The UK competitors at the World Young Shepherds Challenge did brilliantly, and it just goes to show the strength of talent we have coming into sheep farming across the UK. Our sincere thanks go to Eblex for getting the competitors to France and supporting them while there, and also Rappa and NSA regional committees for sponsorship."

World champion Sam Bullingham says: "I wasn't expecting to win, so I'm really pleased! It was a great experience and the people there who had qualified through the NSA Young Shepherd of the Year Competition were probably the best prepared."

NSA Lambing List still open

It is not too late to get your name on the NSA Lambing List if you are looking for assistance this coming lambing time. A huge number of students have already used the list to find a work experience placement so add your details now at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list. If you do not have access to the internet please call NSA Head Office on 01684 892661.

NSA ambassadors applications open

Anyone aged 18-35 looking to apply to be an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2015 only has until Friday 12th December to submit an application form. Successful applicants will benefit from five delivery sessions through the year providing personal development, business management and sheep farming skills. *More information on page 11.*



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Regional Reports

Central

By Alastair Sneddon, Committee Member and auctioneer

It has been a somewhat uncertain period for the sheep trade with finished prices very fragile for much of the summer and autumn and casting a cold wind of caution over the store lamb and breeding sheep sales. But happily the ever optimistic sheep farmers have not allowed a few weeks of lacklustre finished prices to entirely sap their enthusiasm and on the whole the trade has been reasonably buoyant.

But looking across the pens at the thousands of lambs offered for sale has made me wonder who eats all this meat? A similar thought prompted me to write to the Farmers Guardian and Farmers Weekly earlier in the year, suggesting farmers are often too focused on the fine detail of what they are producing and somewhat dismissive of the ultimate consumer, without whom we would be all out of a job. This was echoed at the recent Eblex conference, where a recurring theme was to look after your customers (or somebody else will).

Here are some extracts from my letter published by the agricultural press: "I am constantly amazed by the lack of connection between the exhibitors at agricultural shows and the concept that one day they are hoping someone will spend their hard earned money on a piece of British meat. One cannot but admire the dedication of the committed showman, the skill of the judges and the army of volunteers without whom these shows would not take place. However, exhibitors are avidly focused on the job in hand and judges are intent on determining the colour of the tear ducts, or the fact there are brown hairs on the legs, not features which appear on many carcasses.

"Surely, what is really important is that consumers are informed about the bigger picture – that our landscape has been sculpted and honed by generations of grazing livestock, and farmers can only be expected to maintain such vistas if it is economically viable to do so.

"Perhaps at the agricultural shows next year we might remind onlookers if they want the countryside to remain its glorious self, the best thing they can do is buy top quality British meat as often as possible – 'eat lamb and save the British countryside'. Just an extra half kilo of average consumption would transform the industry and the market."

Don't forget the NSA Central Region Winter Fair on Thursday 29th January 2015. Full preview on page 7.

Cymru/Wales

By Helen Davies, Development Officer
There have been prizes galore for NSA Cymru/Wales members this autumn and our congratulations go to Rhydian Thomas and Guto Roberts, who represented Wales in the World Young Shepherd Competition in France and came 2nd overall and 4th in the under 21 section respectively. Catherine Nakielny was runner up in the Sheep Innovator of the Year category of the British Farming Awards, ran by Farmers Guardian (*pictured below*). Dafydd Jones, Machynlleth, won the Wales Grassland Management 2014 award and Dr Dai Morris, St Clears, Carmarthen, was presented with the John Gittins award.



NSA Cymru/Wales again sponsored the hill and native breed section at the Welsh Winter Fair in early December, and had a stand at the event where members old and new were welcomed.

By the time you read this, Deputy Minister Rebecca Evans will have announced the outcome of the consultation on EID tags and the database, which is likely to lead to a two-tier marketing system for the beginning of 2015 with different rules on either side of the border. NSA Cymru/Wales therefore encourages members to think hard about which eartags they use in lambs next year, and to also remember tagging of the historic flock changes in January 2015 too. The annual inventory will arrive in the Christmas mail so please complete this by the due date.

NSA Cymru/Wales takes this opportunity to wish you well for the forthcoming festive season and for 2015. We look forward to seeing you at our AGM in February (*details below*) and will provide a copy of the agenda, minutes and details of speakers in the February/March issue of Sheep Farmer and on the website at

www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

If you have not already done so, please put Tuesday 19th May in your diary too, to visit NSA Welsh Sheep at Glanmiheli and Drefor, Kerry, Newtown, Powys. Plans for the event are well under way and exhibitors or visitors can contact me for more information.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Generation Meeting of the National Sheep Association Cymru/Wales Region will be held at Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY, 2pm on Thursday 19th February 2015. Business will include: re-approval of Chairman and Treasurer; election of Vice Chairman; approval of nomination of one Regional Trustee Director; election of new committee members and endorsement of current members; Chairman's report; and Treasurer's report relating to the region's finances.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

On 22nd October we held our regional AGM, at which the officers for the region were re-appointed. Andrew Foulds continues as Chairman and Trustee Director, with Dan Phipps as Vice Chairman. John Maxwell stood down as English Committee Representative due to ill health and we all wish him a quick improvement. Taking his place was Philip Sabin, who will join Andrew and Dan as an Eastern Region rep.

The finances of the region are in good stead, because of the two ram sales held at Rugby and Melton Mowbray and the Winter Fair held in January this year, again at Melton Mowbray.

Our AGM was followed by a full and fascinating talk by Phil Stocker on NSA, his work and his recent trip to China. This was followed by an equally interesting and informative talk on EID and electronic transfer of data and how the new systems available can aid our management and decision making processes, provided by Angus Darling of StockTrace, who kindly helped sponsor the evening.

We are planning a second NSA Youthful Shepherds Event at Darley, Newmarket, Suffolk, by kind permission of Darley Stud Management. This will take place on Saturday 6th June 2015 – so a date for your diaries. Everyone who attended the first event held in 2013 found it beneficial and very enjoyable. We will also hold an NSA Young Shepherd of the Year qualifier at the event.

Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman

I have been lucky enough to attend some of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme delivery sessions in the last couple months. One

was at Fernhill Farm and Yeo Valley Farm in Somerset, and the other was taking part in delivering a presentation at the Next Generation conference held in Cirencester in November (see pages 10-11).

It has been very refreshing to see how this year's ambassadors have embraced the programme and developed over the year. It was also great to see so many people attend the Next Generation conference.

The ambassador project is a great opportunity for the next generation to improve their knowledge base and skills and meet like-minded young sheep farmers from around the UK. I would encourage anyone from the Marches Region who is interested in the project to apply to be a part of it and look forward to reading your applications and beginning the selection process for next year's ambassadors.

The day after the Next Generation conference, NSA Marches Region held its eighth AGM, at the Sheep Centre in Malvern. Angela Weston stood down as Treasurer/Secretary and Dy Webb has replaced her. I would like to thank Angela for all her hard work over the years and congratulate Dy on her new appointment. A full report of the AGM can be found on the website.

The AGM was followed by a sheep night where Chris Lloyd of Eblex gave a very interesting presentation on the opening market opportunities in China after his recent trip to the country with Phil Stocker. Chris was followed by Ian Cairnes from the Farm Advice Service with his presentation on the dos and don'ts when it comes to sheep movement records and cross compliance.

This subject stimulated much discussion on what was a legal requirement and what wasn't and how the rules would change come 1st January. One of the conclusions from the discussion was that keeping correct records after 1st January will certainly be easier with an EID reader, as more individual tags will need to be recorded.

We intend to hold meetings in other parts of the region in January so keep an eye on the website for an event near you.

Northern

By Julie Sedgewick, Manager

We are looking forward to our AGM in February (details below) and also an open meeting to follow at 8pm.

Speakers will be confirmed with an insert in the next edition of Sheep Farmer magazine, rather than the region posting out to all members separately – so look out for that! If you wish to receive a reminder of the AGM, please ensure NSA Head Office has your email address.

NSA North Sheep 2015 is due to be held on Wednesday 3rd June at Millstone

Moor Farm, Cockermouth, Cumbria. See regular updates at www.northsheep.org.uk and please note that members will be admitted free of charge in 2015.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association Northern Region will be held at The Hired Lad, Penrith Mart, Penrith, CA11 0DN, 7.30pm on Wednesday 25th February 2015. Business will include: election of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer; re-approval of Regional Trustee Director; election of new committee members and endorsement of current members; Chairman's report; and Treasurers report relating to the region's finances.

Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer
Finally winter has arrived but we shouldn't complain – winter in winter is fine, after the best autumn in years.

Ewes are in great shape and reports from around the country would suggest lambing next spring should be over in a short time. Lamb prices have been the lowest for several years and are now slowly rising. If the price drops the farmer received had been reflected in the retail price it may have encouraged more consumption, but unfortunately those between the farmer and the fork took the opportunity to return a healthier profit.



Our AGM took place in November with all office bearers being re-elected and a couple of new young faces brought onto the committee. Our sheep conference after the AGM (speakers and NSA office holders pictured) proved very interesting with good speakers and left those



attending with plenty to think about.

In 2011 NSA NI Region brought Simon Thorp from the Heather Trust over the water to speak at several farmers meetings on hill and heather management, which were well received. It is encouraging to see that the original NSA initiative has been seen as worthwhile, with CAFRE and DARD recently having Simon back to speak at farmers meetings again. Hopefully the powers that be will value NSA opinions in the future and at times of decision making.

Probably the other devolved regions are having the same problems as NI regarding CAP budgets and financing all that needs to be done, but we find it very frustrating to be kept in a state of suspense when we had been promised answers and action regarding our Rural Development Programme and Going for Growth Strategy. Maybe as you read this we will know more!

DARD are warning those farmers wishing to become 'active' to claim SFP that they will be under close scrutiny and any dubious activity will be investigated thoroughly. This should be a warning that it may well be best to leave the farming to the legitimate farmers.

Scotland

By George Milne, Development Officer
We look forward to welcoming members to our Scottish Region AGM on Friday 9th January in Edinburgh (details below) at 4pm, followed by our annual dinner at 7pm. Please do book a place and come along.

As we near the middle of November it is particularly encouraging to see prime lamb prices on the increase. Let's hope this trade is maintained up until Christmas and into next year. Store lambs have been in good demand over the store sale period, and many finishers will need the increase in price to receive a reasonable margin on them. Confidence has remained high over the trading period for breeding stock with gimmers and ewe lambs fetching a strong demand and a solid trade.

It is now a case for Scottish farmers to get their heads around the new CAP reform rules and make sure we can all adapt to the system to allow us to have a strong sheep industry going forward. All farmers should be looking carefully at the regions they have been allocated by the Scottish Government and make sure their land is in the correct category (either region 1, 2 or 3).

Meetings continue on other matters, and the question of linked holdings has been discussed in detail, leaving no doubt that continuing with the present system will come under pressure. This will mainly affect cattle movements (sheep will continue to be allowed to move under the current five-mile rule) but it is still a concern, as any changes may well be

connected to standstill periods.

Once again we welcome Alyn Smith MEP bringing EID back to the discussion table in Brussels, and I look forward to a meeting later this year with Mr Hogan, which Alyn intends to organise. It still remains a very important factor that sheep should only be required to be double tagged and EID tagged when they leave the holding of birth.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association Scottish Region will be held at Hotel Novotel, Edinburgh Park, 15 Lochside Avenue, Edinburgh, EH12 9DJ (use EH11 4DG for sat nav) at 4pm on Friday 9th January 2015. Business will include: election of Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer; approval of nomination of one Regional Trustee Director; endorsement of current committee members; Chairman's report; and Treasurer's report relating to the region's finances.

South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

In September there were two 'Rams Fit for Purpose' meetings held jointly with Eblex, with thanks to Nerys Wright who came to our rescue when numbers of NSA members wishing to attend were looking 'thin'.

Nerys was unable to come to the Plumpton meeting, so Sion Parry, breeding consultant from Signet, explained how using EBVs was useful in selecting rams for genetic improvement. The following day at Hadlow, Nerys described a research project that had done a survey on rams and found an alarming number of faults. Catherine Nakielney spoke at both meetings and demonstrated how to do an MOT on rams, and emphasised that overfeeding of rams greatly affects their performance and longevity. We hope to repeat these meetings next year, further west in our region.



In late November NSA South East Region attended the South East Primestock Winter Fair at Ardingly, West Sussex, where we had sponsored the wool-on-the-hoof competitions. It was very encouraging to see so many young handlers competing and our congratulations go to the overall winner, 10-year-old Sam Tilley (pictured). There were a total of 40 youngsters competing in classes on the day, with some coming from three school YFC clubs, and we should be filled with confidence on finding so many keen future sheep farmers/shepherds in our area.

South West

By Bryan Griffiths, Chairman

We are delighted to announce that next summer's NSA Sheep South West event will be held on Tuesday 16th June at North Tawton, by kind invitation of E.W. Quick and Sons of Loosebeare. Their reputation as one of the country's top stock breeders will certainly prove a draw to farmers.

South West Region certainly offers a range of farming conditions. Whether it be the drought prone coastal sand, the impermeable 'culm measures' or the bleak high moors, each farm has its own set of challenges. Those who attended our farm walk on the Somerset Levels were treated to a fascinating insight into farming at or below the natural water level. As our host Nelly Gillard led us around his farm it soon became clear that tipping weirs, drainage rates and dredgers were all part of the daily vocabulary. He casually mentioned the modern grain store he had recently dismantled as it had begun to sink into the bottomless soil!

The arrival of the refreshed Red Tractor regulations has prompted much debate. I have used NSA channels to highlight the need to keep these regulations constructive, attractive and appropriate.

We have scheduled our AGM for Wednesday 18th Feb 2015 (details below) and the meeting will be followed by short presentations by World Champion Young Shepherd Sam Bullingham on his progress through the competition, and by NSA's Phil Stocker on his recent fact-finding trip to China.

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association South West Region will be held at Fingle Glen Golf Hotel, Tedburn St Mary, Exeter, Devon, EX6 6AF, 7.30pm on Wednesday 18th February 2015. Business will include: re-approval of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Treasurer and Regional Trustee Director; election of new committee members and endorsement of current members; Chairman's report; and Treasurer's report relating to the region's finances.

Action-packed day planned for NSA Central Region Winter 2015

'Helping sheep farmers move forward' will be the theme for the third biennial NSA Central Region Winter Fair. The potential for progress will be highlighted by all aspects of the event, where technical and market advancements will both be in the spotlight and the next generation of producers will have a chance to shine.

Expert speakers are lined up to deliver an exciting seminar programme, covering some of the core issues current in sheep farming. Defra's Terry Gurnhill, Richard Webber of Shearwell Data and former British Wool Marketing Board Chairman and sheep farmer Frank Langrish will make up a panel to discuss the topic 'Making statutory recording and reporting easier'. This will be your chance to put forward any questions you may have on the recording and reporting system and join in a constructive discussion of the options going forward.

Domestic market

There has been a lot of focus recently on the global market and the development of new export destinations, but Nicola Dodd of Eblex will draw attention back to the domestic market with her seminar entitled 'The modern consumer's view of lamb: who's eating it and who's not?'. This will review the place of lamb in the domestic market and investigate the possibilities for promoting lamb to new consumers.

Vet Caroline Dawson of Elanco (formerly Novartis Animal Health) will give a seminar on understanding blow-fly control products. After recent warm, wet summers, in which vast numbers of sheep farmers reported instance of flystrike, this seminar will provide strategies for protecting sheep in the coming season.

Competition schedule

There will be plenty to see outside the seminar area too, with a range of indoor and outdoor trade and breed society stands and a packed competition schedule. The search for the next NSA Young Shepherd of the Year will kick off at the event with the first regional qualifier for the national final at NSA Sheep Event 2016. The contestants, aged 26 and under, will show off practical shepherding skills including lamb sorting, ATV handling, belly clipping and vaccination and dosing. Eight teams of four will also go head to head in the Junior Shepherd Competition for 14-16 year olds, kindly organised by Derbyshire Agricultural and Rural Training.

As well as putting the next generation through their shepherding paces, the event will also shine a light on creativity in the sheep industry. A photography competition with the theme



NSA Central Regional Winter Fair 2015 promises to build on the success of the event in 2013, which was enjoyed by all who attended.

NSA Central Region Winter Fair

- Thursday 29th January 2015.
- 10am-4.30pm
- Bakewell Agricultural Centre, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1AH.
- FREE entry for NSA members on production of a current valid membership card (one free entry per membership card). Agricultural students, international visitors and under 16s also go free. £5 entry for adult non-members.

'Sheep and the Environment' is open to 16 and unders, with the winning photograph to be featured in Sheep Farmer magazine. The British Wool Marketing Board is sponsoring a Schools Wool Challenge, which will see school pupils produce exhibits showcasing wool with a prize pot of £200 up for grabs. The entries for both competitions will be on display for visitors to enjoy on the day.

NSA Central Region Chairman Bob Payne says: "Our third NSA Central Region Winter Fair promises to be just as relevant and informative as the first two. An interesting programme of seminars will give valuable up-to-the-minute information for all sheep farmers, while we are also building our emphasis on the next generation of sheep farmers by offering four competitions for young people this year. All in all it will be a great event – whatever you do, don't miss it!"

Watch the NSA Central Region Winter Fair web page for more information; find it at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.



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Joined up thinking required in push for improved flock health

The joint responsibility of the whole industry to protect the 'lamb brand' came through very strongly at the Sheep Health and Welfare Conference, held in late November in Staffordshire.

Alick Simmonds, Deputy Chief Veterinary Officer, said all livestock farmers should have high standards to protect the image of a product that so many consumers enjoyed eating. Defra was playing its part by creating a new disease surveillance system that would hopefully provide better representation of the sheep sector, but it was up to producers to use it and ask for more post mortems and health investigations, to boost their own businesses and feed into a central hub of disease information.

"This is going to require mutual trust, so there's a bit of work to be done on both sides. Unless the information and data and intelligence get shared there is no incentive there," said Mr Simmonds.

Michael Barker, who runs 1,000 Swaledale ewes in North Yorkshire, picked up on fragmentation in the industry, calling for more joined up thinking between farmers, vets and Government agencies.

"We all need to work together and a two-way flow of information is extremely important. Our local knackerman has a resident vet at his premises, so if we want a post mortem done it's just a matter of a quick phone call. It's tremendously helpful and it's a partnership."

Dom Naylor, farm manager for Lilburn Estates in Northumberland, built on this idea of partnership by adding the importance of being open with neighbours as well, and also attending meetings and events, locally, regionally and nationally, to share and pick up information.

"We are in the business of making money and if you don't keep your flock secure or know what diseases are on your farm it will erode your profit. Current

Financially incentivising on-farm progress

Regular readers will know NSA has encouraged the use of Rural Development Programme funds to financially incentivise flock health, including closer relationships with vet advisors and contributing to disease surveillance.

This concept was discussed at the Sheep Health and Welfare Conference, which key representatives from Defra attended to hear more about how farmers wanted funding to be made available.

The Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG), who organised the conference, and of which NSA is a member, had highlighted sheep scab as a priority for any funding programmes, and while some excellent speakers and informed

margins are far too tight to have any additional cost of disease," Dom said, including labour as part of this. "Too many of us are guilty of not thinking time is money, but it is."

Reputation was also a big motivator for Dom, for the family who owned the estate, for the ability of the business to sell breeding stock, and for the employed staff who wanted to build a career in the sheep sector and take a good name with them to the next job.

"When you go to buy stock you have to be embarrassing and have to get personal," he said, encouraging everyone to quiz vendors about health status.

Robert Tucker, who buys in Mules for his sheep enterprise in Devon, said it was important in buy stock well in advance to allow time for quarantining. He purchases ewe lambs and over-winters them on his brother's dairy farm to ensure complete isolation from the rest of his flock.

He spoke warmly about the work done by the North of England Mule Sheep

discussion highlighted the very real problems posed by scab for some businesses, it also confirmed that other farms just don't see the disease.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "It feels very positive that a wider audience than just NSA is now talking about RDP funding being used for flock health, but it is vital that any scheme is as inclusive and helpful as possible. While it is right to take an industry-wide and strategic approach, it is also right that all farmers get the chance to invest RDP funds in areas that have the best impact for them. Initiatives should offer the opportunity for all producers to identify diseases that are important for their flocks and provide financial support to tackle them."

Association to present healthy stock and plenty of information at society sales, which prompted some criticism during the following discussion about breed societies who did not take health statuses as seriously. Other comments to come out of the debate were the need for breeding sales to be earlier in the year and for interrogation of a seller about his flock health status to be the norm.

Paul Roger, sheep veterinary consultant, reiterated the importance of quarantine, recommending that buyers observe SCOPS recommendations for worms, fluke and scab but also consider a much longer isolation period to check for other diseases too. He also urged producers to use medicines and vaccines according to the instructions.

"Quarantine should be regarded as an investment in your flock," Paul said, recommending close cooperation with neighbours and the veterinary profession and a keen eye for 'iceberg diseases' such as maedi visna, OPA and Johnes.

On-farm biosecurity tips

Michael Barker

- Maintain high health status by quarantining bought-in animals.
- Capitalise on this by selling breeding stock to a single buyer who wants health information.
- Quarantine bought-in store lambs and still keep them completely separate to breeding stock.



Dom Naylor

- Consider your flock to be Octopussy island where you want to prevent James Bond 'wreaking havoc'!
- Quarantine all incoming stock, even if they come from a low-risk source.
- Remember that animals, humans, equipment and wildlife can all carry disease.



Robert Tucker

- Keep replacement females separate from the main flock for as long as possible.
- Don't automatically trust vendors to have treated for parasites or vaccinated correctly when you buy stock.
- Know which diseases are your priorities to keep out.



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Next generation urged to take every opportunity available

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

The benefits of taking and making opportunities were highlighted by speakers at an 'Inspiring the next generation of sheep farmers' conference held at Abbey Home Farm, Cirencester, in November.

The event, jointly organised by NSA Next Generation and the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) Innovation for Agriculture initiative, attracted more than 80 young people with an interest in the sheep sector. Speakers shared their experiences of different routes into the sheep sector, including inheriting a family farm, share farming, rental agreements, shepherding and off-farm employment.

Andrew Foulds, a sheep farmer and store lamb finisher from Suffolk, and NSA Eastern Region Chairman, said lack of capital would not stop people with enthusiasm and a willingness to work hard. He said he had built up to his current business of 2,000 ewes and several thousand store lambs bought in annually (while owning only 40 acres) by not being frightened to ask to borrow capital and borrow land.

"I started out grazing sugar beet tops," Andrew said. "I couldn't afford the sheep let along the electric fence. It may be frightening to go and knock on someone's door and ask them, but very few people will put you off. Explain you've got access to a bit of land and a day job, and even if the first person says no the next one might not."

Business commitments

Andrew continues to rent land and crops across Suffolk, Norfolk and Cambridge, describing himself as a 'scavenger' and, while acknowledging land is easier to come by in this arable heartland than some areas, said the same principles apply.

"Mind your Ps and Qs with the landlord, don't get cross with the gamekeeper and always, always honour your business commitments," he said. "Pay your bills on time or be honest about cash flow and upfront if you won't have the money for six weeks. Don't be afraid to get a truck on hire purchase or rent it. And use contractors so you don't tie up capital in equipment. Do the job properly. And find a supportive girlfriend or boyfriend that understands what you're trying to achieve and the long hours."

Andrew said he had several young shepherds working for him who also ran their own flocks in their free time. He applauded this, saying start-up sheep owners should 'never give up the day job', whatever that might be, as it helped with cash flow and gave the opportunity to learn business skills. He had worked for the NFU in his 20s and 30s and said this allowed him to meet people and gain business sense.

David Coates, a share farmer from Skipton, North

Top tips for getting ahead in the sheep sector

- Never be afraid to ask for an opportunity.
- Visit and work on other farms, including overseas.
- Volunteer to take additional responsibility.
- Learn from the bad experiences, as well as the good.
- Pick up tips wherever you can and utilise the ones that apply to your situation.
- Follow a passion, but if sheep farming is not for you, find a different career path.



The NSA Next Generation Conference included a farm walk at Abbey Home Farm.



Andrew Foulds.



Yorkshire, said the same about not being afraid to knock on doors. He recommended reading the CLA guide to share farming and giving it to landowners too, as a way to introduce them to the concept.

A son of a tenant farmer, David started share farming in 1984 with no capital, just the use of this father's machinery and his own 'knowledge and effort'. He bought ewes with lambs at foot and contract reared dairy heifers to ensure cash flow and built up to 600 sheep and 90 suckler cows from there. He is now on his second share farm agreement, based on the value of his machinery, labour and management accounting for 70% of the business and the value of the land, buildings and fixed equipment accounting for 30%.

"The golden thing about a share farming agreement is you don't need the same amount of capital as setting up as a tenant. When I buy 100 sheep the auction market splits the bill 70:30 between me and the landowner, and then all the things that go into keeping them is split in the same way – feed, vet bills and medicines. The share operator doesn't have to find all of the capital."

David said he would not be told it was easier in the 1980s when he set up, as interest rates were higher then and land should be easier to find now, as farmers are getting older.

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Earning responsibility and driving efficiency secure future success

The importance of earning responsibility was another running theme through the NSA Next Generation Conference, with Marc Jones particularly emphasising the need to work for what you get.

He is increasingly taking the reins from his father on their tenanted farm at Welshpool, Powys, but said he had earned this right rather than inheriting it. He said there was no use complaining about only getting menial jobs if you do not show enthusiasm and eagerness for responsibility. "Quiz and question everything," he said. "Why are you worming these ewes now? Why do we send the lambs to market? What about other selling options? Show an interest and be knowledgeable."

Marc said he had widened his knowledge base by taking a fulltime job off the farm and also travelling overseas to learn about other operating systems. He pushed his family business by moving from an intensive indoor lambing system with 1,200 Welsh Mules to a forage-based outdoor lambing flock of Lleyns, cutting the cost of winter feeding ahead of lambing from £30 per head to £4.50. This meant the farm business could afford for him to drop to a part-time job and further drive efficiencies at home.



Marc Jones.

Cost of production

Commenting on the importance of taking his family with him through such major changes, Marc said: "Cost of production, that was the main one. I was able to put everything in front of my father and my mother and it was clear cut. If you want to persuade your family do lots of research and go off and travel."

Kevin Harrison, a farm manager on the Gloucestershire/Somerset border with 1,000 North Country Mules, and NSA Marches Region Chairman, echoed Marc's advice about learning something from every farm you visit or work on.

He said he came into the sheep sector with no farming background and worked his way up through various shepherding jobs by listening to people and taking bits to experiment with and learn from. He had also been his own biggest critic, learnt to deal with pressure and always given 100 per cent commitment to his employer.

Kevin said there were pros and cons of being an employed shepherd, but he was rewarded with a job he loved on a farm he could never afford to own. "The job satisfaction is enormous and I have managed to create the sheep flock I've always dreamed of and am very proud of," he said. "It's not just a job, it's a passion. Sheep need attention 24-7 and you can't go home unless the job is done. Everyone should do something that makes them happy."

Eileen McCloskey supported this view of job satisfaction. She explained how splitting her family's farm with her brother would not have been financially viable for either of them, so she had looked for employment off the farm. She said there were lots of people who wanted to work in the sheep sector who might never own their own flock, but working as a service provider gave her an equal amount of pride.

As a sheep technologist for the College of Agriculture, Food



Kevin Harrison.



NSA Next Generation Ambassador applications now open

The NSA Next Generation project is dedicated to encouraging young people in the sheep sector, be they new entrants or from a long line of farming ancestors. Part of the project includes selecting up to 12 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors each year for dedicated personal development, business training and sheep skills development.

To apply for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme 2015 (open to 18-35 year olds) please submit an application form by **Friday 12th December**. Find out more at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

Also visit the website to find out more about the 2014 ambassadors (pictured above) and the five delivery sessions they have enjoyed this year, covering everything from time management and negotiating skills to sheep handling advice and supply chain information. Sessions have also included sheep worming, grassland management, performance recording, media training, ATV handling, financial and business management, and marketing and branding, amongst other topics. NSA is indebted to the delivery partners who have given up their time and resources to support the ambassadors this year; find out more online.

All the ambassadors have been featured in Sheep Farmer over the last year; turn to page 44 to meet Kate Robinson from Gloucestershire, and find achieved case studies on the Next Generation website.



and Rural Enterprise in Northern Ireland, Eileen described the enjoyment she found in helping farmers implement technology and improve their businesses. She had been to university and then taken on a number of research roles in Northern Ireland and Scotland before securing this job.

"I have been very lucky," she said. "I have been paid to get an education in something I love and do research that is vitally important to the industry. I've had the chance to go to New Zealand and Australia and all across the UK."

"I didn't talk myself out of going for jobs but told myself I was as good as the next person who was applying. Don't think you haven't got the skills, because you'll learn on the job."



Eileen McCloskey.

NSA-Shearwell stick reader giveaway

NSA is delighted to announce that 12 Shearwell Data EID stick reader kits will be up for grabs in its 2015 membership recruitment prize giveaway.

Shearwell Data has generously provided the kits, meaning 12 lucky winners will receive a stick reader, mobile printer, spare printer paper, battery chargers, a sturdy carry case and Shearwell's StockMove Express management app, altogether worth £860.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "NSA is delighted to be able to offer this prize, and huge thanks are owed to Shearwell Data for generously donating the kits. While compulsory electronic identification in the sheep sector is far from ideal, there are many businesses using EID to their advantage for recording flock performance and it's great to be able to offer our members a way to make the most of the technology. Whether our winners use it to make movement reporting easier or to track performance in their flocks, I'm sure they'll find these kits invaluable in pushing their business forward."

The prizes are not just on offer to new NSA members – existing members can get their names into the hat by getting a friend or neighbour to sign up to NSA. The more new members you recruit, the more entries you earn! The 12 prize draws will be spaced throughout the year, and every time a winner is picked all non-winning entries will automatically roll over to the next draw; that means the earlier you enter the more chances you have of walking away with an EID kit. Entries are now open and will close on 30th November 2015.

Supporting NSA

Richard Webber, Director of Shearwell Data, says: "We are proud to be sponsoring this NSA offer for the next 12 months with our most popular stick reader and mobile printer kit. Shearwell have long been supporters of NSA and applaud the work they carry out on behalf of the industry. Many farmers are now seeing the benefits of individual recording and the backup and support Shearwell gives puts them second to none in this field. We hope the winners will find this prize very useful."



What could you win?

Stick reader: Shearwell's all-weather, battery-powered stick reader is designed for ease of use, with a single button to turn it on and off, choose its setting and create different groups of animals. The stick will read all eartags and boluses from up to 20cm away, and will not double-read animals within a batch. The reader's memory capacity allows it to store 16,000 records at one time.

Mobile printer: Print out records while you're away from the farm using information sent directly from the stick reader. These print-outs can be attached to movement documents in lieu of listing the tag numbers on the form itself – simply tick the box stating that the numbers are attached.

Mobile app: The Shearwell StockMove Express app links to the stick reader and allows you to view and manage flock information on your phone or tablet. It can be used to log births, movements, deaths and replacement tags, and report movements to ARAMS and Scot EID through the free National Livestock Management Database website. The app can automatically maintain your online holding register and medicine book and be used to make and review notes on specific animals. It is currently available for Android phones, but an iPhone version will be available by the start of 2015.

Addition membership forms, more information and full terms and conditions at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw. Information and membership forms are available on the NSA website, from NSA Head Office and from the NSA stand at events throughout 2015.

3in1 feeder heads to Isle of Man

One 3in1 feeder was not enough for Daniel Creer, the fifth winner in this year's NSA membership recruitment prize giveaway. Daniel was so pleased with his prize that he bought another to take home with him – to the Isle of Man.

Daniel runs 500 Blackface cross Swaledale ewes and 400 Mule and Texel ewes across six separate packages of land on the island, each tenanted from a different landlord. With 1,000 acres of hill ground and 250 acres of upland, Daniel's enterprise spans from 500 to 1,800 foot above sea level.

The farm enterprise produces fat



Daniel (right) is pictured collecting his new feeder from Robert Ball (left), who runs an Advantage Feeders' UK distribution centre from Shropshire.

lambs, which are sold through the local abattoir and to Dunbia in Lancashire, and also sells approximately 200 Texel Mule breeding ewes a year. Dan also keeps 100 store cattle and 20 Aberdeen-Angus cows, shears 30,000 sheep each summer with his shearing partner, and fits in fencing contracting work in the winter.

Daniel is delighted with his new feeders, and intends to use them to flush ewes and keep condition on twin-bearing ewes pre-lambing.

Meet the other winners of this year's NSA prize giveaway, run in conjunction with Advantage Feeders, at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.

NSA membership



Existing members can pass on this form to be in with the chance of winning a Shearwell EID Stick Reader Kit

NSA's 2015 membership recruitment campaign will see us give away 12 Shearwell EID Stick Reader Kits and Mobile Phone Apps through the year. New members will automatically be entered into the draw when they sign up, and existing members can get one entry each and every time someone they recommend signs up as a new member. The earlier in the year you enter the draw, the more chances you have of winning.

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your business your future

Activity in England to address depressed demand for lamb

While cultivating new export markets has become increasingly important to the UK sheep industry in recent years, stimulating demand at home remains a key priority for Eblex, particularly when lamb supplies are plentiful.

With UK sheep meat production forecast to increase by 5% year-on-year in the final quarter of 2014, and by a further 3% cent overall in 2015, the amount available for domestic consumption looks set to rise in the medium term.

“So far this year, the increased supply of lambs has been met by limited consumer demand, both at home and abroad,” says AHDB/Eblex Market Specialist Manager Stephen Howarth. “With supplies expected to be higher going forward, whether the market remains subdued will, as always, partly depend on how domestic consumer demand develops.

“Until very recently earnings growth was still running below inflation and as yet there is little sign of consumer spending on meat growing. This will need to change if demand for sheep meat is going to rise to meet increased supplies.”

Achieving growth

Eblex has responded to the challenge by launching a range of initiatives to stimulate demand for lamb in both the retail and the foodservice sectors and make sure quality assured lamb is well-represented on menus and in supermarkets and butcher’s shops. The trade marketing team is focused on achieving growth in the sector, enhancing consumer satisfaction and repositioning lamb as an affordable meat for families to enjoy throughout the week. Their strategy focuses on three key areas:-

- Building a market for lamb mince.
- Developing a market for forequarter lamb cuts.
- Enhancing the market for prime lamb cuts.

“We want to stimulate consumer demand for lamb by reminding people just how good it can be,” says Mike Whittemore, Eblex Head of Trade Marketing. “By offering consumers better value and greater consistency, educating them and providing inspiration, we can stimulate increased demand.

“We’ve been working closely with processors, retailers and foodservice operators to encourage them to adopt the enhanced specifications we have developed for a range of premium

and forequarter lamb cuts, as well as developing lamb mince as a versatile meal solution.”

A new range of ‘The Carvery’ mini roasts was developed to address the decline in consumption of traditional roasting joints in the retail market and appeal to today’s consumer. The range is targeted at the dining-for-two market and smaller families who don’t want a large traditional roasting joint, due to cost and cooking time. The new cuts are more affordable, lend themselves to increased versatility and are perfect for midweek meals.

TV advertising

This message was communicated to a consumer audience this autumn through a six-week ‘jetpack journey home’ television and digital advertising campaign, promoting Quality Standard and Red Tractor lamb and beef mini roasts. The advertisements aired nationally on ITV during ‘lifestyle’ programmes such as Coronation Street and the Pride of Britain awards. While a final report on the performance of the campaign is not yet available, anecdotal feedback has been very positive.

In contrast to this broad campaign, Eblex’s ongoing LambSoc activity is more tightly focused on the 18-25-year-old demographic identified as key to building a sustainable lamb market for the future. The messages for this campaign are directed very specifically toward students as they begin to cook for themselves and set patterns for later life, ensuring the lamb-buying habit is ingrained in the next generation of consumers.

LambSoc aims to provide an online hub for students to encourage one another to eat lamb by talking about their

Sheep Farmer Market Focus

Following the special report on the international exports in the last edition of Sheep Farmer, enjoy this five-page special on supplying the home market.

cooking experiences and sharing their own dishes. The community is run online through channels such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, using channel-specific content designed to get maximum engagement from students. The most influential content to date has been created on YouTube, where the campaign has exceeded 400,000 views.

“LambSoc aims to highlight lamb as an ‘adventurous meat’, as it is a fantastic flavour carrier for spices and other ingredients that students may have tried when travelling the world or sampled at fashionable street vendors,” says Eblex Head of Consumer Marketing, Jane Ritchie-Smith.

Lamb positivity

“Since its launch in July, the LambSoc community has grown by 130% and now has over 11,000 members that we regularly interact with to reinforce positive messages about lamb.

“With videos from YouTubers such as model Ruth Crilly, travel vlogger Louis Cole and the extremely popular Jim Chapman, we’ve been demonstrating how much fun cooking with lamb can be. We’re very pleased with the high viewing figures, but the highlight has been the number of positive comments from young people interested in cooking with lamb.”



Converting Scottish non-lamb eaters

By Laurent Vernet, QMS
Head of Marketing

Each year around 4,175 tonnes of lamb is eaten in Scotland, which represents a market worth £35.6 million. Yet this represents only 5.3% of the total sheep meat retailed in Great Britain, despite Scottish residents representing 8.3% of the total population.

If Scottish consumers were to purchase 8.3% of the total volume of lamb retailed they would increase consumption by a further 2,300 tonnes, the equivalent of 261,000 lambs a year. This is why Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) has always prioritised its promotional activities to support lamb consumption in Scotland.

Scotch Lamb PGI is trusted and well perceived by over 85% of the Scottish population. The issue is therefore not that consumers have a poor opinion of Scotch Lamb PGI but that lamb is not on the shopper's radar. Over the years the space on the retailer's shelves has been shrinking, making it more difficult to tempt consumers to make an impulse purchase. Retail price has also been a barrier for consumers hit by the economic downturn.

Very often those people who claim not to like lamb have not tried it for a while and base their opinions on pre-conceived ideas. That is why QMS promotional campaigns always include in-store tasting.

This year QMS worked closely with

NSA Scottish Region and NFU Scotland to deliver a series of in-store samplings involving lamb producers. These samplings were under the banner 'Love Scotch lamb' with QMS supplying promotional material and press activity, as well as some aspects of the logistics.

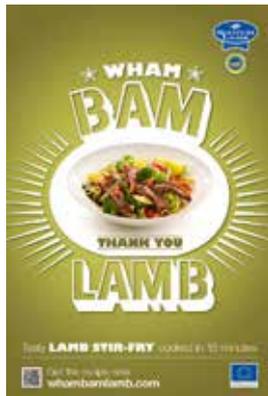
Farmer passion

These activities were very important for two reasons. First, it allowed farmers to share their passion with consumers and showed that producers are just down the road and not from the other side of the country or the world. Secondly, the activities offered the farmers the opportunity to meet with shoppers and consumers who are not part of the farming community. Talking to the farmers who participated to the promotional campaign, it became obvious that they learnt directly from the shoppers about reasons why consumers are 'lamb shy'.

The QMS promotional campaign included outdoor billboards around points of sales, radio advertising when shoppers are in their car between work and home, and online activities targeting specific people who use the internet during their lunch break to decide on their menu that evening.

This campaign was focused on Scotland – mainly the central belt and the central East coast (Dundee – Aberdeen – Inverness) from

August to October 2014. The key message was that cooking lamb is easy, fast and



Scottish eating habits

- Scotland has always consumed less than the other British.
- Historically the Scots tend to eat more beef than the other British nations.
- More than 10% of the British population is from specific ethnic cultural backgrounds that traditionally demand more sheep meat in their diet. Scotland tends to be less culturally diverse with less than 4% of these higher lamb consuming communities.
- About 44% of Scots purchased lamb at least once in the last 52 weeks, compared to 57.5% in Great Britain.

modern, promoted with the 'Wham Bam Scotch Lamb' creative which is co-funded by the European Union.

The campaign allowed QMS to lift the demand for lamb in Scotland by over 11% (87 tonnes) during the 12 weeks of the campaign, while demand over Great Britain was stable and even decreasing in some regions.

Independent research showed the increase of volume retailed was not driven by price promotion, as average lamb retail prices remained stable in Scotland during the QMS promotional campaign. It also showed that not only those who are lamb-eaters bought more lamb during the campaign, but also new consumers. It is estimated that an extra 28,800 Scottish households bought lamb between August and October.

Overall this campaign has supported and even boosted retail sales of lamb in Scotland, particularly Scotch Lamb PGI.

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Promotional work in Wales timed to coincide with peak lamb supply

When lamb prices and consumer demand slumped earlier in the year, Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) responded by bringing forward a promotional campaign that was planned for October, to August.

During the autumn period, new season Welsh Lamb lends itself to all sorts of cooking methods and cuts, but one of the biggest challenges for HCC is to find new and exciting ways of promoting this, at a time when lamb is in abundance.

In an effort to drive consumption of Welsh Lamb among UK customers, HCC's most recent campaigns have been designed to appeal to a wide and varied audience. One example is the Baafta Awards, a competition offering the nation's budding chefs an opportunity to grab the limelight with their favourite recipe to win a luxury box of Welsh Lamb. Competitors were encouraged to upload a picture of their best lamb dish to HCC's consumer website – eatwelshlamb.co.uk – during the height of the autumn season. The four categories were Sunday Boast, Midweek Masterpiece, Welsh Whizzardry' and Cosmopolitan Creation.

Philippa Gill, HCC Brand Marketing Executive says: "The idea behind the competition was to find and share some of the most creative dishes from thousands of foodies who appreciate the merits of Welsh Lamb. A dedicated gallery was



Autumn promotions boost lamb sales when supply is high.

included on the website and the best entries appeared on HCC's social media pages. It was a great way to inspire other enthusiastic cooks to rediscover the unique flavour and wide range of cuts that Welsh Lamb offers, to create a traditional family recipe or even a bhuna or a burger."

Butchers throughout Wales have also

received new promotional material, encouraging their customers to choose Welsh Lamb. Packs containing recipe and competition flyers, posters and window stickers were sent to more than 200 members of HCC's Butchers' Club. This club is for retailers who are confirmed as selling Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) Welsh Lamb or Welsh Beef. It includes a range of benefits, including regular promotional material provided by HCC, and is free to join.

"Butchers have an extremely important role to play in promoting Welsh Lamb," says Laura Pickup, HCC Market Development Manager. "They can influence their customers' choices and what meat they have for dinner. We provide members of our Butchers' Club with a range of tools to help them get the message across about the qualities of PGI Welsh Lamb and why customers should choose it before any other brand."

An advertising campaign was also aired on television in Wales and the Meridian region to heighten consumer awareness on the availability and qualities of Welsh Lamb during the peak autumn season.

Effective campaign

A survey was undertaken to measure the impact and effectiveness of this campaign. From the respondents who were aware of Welsh Lamb, it was regarded as a quality product by 76% of them. In addition 78% of those people who had watched the advert claimed it would make them more likely to purchase Welsh Lamb.

Mrs Pickup added: "We are planning further promotional campaigns for the new year. It is our aim to ensure a constant demand for the product and drive consumption throughout the year.

"Consumer behaviour is also changing. People spent an average time of 31 minutes on meal preparation in 2013 compared to 60 minutes in 1980. This has meant that the traditional roast is in decline, largely because younger consumers aren't investing their time in high effort meals. Our future aim is to increase penetration amongst younger consumers and families, show consumers how Welsh Lamb is at its best and develop added value products in order to provide a premium and ensure a positive future for Welsh Lamb."

Northern Irish push for lamb

The Livestock and Meat Commission for Northern Ireland (LMC) has just completed the first year of a three year project aimed at promoting lamb and beef on the domestic market.

The initial 12 months of the campaign, called 'The Natural Choice', have been a success, with consumer recognition of the Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured lamb standard now at 80%, up from 69% in February.

The start of December sees the end of an LMC television, radio and print advertising campaign promoting lamb, which has run since July. LMC has also launched a consumer-facing website – beefandlambni.com – providing recipes, information and an opportunity to 'meet' farmers and butchers through online profiles.

The media campaign compliments LMC's work in schools, where eight freelance cookery demonstrators deliver practical cookery sessions focused on showing the versatility and ease of cooking with lamb. LMC also educates students on the nutritional value of lamb and the options for reducing its cost by choosing different cuts. LMC works with over 300 schools, reaching 8,000-9,000 students each year.

LMC Industry Development Manager Colin Smith says: "LMC recognises the importance of the domestic market for Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured Lamb. We are aware of the challenges faced by the industry and will continue to work to encourage consumers to choose lamb as a meal option on a regular basis."

Future-Proof Your Rural Business

Learn 2 simple steps on how you can benefit from solar power

Rural businesses are constantly faced with financial pressure. Erratic weather, fluctuating global prices and indecisive policy are driving the need now more than ever for rural businesses to diversify and seek out sustainable income. Solar power can greatly benefit rural businesses and Lightsource Renewable Energy, the UK's No 1 Solar Energy Company, shares two simple steps on how you can start to see rewards in a matter of weeks!

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As Lightsource are the largest buyers of best-in-class solar components in the UK, you will also benefit from the highest performing equipment, ensuring your business receives maximum benefit from the solar panels. These FREE panels come with extensive Lightsource warranties and guarantees so you can rest assured that your property will be protected at all times. Lightsource also employs local engineers in your area, on the rare occasion that the panels become faulty, local engineers are within reach to attend quickly within a few hours.



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Direct selling of lamb and mutton

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

Stats that have come out since the recession show that consumers remain cautious about their weekly shopping, but are increasingly willing to splash out for special occasions.

How else could discount supermarkets continue to grow at the same time as the food service sector strengthens? Andy and Frances Offer have found this within their own business and adapted accordingly.

They grew their 'tiny hobby' selling a few half lambs from their farm near Leominster, Herefordshire, into the solid Whyle House Lamb business by attending farmers' markets, doing 14 a month at their peak and selling as many as three lambs each time. But sales slowed down as the recession hit and the novelty of the markets wore off.

In the meantime the popularity of food festivals has increased and the couple can sell 20 lambs in a weekend at the biggest of these. This is a combination of chilled cuts and hot takeaway lamb burgers.

Lamb burgers

"The ready-to-go market isn't easy and needs a lot of investment, but the burger story is a good one," says Andy, adding hot burgers to eat and burger packs to take home now account for 40% of sales. "When we started to get serious about it we did mutton burgers too, and all our cull ewes now go as mutton. It means I can be a bit harsher on culling too, because I know I can turn them into a valuable product and give them a dignified end.

"We have no problem marketing mutton and sell a lot at Christmas – it has become something people buy for special occasions rather than being the poor man's lamb," he says, explaining they charge the same per kilo for mutton as lamb.



Andy and Frances Offer.

Andy and Frances market mutton legs and shoulders but sell the rest as diced stewing meat or in burgers. In contrast they offer a wide range of lamb cuts, putting only offcuts and unsold joints into burgers. For them, burgers are the ultimate carcass balancer. Previously unsold stock was frozen, but an 11kg (25lb) leg joint will make £28 of burgers, representing added value, a faster turnover of stock and better cash flow.

The festivals are high volume but also high risk and very competitive, so the couple are 'keeping themselves on top' by looking at additional ready-to-go products and are rebranding their marketing material with a fresh, modern look. They are also looking at ways to retain their

Farm Facts

- Eight-acre farm with barn, complemented by grass lets ranging from six to 27 acres.
- Only have home farm for sheep between Christmas and lambing, so capacity is 200 ewes housed and fed on homemade silage.
- Flock is growing, with 100 Welsh Mule and Texel Mule ewes to lamb in March and 80 yearlings/ewe lambs in April.

regular customers without doing so many farmers markets, and it is this willingness to adapt that ensures Whyle House Lamb thrives.

The business currently sells 300 lambs a year (including a small number of bought-in store lambs) and with stock killed every single week Andy says it is a constant battle to get lambs to his target spec of 40kg R2L. This year he successfully pushed the heaviest lambs ahead of a July food festival, but held the smaller ones back too much and is now struggling with lean, light carcasses.

Butchery

By doing the butchery himself he can utilise over and under-fat lambs, achieving high quality control and treating every customer individually by providing specific and numerous cuts. His butchery is meticulous and always done with the customer (not weight) in mind.

The couple's business principles are treating customers as individuals, focusing on provenance and ensuring high welfare standards.

"People are concerned about how animals are looked after, how they're fed," says Andy. "They're not very well informed but they are concerned, so they buy into the concept of how we look after our stock."



Quality butchery and a variety of cuts is a priority for Andy and his customers.

Making more of mutton

New energy has been put into the promotion of quality mutton in a renewed initiative from NSA and the Royal Academy of Culinary Arts (RACA).

Extending the work of the Mutton Renaissance Club, an initiative of HRH The Prince of Wales, the partners (with sponsorship from Eblex, HCC and LMC) intend to use their joint expertise to invigorate the mutton market. The renewed work will assist producers, processors and retailers in making quality mutton once again available to all, as it was as recently as 80 years ago.

This once lauded gem of British cookery is now starting to recover some of its lost ground, finding new enthusiasts in restaurants and homes across the UK, so now is an ideal time to boost activity.

Joining the partners will be Bob Kennard, who has a long history of processing and selling mutton. He says: "Quality is the key to a satisfying mutton meal. It depends on having the right quality of animal to begin with and then ensuring it is treated properly at every stage along the supply line.

"This initiative will help producers, processors, retailers and consumers to



Mutton is starting to recover lost ground as a favourite family dish.

have a first rate eating experience."

Bob is keen to hear from existing quality mutton producers, as well as processors and retailers, so every opportunity is taken advantage of to raise the profile and increase interest in quality mutton. Contact Bob at mutton@nationalsheep.org.uk (and turn to page 25 for the chance to win a copy of his book). The project's website is under preparation and will soon be available at www.nsamutton.org.uk.

The history of mutton

Mutton has suffered for more than 50 years from a combination of changed fashions, some poor wartime folk-memories, and busy modern life styles.

It used to be more popular than beef but declined in use after the Second World War and virtually disappeared from all but the most discerning dinner tables – until the work of the Mutton Renaissance Club started some 10 years ago.

A decline in numbers of sheep towards the end of the first decade in the new millennium and consequent market distortion with high prices and poor quality product acted against the developing interest in mutton. It is only now, with a more stable sheep population, that it has been thought sensible to encourage new enthusiasts for quality mutton from production through to the consumers.



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Latest farm fatality figures show greater need for safety

By Caitlin Peck, NSA

Farm safety is slowly improving, but there's still a long way to go before agriculture is a safe industry to work in. That's the message from the new Health and Safety in Agriculture figures published by Health and Safety Executive (HSE) at the end of October, which once again identified farming as one of the most dangerous sectors to work in within Great Britain.

The 12 months to October saw 27 work-related deaths in agriculture. Although that figure is down from an average of 33 fatal injuries per annum over the last five years, reflecting a gradual long-term decline in deaths in farming, agriculture still accounts for more work-related fatalities than any other industry and remains behind the curve in fatal injury reduction. The death rate in agriculture is now four times higher than that in the construction trade. Although it employs only one in 100 GB workers, agriculture accounted for one in five workplace deaths in 2013/14.

There were also 292 reported injuries

Farm safety tips

- Always tell someone where you are going and when you will be back. Let someone know if your plan changes.
- Before you start a job, take the time to assess the risks and think about how you will avoid them.
- Never do a job in a hurry; it's easy to make mistakes when you're in a rush.
- Take advantage of training. For example, the free EASI course offered when you buy a new quad bike.
- Attend a HSE Safety and Health Awareness Day (SHAD). SHAD's are practical courses covering the everyday dangers of farming. Find out more at www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/diary.htm.
- NSA is part of the Farm Safety Partnership; find useful resources at www.nfuonline.com/business/farm-safety/farm-safety-partnership.
- Also find information and advice on the HSE website at www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture.

Farm Safety Partnership



Quad bikes and lone working are two of the factors that make sheep farming as dangerous as any other agricultural occupation.

to farm workers over the 12 month period.

Rick Brunt, HSE's head of agriculture sector said: "While any decrease in the number of injuries is welcome, I would urge the industry to avoid complacency and recognise it still has a long way to go to improve its poor record of managing risks. As ever, the causes of death and injury in the sector are not new, and the industry must work hard to manage these well-known risks if we are to tackle the poor health and safety record."

Real tragedy

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker emphasised that farm work is hazardous in every sector. He says: "The numbers make for sobering reading. We mustn't forget that behind every one of the figures on farming fatalities is a very real tragedy for a family. Sheep farmers often think they're at less risk than those in other farming sectors because they have less contact with large animals and heavy machinery, but there is a very real danger in every day sheep farming tasks like ATV handling and general farmyard maintenance."

With Christmas just around the corner, this is a good time to think about safety on your farm and ensure everyone on your team is working as safely as possible. The families of those killed in farming accidents often report that Christmas is one of the most difficult times to cope with their bereavement. While you and your family are gathered together this Christmas, take a moment to think about how things would be if one of you wasn't there.

Case study: Roger James

Life hasn't been the same for Powys livestock farmer Roger James since a quad bike accident left him in constant pain and with limited mobility.

Roger was checking a new field before moving stock into it when his attention lapsed and he absentmindedly took an unfamiliar shortcut up a steep slope. The hill was too steep for the bike, which tipped backwards, flinging Roger to the floor and upended on top of him. Roger's pelvis was smashed and he was lucky to avoid fatal artery damage.

Roger now finds it difficult to stand for short periods of time. He can perform only light part-time duties on the farm, and he can no longer enjoy the social life he once did. Roger says: "Keep your mind on what you're doing. I'd done that sort of job hundreds of times before, and I got careless."

Case study: Peter Rooke

At the age of 20 Peter Rooke was cleaning out the guttering on a farm shed with his father when he stepped backwards off safety boards onto a roof light and fell 18 feet onto the concrete floor below.

Although he was lucky and the accident could have been far worse, Peter broke the femur in his left leg and could not return to work for eight weeks. It was June, a busy time on the farm, and the Rookes were forced to hire contractors to cover Peter's workload. Following the accident, a harness and back rail has been fitted to the roof to ensure anyone working on it is secure.

Free safety app for smart phones

If an accident does happen and the victim can't summon help, it is often family and friends who notice they are missing. With this in mind, a new app for smart phones and UrSOSButton has been developed.

If someone is late home without explanation or cannot be contacted, UrSOSButton can locate them by finding their phone. There is also the option to buy a button which sends calls for help remotely with a single press, allowing someone who has been in an accident to get aid quickly and easily. The UrSOSButton system is currently being trialled by the Irish Farmers' Association, and is receiving positive feedback.

How does the app work?

Only the person who you are finding needs to have the app on their phone. To locate them, simply text a code to their phone and you will receive an automatic reply containing their GPS coordinates, the nearest postal address to them and a link to their location on Google Maps. You can also choose to 'track' the person; you will then receive updates on their whereabouts at an interval of your choice. Because the app works through text messaging, it

The UrSOSButton app for Android mobile phones is available free of charge to help find a missing family member, and the emergency button can be bought for a one-off fee of £89 for someone to call for help in an emergency.



functions on the bare minimum of phone signal. You can use the app without buying the button, although it is only suitable for Android phones. The app is a useful means of making sure someone is safe and of letting the emergency services know exactly where they are if necessary – and it's a handy way to find your lost phone too!

How does the button work?

This is the addition paid-for service offered alongside the free app. The button is a small device, about the size of a USB stick.

To summon help, hold the button down for three seconds. Your phone will automatically text a message requesting help and giving your location to five pre-selected contacts. It will also call five contacts, switching to speakerphone mode when a call is answered. Any incoming calls will be answered automatically and put on speakerphone too. The button works up to 30 metres away from your phone and regardless of whether the phone is locked. It costs a one-off fee of £89.

How do I get the system?

The UrSOSButton app is available to download from Google Play (<https://play.google.com/store/apps>) and you can find more information on the system, including on buying the button, at www.ursosbutton.com.

NSA has prepared a handy new guide on downloading apps for smart phones; find it in the members-only area of the NSA website at www.nationalsheep.org.uk.

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Sustainable land management makes stratified system work

Farming in the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty means Adam Watson works in a truly spectacular landscape, but faces the daily challenge of balancing farming with the environment.

He and his family have made the most from this situation at Sanders Close, Slaggyford, Northumberland, working closely with the authorities to ensure they support important plant and wildlife species while also being able to run a thriving farm business.

They run just over 900 ewes and 50 suckler cows across 590 hectares (1,450 acres), but two-thirds of that is fell ground and rough grazing managed under HLS, where grazing is not permitted from early October through to late March.

The Watsons negotiated on this grazing restriction during the winter months, as the cost and labour of shepherding 100 ewes over 400ha (1,000 acres), as suggested by Natural England, did not stack up for them. Instead they reached an



Adam Watson.



The youngest Swaledale females are kept pure, to make rapid genetic progress in the purebred flock.

agreement where the hill carried no stock in winter but could have a higher number in the summer.

“I like to think we educated Natural England, as all that distance on a quad bike for only 100 sheep was unworkable,” Adams says. “In wintertime we can get winter keep, which is expensive but cheaper than feed. The environmental payment goes towards it and we still get a sensible stocking rate in the summer.”

Pures and crosses

The 890-head Swaledale flock is split into gimmers and shearlings to be kept pure for their first two lamb crops, the best ewes to be kept pure (Adam’s ‘golden girls’!), and the rest of the ewes to be put to the Bluefaced Leicester to produce North of England Mules. This gives 380

Swaledales kept pure and 510 crossed, and it is 400 of these crossing ewes that are away-wintered each year. This allows room on the better land for the younger Swaledales to come down from the hill for tugging.

“Away-wintering would make the gimmers too soft for when they go back to the fell the following summer with a lamb at foot,” says Adam, explaining they are lamed inside but turned straight out with one lamb each so they remain hefted to the hill and can heft their lamb too. “It’s all very well shouting about scanning rates and lambing rates but if you turn them back to the fell with more than one lamb you end up with three poor sheep instead of a good ewe and a single.”

The away-wintered ewes return to Sanders Close at the end of January, but

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“Away-wintering would make the gimmers too soft for when they go back to the fell the following summer with a lamb at foot.”

Adam Watson

with only 190ha (450 acres) of grazing available for the entire flock at that time, Adam chooses to house stock instead.

“In the first year of environmental stewardship we realised how much pressure it was putting on the rest of the farm, so we put up a shed for when sheep come back from away-wintering, and that means we can put ewes and lambs out

to clean pasture after lambing, hopefully with a good bite of grass in front of them. There’s no better substitute than spring grass for making ewes milk.”

Lambing starts in early March with 20 Bluefaced Leicester ewes, synchronised in mid-October to produce purebred lambs. “We lamb them first so we can concentrate and focus on them,” says Adam. “Ram lambs from those ewes influence our Mules in time, so we have to get it right.”

Around 15 Leicester tup lambs (usually all homebred plus one bought in for new bloodlines) are put to 30 Swaledale ewes each in late October, managing to serve about 10 ewes each in a week. Those that produce the best Mule lambs are kept as stock rams or sold for breeding at the Lazonby sale as shearlings, this year topping at £1,150 and averaging just short of £500 per head.

Adam will not use or sell a Leicester male until it had proven it can throw good Mules, so all matings are recorded and notes made on lambs as they are born, and checked again when ewe lambs are sorted for sale, to judge the quality of the sires. This is currently done by hand, but

Farm Facts

- 590ha (1,450 acres) split as two-thirds fell and rough grazing and one-third meadows and improved pasture.
- Land runs from 200m to 600m above sea level (700ft-1,950ft).
- Farm bought in 1960s and expanded since; it is a family venture with Adam, his parents William and Isobel and brother Nigel. Adam’s partner Alison and daughters Charlotte (12) and Lucy (6) are also activity involved.
- Mule gimmer lambs are the main output, but also Swaledale rams (Sanders Close prefix) and draft ewes, Bluefaced Leicester rams (Thornhope) and Limousins (Saunders) all sold for further breeding.

an EID reader has been invested in for future use. Adam says he is enthusiastic about embracing it, but has not yet had the time to set up a system he feels confident he can rely on.

Once the Leicester ram lambs have been in for a week they are replaced with older stock rams. Again, one ram is allocated to each group of Swaledale ewes, but these are rotated after the first cycle to ensure every female is successfully served. Ewes are housed from January, then scanned, and later vaccinated for costrioidal diseases, before being sorted into groups of singles, twins and triplets to allow for as many sets of twins to be turned out as possible.

Shed space

The younger Swaledales and ‘golden girls’ are put to a Swaledale tup slightly later (mid-November) so there is shed space available for them once they start lambing in April. Adam says the family spend an entire day sorting through Swaledales to be kept pure, deciding which to put to which ram and avoiding any inbreeding by carefully checking eartags.

The gimmers usually scan at 130% (compared to 186% for the older ewes) and Adam says his is ‘about right’ as sets

Continued on page 24



Bluefaced Leicester tups run with the Swaledale ewes from late October, after giving tup lambs a run for one week first.

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Adam is particularly pleased with this Swaledale tup, bought in this autumn to introduce a new bloodline.

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➔ of twins are kept as such but not turned out to hill, meaning they take up valuable grass needed for the Mule-bearing ewes and to make into silage for the cattle and hay for the sheep in winter.

The value of grass is also the reason the Mule wethers are sold in batches of 50 over two weeks in in July and August. This year they topped at £61 and averaged at 'a nice price' of £54.

"We want as much grass as possible for the Mule gimmer lambs, because that's our main business," Adam explains. "If you've got a lot of Mule wether lambs kicking around it defeats the object. We move them on because someone else can feed them cheaper on a lowland operation."

Because the Swaledale wether lambs stay on the hill and don't compete for grass, they are kept on until the autumn and then moved into the lambing shed to be intensively finished. This solves the problem of low demand for Swaledale stores and achieves an income of around £80 per head in late January, with a feed cost of £20 each.

The Mules gimmers are weaned in early August and dipped, wormed, vaccinated for costrioidal diseases and pearl dipped at least three times over the coming weeks. Each time lambs are handled they are sorted for the five NEMSA sales the Watsons attend over four weeks in September and October. Up to 12 homebred Swaledale shearing rams are also sold in October, at the St Johns Chapel's Weardale (D District) Sale. Highlights in past years have been top males making £5,200 and £7,000. The money is reinvested straight back into new tups, so with Limousin bulls also sold at this time of year, it is a busy time for farm.

Pedigree Limousins

The majority of the suckler herd calves in March-May, with female progeny either retained for breeding or sold at the pedigree sales at Carlisle. Most males are sold as stores through Penrith mart, but the very best are sold for breeding. The best prices achieved are £10,000 for Saunders Stallone when he took the reserve junior male championship at Carlisle in May 2003 and £8,000 for Saunders Handy Andy (from the same dam line) in February this year.

The sale ring is work enough for the cattle, with forays into the show ring reserved for the Swaledales. Adam says it is impossible to describe the pride he felt when he took the 2011 Royal Highland Show breed championship with a homebred shearing ram, and while he says you can never know if it will happen again, he certainly has two eager assistants with his daughters both being keen young handlers.

"The not about the showing when you go up to the Highland; it's a family thing. It's a really nice atmosphere and everyone is there promoting the breed," Adam says. "The stratified system is the backbone of the sheep industry and we are very proud to be part of it."

NSA Christmas book giveaway

The generosity of three authors means NSA has copies of three must-read sheep-related books to give away in the run-up to Christmas.

We have a total of 11 copies across three titles and will be putting them into a free prize draw open exclusively to NSA members ahead of the festive period. To be in with a chance of winning simply fill in the entry form below and return it to NSA by Friday 19th December. Or save yourself the cost of a stamp and email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk providing the same information. The draw will take place on Monday 22nd December.

Counting Sheep by Philip Walling (Published by Profile Books)

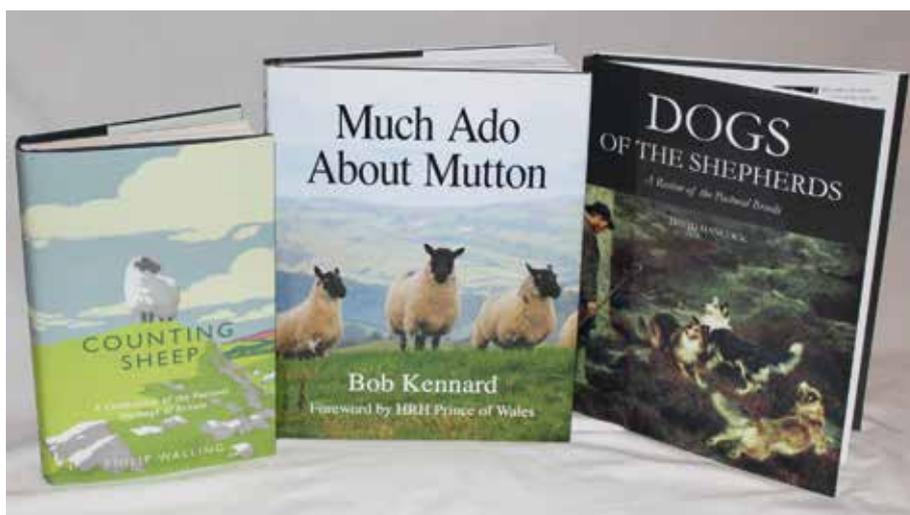
This celebration of the pastoral heritage of Britain tells a story of wool, money and history, of merchants, farmers and shepherds, and above all, of the soil. With his eye for the idiosyncratic, Philip meets the native sheep that thrive in the UK, telling stories about each breed, meeting their shepherds and owners, learning about their past, and confronting the present realities of sheep farming.

Not lucky enough to win a copy? Buy online at Amazon or Waterstones.

Dogs of the Shepherds by David Hancock (Published by Crowood Press Ltd)

This review of pastoral dog breeds is about the farmers' dog – those fussless, selfless, strongly motivated, quite admirable dogs that down the centuries have herded and guarded livestock the world over. It considers the pastoral dogs' contribution to the working and companion dog scene, a searching examination of their past, their performance and their prospects in an increasingly urban society.

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Much Ado About Mutton by Bob Kennard (Published by Merlin Unwin Books) Signed by the author

Once more popular than beef, mutton has impacted our history, culture and landscape. Bob's fascinating book looks at farming past and present, mutton's decline and current revival, its newly

discovered health benefits and butchery of the meat. The lavishly illustrated volume, which has been positively reviewed by Lynda Brown, Sheila Dillon and Nigella Lawson, includes recipes, a suppliers' directory and breed guide.

Not lucky enough to win a copy? Buy signed copies at www.aboutmutton.com or unsigned copies from all good booksellers.

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*You must be a current member of NSA to qualify for the draw; if you are unable to provide your NSA membership number will be check against your farm name and post code so please ensure you provide the correct information. **NSA will do its best to provide your preference of book and post it for delivery before Christmas, but cannot guarantee this. Only one prize will be allocated per NSA membership held. Entries received after the closing date of Friday 19th November will not be entered in the draw. NSA employees, trustees their families, agents and anyone else connected to this promotion are not eligible to take part. Prizes are non-transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash or exchanged. Names will be published in NSA communications when the draw is concluded, but no contact details will be shared with third parties. By entering the prize draw, entrants agree to be bound by these terms and conditions.

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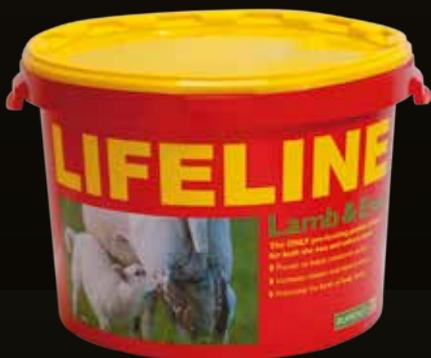


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Opinion piece: New LAA chairman

By Rod Cordingley,
LAA Chairman



I am obviously a massive fan of auction marts, which I believe are the best way to keep trade free and open, and I want to see the system survive and thrive.

Through the auction marts, farmers have the ability to market their stock and get a fair price. Every time a farmer elects to accept a price that's dictated to them, this fairer system is damaged. Milk production and pig production have lost their competitive bidding. If we're not careful lamb production will follow.

Other marketing schemes can tempt farmers away from the local live auction, whether that's deadweight procurement, online auctions, collection centres or marketing groups. But each of these takes a steer from the live system to set their prices. The logic is obvious – if everyone abandons live auctions, who will be left to set the price? Nobody that will be on the side of the farmer, that's for sure.

Livestock markets need to be used to ensure their survival and those who think they can manage without will rue the day when they left it to others to do the supporting. The loudest protests following the closure of a mart often come from those whose failure to support it brought about its demise.

Number of movements

Abattoirs tell farmers that their supermarket customers are making them restrict livestock movements to a certain number, or specifying that animals can't have been moved in the last 30 days. But why are they penalising farmers in this way? The supermarkets will tell us it's because their customers – shoppers – don't like the animal welfare implications. But what are these animal welfare reasons? I've seen no evidence to support this reaction.

I believe there is a wider communications challenge around telling the story of the countryside and the role of auction marts in the production of food. It's down to all of us to raise consumer awareness. People need to understand why livestock is bred in the hills of the west, where grass is plentiful, and why it's finished in the east, where there's plenty of fodder.

We all know why it's cheaper to bring the animals to the feed rather than the feed to the animals – but we need to tell this story to consumers. And we need to do so through supermarkets, butchers, agricultural shows, open farms and at every opportunity. Livestock movements are a fact of life and are better

done through our licensed premises which are open to public inspection.

So use your local auction mart – and next time you visit your butcher, invite them to come with you to find out more about our vital role in the supply chain.

Rod Cordingley, the newly elected chairman of the Livestock Auctioneer Association, is an auctioneer with Stephenson & Son at York Auction Centre.



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Somerset family making the most of sheep focus farm project

Having agreed to become a focus farm in 2011, NSA members Mike and Jo Mouland have worked with a number of delivery partners and funding streams to host on-farm meetings and make the most of the opportunity for their own business.

With the help and support of Kat Bazeley, their vet from Synergy Farm Health, and various industry speakers, they have covered all sorts of topics at these meetings. Just one example is foot health, and for the past 12 months the Mouland family has been using the sheep industry's five-point plan to reduce lameness. Ewe lameness levels were at about 8% previously, but have reduced to 2% meaning much less time spent on dealing with lame sheep.

They have been culling hard for lameness for up to five years, and while Mike admits it was not easy to stop trimming the majority of cases and just inject with antibiotics (see pages 30-31 for more on this approach), but he has seen great results and now says he would never go back to the routine trimming he used to carry out on the flock.

Egg counts

As part of another focus farm project, the family were supplied with a faecal egg counting kit (FECPAK) and combined this with following SCOPS principles to reduce the amount of wormer administered without reducing productivity. Previously Mike drenched automatically at key times of the year, but by only treating stock when the FECPAK says worm counts are high, wormer use has halved, saving money and time too.

At the most recent focus farm meeting, body condition scoring was covered. The Mouland family body condition score at weaning and then sort the ewes into four groups, fat, medium, thin and lame (although this one has become increasingly redundant due to the five-



Suffolk rams are used on 1,750 Mules, which are run alongside 300 Dorset crosses and 100 Highlanders.



Mike and Jo Mouland (inside right) are pictured with sons (l-r) Richard, Sam and Nick. Jenny (a work experience student) is pictured, but son James is not.

point plan). They do not flush ewes unless it is needed and the thin group will receive concentrate for a month before tupping to improve their body condition. They are very aware that body condition of ewes and rams is vital for optimum performance of the flock.

With four sons enthusiastic to enter the farm business, Mike and Jo have been very keen to focus on the future and the whole family has been working hard on developing an even more productive and higher health status flock and suckler herd.

They have recently purchased 100 Highlander ewes, which will kept as a completely separate flock, in the hope they will be able to maintain a high flock health status. If they prove to be a success, they plan to buy more next year. They have also bought an Abertex ram. These new investments will enable them to start breeding their own replacements to reduce risks associated with buying in new stock.

Additional data

Purchased with grant funding, a new EID system with weigh crate is on its way, which will be hugely beneficial and add additional information to the already high level of record keeping and aid them in getting lambs off the farm at optimum weights.

Another future priority will be grassland management and getting the best possible from the land they have, especially with some of it being restricted within environmental stewardship schemes. Outdoor lambing is an area that is also being explored.

Clare Maggs, Healthy Livestock Training Coordinator, has been working with the

Farm Fact File

- Family business involving Mike and Jo Mouland and sons Richard, James, Nick and Sam.
- Horn Farm, Forton, Chard, Somerset is a 1,330-acre tenanted unit with sheep, beef and arable enterprises.
- 300 Dorset cross ewes lambed in January, with lambs creep fed for the early market. Also 1,450 North Country Mules lambed in March and 300 ewe lambs in April. All lambs sold fat to St Merryn abattoir (Two Sisters).
- 400 head of cattle, including 140 suckler cows.

family since 2011. She says: "The whole family have been a great success with regards to the focus farm meetings, with great turnouts at every meeting. They have always been willing to share their experiences good or bad to help other farmers and this has also helped them develop. They are a great example of what can be achieved when the whole family works together. The future is definitely bright for this proactive farming family."

This article is part of NSA's support of the Eblex Focus Farm programme. Eblex has joined up with a number of delivery partners to run 19 sheep focus farms throughout England, with Duchy College's Rural Business School working with the Mouland family in Somerset. The family joined up with Duchy and Adas on the Healthy Livestock project back in 2011, so are continuing in a similar role as a focus farm through this Eblex project, which is funded by the EU and Defra via RDPE. Find out more at www.eblex.org.uk/returns/cattle-sheep-health-welfare-project.

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To trim or not to trim?

By Fiona Lovatt, sheep veterinary consultant

Foot trimming was long recognised as an appropriate management technique for sheep, until considerable research suggested that routine trimming can increase levels of lameness. More recently it was shown that even trimming the hooves of lame sheep may lengthen the time it takes for them to heal.

Through a research and development grant, Sainsbury's funded a project on a Gloucestershire farm in early 2013 to compare the effects of trimming some randomly selected lame ewes compared to not trimming others. In the summer of 2014 Sainsbury's funded further randomised case-controlled research on a couple of Northumberland farms and Eblex undertook some informal trials on their RDPE-funded focus farms. I have been involved in each of these studies and amassed a vast library of photographs of sheep feet.

We knew what the research was saying but we were not able to answer farmers who questioned what feet would look like after weeks or months. We now have this evidence and some answers to important questions.

Q. Is it necessary to trim long and misshapen claws?

A. Sheep feet become overgrown and out of shape when they are infected with either footrot or CODD. They may be more likely to become infected if they are damaged but not necessarily if they are overgrown. It is very important to promptly treat any infection but not necessarily to trim the foot. See pictures below.

Q. Does trimming feet keep them tidy?

A. Healthy sheep hooves can grow a couple of inches in a year, and perhaps even more when there has been some insult such as an infection or after they have been trimmed. Even careful trimming does not mean that the foot will still be a neat shape after six weeks and it may

cause irregular growth. See pictures on page 31. It is not recommended to carry out routine foot trimming of sound ewes.

Q. Does trimming feet improve or slow the speed of healing?

A. On some farms it has been shown that trimming infected feet delays their recovery. Whether or not you decide to trim infected feet, it is very important to treat any infection with an antibiotic. Careful trimming may be considered in cases of shelly hoof, if the hoof shape is encouraging debris to accumulate or if the hoof is so overgrown that its shape is itself causing lameness.

Q. Is it OK to trim a long hoof that looks untidy?

A. Cautious trimming, well clear of any sensitive tissue, will probably not cause further harm though you should consider this a 'cosmetic' trim and not assume that it is beneficial.

Q. Does advising farmers not to trim encourage neglect and risk fly strike?

A. It absolutely should not. Any suggestion that trimming is not always beneficial certainly does not imply that lame sheep should not be treated quickly and effectively to clear up any infection. Flies are attracted to the smell of footrot, which is cured by prompt and effective antibiotic treatment, not trimming. Sheep that are not sound within a fortnight should be retreated and, particularly in the case of CODD, your vet may advise a 'stronger' antibiotic as well as topical treatment. Application of the five-point plan has been shown to be very helpful in the reduction of lameness – see panel.

High levels of sheep lameness remain one of the great challenges faced by our industry despite proven and effective control measures. Some shepherds tolerate too many lame sheep, so on these farms there is a high weight of challenge facing both ewes and lambs and causing yet more lameness. However on other farms, there are shepherds who have embraced the control measures so that

The five-point plan

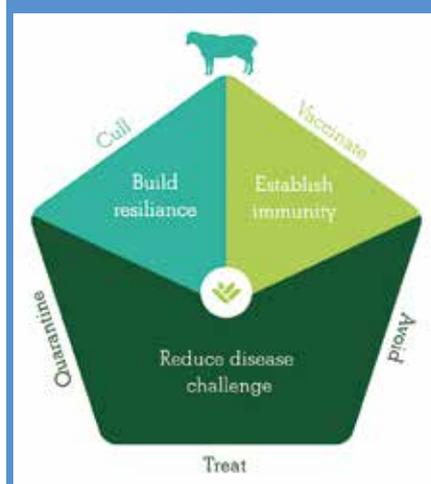
Treat – It is essential that all lame sheep are caught and treated effectively, which will include use of an injectable antibiotic for cases of footrot or CODD.

Avoid spread – Both footrot and CODD are infectious disease which will spread between sheep at areas of high sheep traffic and as they are gathered.

Vaccinate – Computer modelling shows a cost-benefit to vaccination when levels of footrot exceed 2% of the flock at any one time.

Cull out persistent offenders, which means records must be kept so you don't keep retreating the same ewes. These ewes are not paying their way and are a constant source of infection to others.

Quarantine all incoming sheep to avoid the introduction of a more virulent strain of footrot or CODD.



they consistently have low numbers of lame ewes and this means that every one that is lame can be treated within a timely manner.

With acknowledgements to J Sainsbury's, Eblex, RDPE Skills Framework, Jake Freestone, Phillipa Page, Rheinallt Jones, Steve Dunkley, Tim Kelsey, Emily Reeves and Iain Robertson.



1. On 16th May 2014 this ewe was identified as severely lame from footrot and treated with injectable antibiotic but not trimmed. 2. On 6th June she was walking much better. She was not trimmed and no further treatment was given. 3 and 4. On 4th July and 1st August she was completely sound and she was not trimmed. 5. On 15th September, she was completely sound and the hooves were virtually perfect in shape despite no trimming. This ewe was at grass all summer and had not walked on hard surfaces.



Feet from these three ewes were photographed six weeks after identification of infection/overgrowth and being carefully trimmed.

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Prepare for lambing pitfalls to reduce number of losses

By Howard Kellock,
Wensom Valley Vets



Lambing is inevitably a busy time, but slight changes can make a big difference to lamb survival and the profitability of the business.

Nearly 50% of lamb losses occur either at lambing or in the 48 hours following, so being well prepared and aware of the potential pitfalls is key to preventing avoidable losses and ensuring good early growth rates.

Prior to your expected start date make sure you get all your facilities ready. Check water and feed provision is suitable with outside pipes lagged to prevent freezing. Indoor facilities should be clean, dry, well ventilated and all hurdles and adopters disinfected. Stock up on equipment well in advance – see panel 1.

Interventions

During lambing it is important to know when and how to help a ewe lamb. There are some situations when a ewe should be restrained and you should investigate, such as when the head appears on its own without the front feet, or when there is only one leg or a tail.

Also intervene if no clear progress has been made 30 minutes after the water bag emerged, or if the time for lambing has been more than 90 minutes, or if the ewe is in clear distress. Regardless of why you have to interfere with a lambing, there are some important common points to remember – see panel 2.

Sometimes everyone needs a bit of extra assistance. Knowing when to call the

1: Lambing equipment

- Clean, arm length gloves
- Clean, waterproof clothing
- Lubricant
- Disinfected lambing ropes and snare
- Clean buckets with warm water and disinfectant
- Halter for ewe restraint
- Resuscitation drops
- Medicines – injectable antibiotic, oxytocin, painkiller, blue spray

vet for backup can be important. Generally speaking, if you attempt to aid the ewe but are not getting any progress after five minutes then you should call for help. Vets can give an epidural or medication to give more space and allow more chance of a successful lambing with no damage to the ewe or lamb. In some cases a caesarean section may be required.

Other clear reasons to call the vet include: feeling a tight ring at the cervix so you can't feel the lamb (ringwomb); finding a lamb that is too big and you are unable to get a hand over the back of the shoulders; and when the ewe is torn or injured during lambing and requires attention.

After an assisted lambing it is common practice to give the ewe a dose of injectable antibiotic. This will help prevent her developing an infection within her uterus. Something less commonly thought of is to provide pain relief and anti-inflammatory medication. Using a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) is important in these situations. The ewe will be bruised and in pain. Reducing this pain and inflammation as soon as possible will mean she mothers the lamb and gets back to her food quicker to produce quality milk.

2: Tips to remember for assisted lambings

- Repel the lamb sufficiently before attempting any corrections.
- Use plenty of lubrication.
- Know which limbs are which – fore limbs bend the same way at both joints, hind limbs bend in opposite directions.
- Always return to the ewe once the lamb(s) is delivered to check for tears and other injuries and also for any further lambs left inside.
- If you are struggling for space to reposition the lamb, try repositioning the ewe. Having her laid down on the other side or even stood up can often free up that bit of extra space.
- Don't cut the umbilical cord, gently pull it away until it breaks so that bleeding is minimised.

A newborn lamb should shake its head within two minutes of birth, begin standing within five minutes and have sucked within 40 minutes. The most important thing for the newborn lamb is to ensure that sufficient colostrum is taken within the first three hours of life. Colostrum is essential to healthy lamb development, as it transfers essential nutrients as well as maternal antibody to protect against diseases. This is where clostridial vaccination of the ewe is passed down to the lamb.

Colostrum

If the lamb has not sucked within three hours, the ewe should be milked and this provided to the lamb by bottle or stomach tube. A lamb should take 50ml/kg of colostrum in this time period.

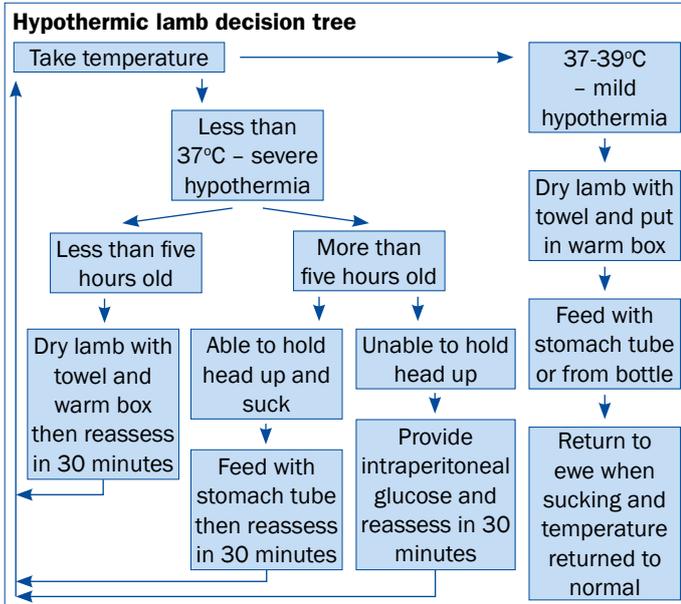
Lambs should have their navels

3: Key biosecurity points to be aware of

- Have a separate area for sick ewes and lambs to be cared for.
- Wear gloves and use antibiotic hand wash between assisted lambings.
- Keep bedding dry and fresh when lambing indoors.
- Use a disinfectant powder when wet/dirty areas have been cleaned out.
- Remove all bedding and disinfect individual pens after each use.
- Remove placentas and prevent access by dogs or wildlife.
- Insist visitors wear clean waterproof clothing and gloves around the stock.



Lambs should shake their heads within two minutes of birth, stand within five minutes and suck within 40 minutes.



Nearly half of lamb losses occur within the first 48 hours of life, so prepare now to avoid common pitfalls.

dressed with iodine soon after birth. Ensure that all of the cord and surrounding area are covered. Where possible check it has dried up sufficiently 24 hours later and retreat if needed.

Hypothermia is a common cause of loss in the newborn lamb and can be due to starvation, exposure or a combination of both. To assess for hypothermia use a thermometer at around 3cm into the rectum.

- More than 40°C – fever, too hot
- 39-40°C – normal temperature
- 37-39°C – mild hypothermia
- Less than 37°C – severe hypothermia

What to do if the lamb is hypothermic can be decided by following the decision tree – see *diagram*. When you need to give intraperitoneal glucose to a cold lamb that is still unable to hold its head up five hours after birth, it is important to do this before putting the lamb in the warm box. A sterile 50ml syringe, one-inch 19g needle and warm (but not hot) 20% glucose

is required. If you have a 40% glucose product dilute it with an equal amount of water. Hold the lamb with front legs raised then inject half an inch to one side and one inch below the navel with the needle directed downwards towards the rump. Large lambs should receive 50ml and small lambs 25ml.

Disease

Biosecurity at lambing time is important in minimising disease transmission and maintaining a healthy flock. It is also important to protect yourself, as diseases such as salmonella, orf and enzootic abortion are all transmissible to humans.

The wet, dirty and warm floor of a poorly kept lambing shed is a perfect breeding environment for pathogens that cause disease. Watery mouth can lead to death and is the result of excessive e.coli multiplication within the gut, while navel ill is the infection of a wet navel that can lead to joint ill.

In order to reduce the disease incidence it is important to reduce the pathogen build up through the key points listed – see *panel 3*.

An additional point to consider is removing older lambs from the lambing shed, as these will be acting as ‘pathogen multipliers’ in that they will be unaffected by a bacteria but will be shedding it out in large numbers. This means younger animals in the same environment with less immunity (i.e. newborns) will have to deal with a much greater degree of environment infection. Removing the older animals or preferably moving the ewes still to lamb to a clean, unused pen will greatly reduce this ‘pathogen multiplier’ effect.

For more information on infectious causes of abortion see page 36. Find out more on the general topic in the Eblex ‘Reducing Lamb Losses for Better Returns’ handbook – see www.eblex.org.uk/returns or call 08702 418829.

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Health and hygiene when lambing

Preparation for lambing starts well before the lambing shed, says sheep veterinary consultant Paul Roger. He recommends making a lambing health plan with a vet not long after the tups go in, and making sure ewe nutrition is right to ensure good colostrum supply.

Paul also highlights the importance of vaccinating ewes for clostridial diseases in the run-up to lambing, to further enhance colostrum.

Mark Pass, an SQP advisor at Beeston Animal Health in Cheshire, adds mineral supplementation to the topic of nutrition, saying to talk to your local merchant about different options for drenches, licks and boluses.

"Your local SQP will have useful knowledge about deficiencies in your region, but nothing beats getting bloods done, so work with your vet and then involve us to look at the next steps," he says.

Paul says to prepare your lambing shed well in advance, aiming for a clean environment rather than a sterile one and allowing ewes to get accustomed to it before lambing down. Mark recommends taking an inventory of what equipment you have, stocking up on supplies, and finding



Lambing pens should have at least a foot of clean straw.

a suitable tool box or similar to keep everything together in the same place. His shopping list includes iodine, rubber rings, arm length gloves, lubricant, plenty of disinfectant, stomach tubes, twin lamb drench and calcium, among other things.

"It might be stating the obvious, but it's all about pre planning," he says. "Also remember lambing aids, because having those to hand can sometimes save having to call a vet. Chat to your vet about whether you should also have antibiotics to hand and what to use.

"The most important thing is artificial colostrum," Mark adds. "While there is nothing better than the mother's own milk, if you need a substitute you need it there and then and not have to wait until the shop opens on Monday morning."

Mark and Paul both say using lambing gloves for assisted lambings will reduce antibiotic use. Mark says: "It's about what's on your hands when you put them inside the ewe. I know at 12 o'clock at night you don't want to put a glove on, but if you have a ready stock to hand you are more likely to use them."

Paul says a routine intervention using

gloves and plenty of lubrication will not require antibiotics. "Use antibiotics where they are needed, but do not use them for blanket coverage to cover up defects on your hygiene," he says.

Bedding

Paul recommends 'at least a foot of fresh straw' in lambing pens and a thorough clean-down between occupants, using a powder disinfectant if there is not time for anything else. He also says to think about what to use for feed and water buckets, so lambs do not drown or break a leg.

Once turned outside, Paul says to always provide shelter. If none is available naturally then a cross of big bales will work well. If bad weather makes turnout difficult, he says any hard standing is better than overcrowding indoors – but again provide big bales for shelter and regularly supply dry bedding for stock to lie on.

Alternative bedding

Finding that absorbent wood shavings keep lambing pens drier than straw, Andrew Phillips from Lamphey, Pembrokeshire, is a convert to this bedding, despite it being more commonly used in horse stables.

He lambs 1,700 ewes indoors and goes through 200 bags of Bedmax shavings, saying it keeps pens more hygienic and significantly reduces lamb mortality by cutting watery mouth and scour; antibiotic use has also fallen. Andrew says shavings are comfy for ewes to lie on, less labour intensive, dust-free, easier to throw into pens, and particularly good on concrete floors where moisture doesn't run away easily. By choosing a pine shaving there are also associated antiseptic benefits against bacteria such as e.coli.

Farm assurance reminder

Under the updated Red Tractor farm assurance standards in England, scheme members must introduce new staff to a farm and explain their tasks to them. This includes extra labour at lambing time. Although this induction does not need to be documented for farm assurance reasons, writing a quick check list of how the lambing shed works is not a bad idea for all units (including non-assured farms) as it makes everything clear, and might even help yourself before lambs start arriving.

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Lambing shed tips

When we asked NSA members for tips for inside the lambing shed we got sent lots of clever and novel ideas.

Plastic sheeting for hygiene: Angela Doughty from Crediton, Devon, says the best investment they made was when her husband picked up a roll of thick plastic from a builders' merchant (the sort used under concrete). "Cut up into six-foot by three-foot sections it makes a perfect bed for lambing pens," says Angela. "After each ewe and lamb occupation we can pull the mat out with the dirty bedding, roll the whole lot up and put it on a wheelbarrow, unwrap and discard the bedding and recover the mat. A quick wash down with the hose, hang the up mat to dry and everything's ready to go for the next occupant. Clean bed, clean floor, speedy operation!"

Reusing wine bottles: Anwen Hughes, via Facebook, says: "Pour boiling water into a wine bottle and wrap it in a number of sheets of newspaper and place under a hypothermic lamb. Within 10 minutes the lamb will be up on its feet."



Making the most of space: James Davison, County Antrim, says he solved the problem of limited space in his lambing shed by keeping the feeding area tight and compact. He came across some free steel from a local distribution company so asked his friend to weld up some hurdles with wooden troughs to contain silage (pictured above). "I only had to buy the paint and the wood and a few bits so it wasn't expensive," James says. "The shed is not that wide so it makes the most of the space. And I can easily take them down, which leaves the shed free for storage in summertime."

Blackboard paint and police tape: Kevin Harrison, NSA Marches Region Chairman, swears by blackboard paint. He paints a black square on the wooden doors of his lambing pens so very time a ewe is penned up the day, am/pm and number of lambs can be easily and visible recorded. "That way, if you find a lamb running up and down the passageway you can quite easily work out which pen he's come from. We also write 'F' for a foster lamb and any problems, like 'low milk', so everyone can check them a bit better when feeding up."

Plastic tape (the type used by police to cordon off a crime scene!) is also used. Red and white tape is tied to the hurdles of pens that need suckling or extra checking, while yellow tape is used on pens with three lambs in. "When we spot a single lambing we can go straight to a yellow pen and take a lamb out to foster on."



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Superblocks

Prevent and control abortion-causing infectious disease

By Lee Innes
and Stewart
Cowan,
Moredun



Abortion in the flock can be a critical blow to any sheep farmer and has a significant financial and welfare impact – however most abortions are caused by preventable disease.

Two of the most frequently diagnosed causes of infectious abortions are enzootic abortion of ewes (EAE) and the parasite *Toxoplasma gondii*. With vaccinations available for both and increased knowledge of how the diseases spread, this article aims to ensure getting the best out of your next lambing season.

EAE is caused by *Chlamydia abortus* that spreads to the womb and the placenta killing developing lambs. Abortions usually occur in the last few weeks of pregnancy and often the first indication that something is wrong is the appearance of a stillborn lamb two to three weeks before the expected lambing date.

Enzootic abortion

The ewes usually appear healthy afterwards, although they may continue to have a vulval discharge for several days. The dead lamb, placenta and any discharges from the affected ewe will be contaminated with chlamydia bacteria and these are a source of infection for other ewes and also for people. Therefore these infectious materials, including any bedding, should be rapidly disposed of (burning is an effective means of killing the bacteria) and the affected ewe should be isolated for up to 14 days.

Infected lambing pens should be cleaned and disinfected. As *Chlamydia abortus* is also a human pathogen, it is a significant risk to pregnant women who should avoid all contact with lambing ewes and any clothing or materials used at lambing time.

It is very important to get an accurate diagnosis of the abortion and to do this the local veterinary lab will usually require the aborted lamb and the placenta to conduct the necessary tests. Your vet will then be able to work with you to advise on treatment of the flock with oxytetracycline, which may help during an active outbreak, and health management in the flock going forward.

If chlamydia infection is established in the flock it may be appropriate to look at vaccination approaches. There are currently two live attenuated vaccines available and your vet will help advise how these should be applied.

In flocks free of infection great care should be taken in buying in replacement stock, as this is a very common way for chlamydia-infected sheep to be introduced to your flock. Where possible, buy in replacement stock from EAE-accredited flocks and members of health schemes.

Toxoplasmosis

The *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite is spread to sheep flocks by animals consuming the oocyst (egg) stage of the parasite which is shed in the faeces of infected cats, contaminating the environment. The oocysts (eggs) can survive for up to 18 months in moist mild conditions and may contaminate feed and drinking water.

If the ewe gets infected for the first time during pregnancy, toxoplasma can spread to the placenta where it causes disease and can also infect the developing foetus. If infection occurs early in pregnancy,

this usually results in abortion, whereas later in pregnancy you may see stillbirths, mummified foetuses or birth of a live but sickly lamb. If a ewe aborts due to toxoplasma infection she will be immune to the same disease going forward and will be safe to keep for the next breeding season.

Diagnosis of infection is critical to ensure effective control and prevention strategies. Submission of dead lambs and their placenta if possible to the local veterinary investigation centre will help aid the diagnosis. Again, similar to *Chlamydia abortus*, toxoplasma is also a human pathogen and pregnant women should avoid contact with lambing ewes.

Vaccination

Because sheep develop very strong immunity following infection with toxoplasma, this disease can be controlled very effectively through vaccination. A live attenuated vaccine is available and it is recommended to be used three weeks prior to tupping to give very good protection against the disease.

There are no drug treatments that will cure animals of infection, although some coccidiostats have been shown to reduce the effects of toxoplasma infection in pregnant ewes.

As the cat is known to shed the infective oocyst stage of the parasite into the environment causing widespread contamination it is difficult to maintain a closed or 'clean' flock. Feed bins on the farm should be kept closed or covered to prevent cats gaining access and potentially contaminating livestock feed.

Diagnosis

As with all infectious diseases it is very important to get an accurate diagnosis so that you know what you are dealing with. Your vet or animal health advisor will be able to help you with practical advice on how best to manage the health of your flock going forward.

All NSA members are automatically associate members of Moredun too and as such, receive occasional technical newssheets. A newssheet on flock health planning is included as an insert with this magazine; if yours is missing please contact NSA Head Office. To support Moredun by becoming a full member or by buying Christmas cards please contact them on 01314 455111 or visit www.moredun.org.uk.

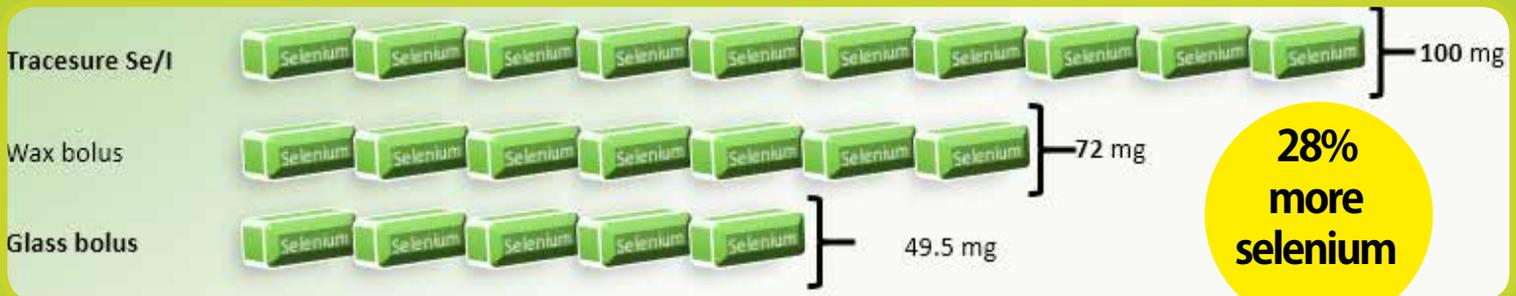


Cats are key to spreading toxoplasmosis, so keep feed covered and bins closed.

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Rearing greater numbers of lambs

By Harriet Fuller,
independent sheep vet,
and Dr Jessica Cooke,
Volac young animal
specialist

Neonatal mortality continues to run at an average of 15% of lambs scanned, costing around £10,000 in a 500-ewe flock, but 5% is an achievable target on most units.

Thin ewes generally produce lambs of lower birthweight, provide less/poorer quality colostrum and do not 'mother' their lambs as well, meaning poor body condition score at lambing is one of the main underlying causes of neonatal mortality.

Approximately 70% of foetal growth occurs in the last six weeks of pregnancy. To help meet the ewe's growing nutritional demands in late pregnancy and early lactation, introducing rumen protected fat to diets is an ideal way of increasing diet energy density and subsequently maintaining ewe body condition. Scanning enables rations to be tailored to the needs of the ewes and blood sampling ewes three to four weeks pre-lambing will determine if their energy and protein requirements are being met.

Body condition

Target body condition score for lowland ewes lambing indoors is BCS 3, or 2.5-3 for outdoor lambing to help minimise lambing difficulties. Poor ewe body condition at lambing usually results from inadequate nutrition or disease, or both. The main diseases causing thin ewes at lambing are lameness, liver fluke, haemonchosis and sheep scab, so it is vital that these diseases are controlled.

Lambs of both low and high birthweight have a reduced chance of survival compared to lambs in the optimal weight

The main causes of neonatal mortality

- Stillbirths – difficult births or infectious abortion agents.
- Starvation – failure of lamb to suck because too small, too weak or had a difficult birth, or failure of the ewe to provide enough colostrum or to 'mother' the lamb.
- Infection – (e.g. watery mouth) usually the result of insufficient colostrum.
- Hypothermia – more common in small lambs or as a result of insufficient colostrum.



Correct nutrition ahead of lambing will ensure healthy good-sized lambs and a ready colostrum supply.

range. Very small lambs are more at risk of hypothermia and take longer to stand and suck, whilst very large lambs are at risk of dying during birth or suffering trauma that delays standing and sucking. Optimal lamb birthweights for 70-85kg ewes mated to a terminal sire lambing indoors are 5.5-7kg for singles, 5-6kg for twins and more than 4kg for triplets.

Early intake of good quality colostrum is the single most important factor affecting a lamb's survival. Accumulation of colostrum in the udder is dependent on the ewe being adequately fed both energy

and protein in late pregnancy and on the ewe being in good body condition. Lambs require a minimum of 50ml/kg bodyweight of colostrum within the first two hours and 200ml/kg within the first 24 hours.

Triplet-bearing ewes are a particular problem, frequently having insufficient colostrum to satisfy all three lambs' requirements. Feed either supplementary colostrum collected from a single-bearing ewes or artificial colostrum.

In addition to high quality colostrum, to protect against disease, lambs must be born into a clean environment and have their navel treated with strong iodine. Treating lambs with antibiotics at birth is no substitute for these measures. Routine use of antibiotics is discouraged because of the risk of selecting for antibiotic resistant bacteria.

Disease

For diseases such as lamb dysentery, injecting pre-lambing ewes with a booster clostridial vaccine produces specific antibodies in colostrum to protect the newborn lambs. Infectious abortion agents such as enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis present within a flock usually results in the birth of weak lambs as well as typical abortions. Effective vaccines are available, however their uptake remains relatively low and both these diseases continue to have a significant impact in flock performance. *More on infectious caused of abortion on page 36.*

New products for sheep farms



Footbathing mat

G Shepherd Animal Health has launched a new 'Baa-Mat' which is designed to fit inside a creep feeder or be secured to a fence with a mineral block placed on top (see picture) to tackle lameness. The PVC mat has a thick sponge inside which is soaked with footbath chemical so ewes and lambs' feet are treated each time they feed. One mat per 100 ewes or lambs is recommended, with the

footbath solution topped up weekly and mats washed monthly.

New spot-on

Norbrook has launched a new spot-on product for sheep and cattle. Spotinor Deltamethrin (pictured) can be used to treat and prevent ticks, lice, keds and established blowfly strike on sheep, and lice and ticks on lambs. A number of pack sizes and presentations are available for different sized flocks.



Final weeks of nutrition are key

The rapid increase in the nutritional requirements of a ewe in the last six weeks of pregnancy mean careful management is vital, says Dr Michael Marsden, Trident Feeds technical manager.

"Approximately 70% of foetal growth occurs in the final six weeks, but as lambs continue to grow in the uterus they take up a greater proportion of body space, reducing the capacity of the ewe's rumen and decreasing their appetite by up to 30%," he says. "It's important to increase the nutrient density of the ration as the gestation period progresses to keep the additional nutrient supply at equal pace with foetal growth. Aiming for an energy content of at least 12.5MJ ME/kg DM in the supplementary concentrates, plus at

least 16-18% crude protein if feeding hay or silage, or 20% for straw-based rations."

Dr Marsden believes that given this year's favourable cereal prices, farmers will be looking to feed as much cereal-based feed as possible. However, too much starch can very quickly upset the rumen, causing acidosis. This can lead to lower birth weights and poor milk quality, ultimately affecting early lamb growth rates.

He says feeding cereals as part of the ration is not a problem as long as this starchy energy is balanced adequately in the rumen. "This can be managed by including a good amount of digestible fibre, which is available from feed sources such as sugar beet feed and low-copper high-protein bioethanol distillers' feeds,"

he says.

"Both feed sources have a slower rate of rumen fermentation when compared to cereals, so the risk of digestive upsets is reduced. The feed sources can also stimulate dry matter intake and provide more nutrients for milk production."

Dr Marsden says to take care when feeding wheat by-products, as products from whisky distilleries that use copper stills can have a high copper content. This is a key consideration for sheep, especially for breeds where copper is particularly dangerous. However, low copper bioethanol distillers' feeds are safe for sheep and offer the high energy content required during the late stages of gestation.

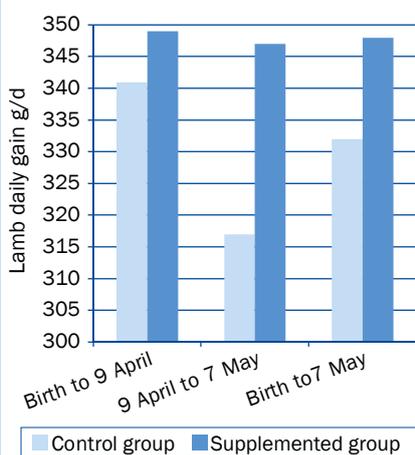
New Trial

A new trial from DSM Nutritional Products, overseen by Kate Phillips of Adas, has shown a significant improvement in lamb performance.

In the trial, 172 twin-bearing Suffolk cross Mule ewes were fed a diet based on big bale grass silage and a compound feed during late pregnancy and into lactation. At housing ewes were split into two groups with one group being supplemented with Crina Ruminants, a blend of essential oils designed to improve the effectiveness of rumen fermentation and feed efficiency.

Ewes lambed from 12th-15th February and all lambs had access to the same creep feed. There was no significant difference in lamb growth rate from birth to 58 days. However, the lambs from supplemented ewes grew 9% quicker

Lamb Growth Rates



from 59-87 days (see graph) and were 1.3kg heavier at 12 weeks old.

The supplemented lambs were sold earlier with half being sold in May compared to only one third of the control group lambs. Cold carcass weight,

conformation and fat class were similar for both groups.

"Correct ewe nutrition can have a big impact on milk supply and also prevent ewes losing too much condition," says DSM's Adrian Packington.

"It is likely that the faster growth rates in the later period were due to lambs receiving a better milk supply from the ewe. By improving the balance of rumen microflora, Crina Ruminants has a positive effect on overall fermentation, allowing ewes to sustain lactation. In addition, Crina is glucogenic which means it will have a positive effect on milk yield.

"The better milk supply meant the lamb's requirements for energy were better met allowing them to grow faster and finish sooner. This meant they were sold sooner, giving cashflow a welcome boost. This benefit is particularly relevant for early lambing flocks looking for the premium market and where ewes will tend to be fed more concentrates."



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Assessing your sheep flock performance

This winter is a good time to step back and assess what is happening in your business, says



Liz Genever, Eblex Senior Livestock Scientist, encouraging producers to get better at keeping records and analysing their figures.

The Eblex Better Returns Programme has developed a list of 27 records and 24 performance indicators for breeding flocks, which producers are encouraged to focus on in 2015.

“Of the 24 indicators, we’ve selected five key performance indicators (KPIs) which are a combination of information that can be gathered from invoices, e.g. lamb sales, and indicators that are fundamental to sheep production efficiency,” Dr Genever says.

“However, it’s important that individual businesses should identify their own strengths and weaknesses and look at establishing KPIs that relate to these.”

1. Scanning percentage

Scanning data is normally provided by the scanner, so is easy to capture. Industry targets are difficult to establish as the percentage will depend on the resources available, however most farms will have identified their ideal levels. Scanning rates can be used to check the health and fertility of the flock. High empty rates act as a prompt to the producer to identify the underlying causes and potentially take action.

2. Weaning weight

Analysing lamb growth rates to weaning is very important as it provides information about maternal performance, grass availability and parasite control. A target of over 300g/day could be established, but this will vary between systems. The key factor is to understand the reasons for any variation between growth rates, such as ewe body condition score, grass type and



Gathering information on lamb numbers and weights will allow flock performance to be monitored.

lameness.

The Eblex sheep breed survey found that a third of all producers never weigh lambs, which will be an issue for this indicator. If producers are not able to wean lambs at the appropriate time, weighing them at around 90 days of age or 100 days from the start of lambing could be useful. A standardised 90-day lamb weight could be calculated to help improve the robustness of this indicator

3. Lambs reared

The number of lambs reared per 100 ewes put to the ram includes all lambs sold finished, as stores or for breeding, any transferred as stores and those retained for breeding. Some of these numbers can be extracted from invoices or movement records. This indicator is a summary figure to help understand how well the system is performing. The target will vary depending on scanning percentage and resources.

4. Lamb losses

A measure of lamb losses is important as it’s fruitless to strive for higher scanning percentage when poor survival could reduce its impact. This indicator uses the data already collected for other KPIs in a different way. An ambitious but achievable target is to have a lamb survival of more than 90%.

Definition of records

A record is defined as something that is collected, either on paper or electronically, e.g. the number of ewes put to the ram, and can be from individuals or groups

A performance indicator uses records to calculate a figure. For example, lambs reared per 100 ewes to ram uses the number of ewes put to the ram and total number of lambs sold or retained for the relevant production year

A key performance indicator (KPI) is a performance indicator that has been identified as important to your business or system, for example weight of lamb reared per ewe put to the ram.

Keeping better records

“We have a range of tools available to producers, such as paper and online flock note books and record-keeping posters, as well as the Stocktake benchmarking project, to help producers collect and analyse their records,” says Dr Genever.

“We have also made efforts to standardise language and calculations across Eblex’s resources and have engaged with other levy boards and software companies to ensure performance indicators mean the same, irrespective of who has calculated them.

“In addition, in the future we plan on holding ‘record clinics’ at shows to help producers who have queries about what records they should be keeping, how to analyse this information, or what to do with the results.”

5. Total lamb weight

The weight of lambs reared per ewes put to the ram should include the weight of all lambs sold finished, as stores or for breeding, any transferred as stores and those retained for breeding. This indicator helps evaluate the efficiency of the system by understanding the weight reared per ewe. It is a flock measure and should not be used to compare individuals. The figure will vary depending on the producer’s selling policy, but could be useful to track performance over years.

There is more information on records and KPIs at www.eblex.org.uk/returns.

Key performance indicators

	Measurement	Definition	Example
Scanning percentage	% per ewe scanned	(Number of lambs scanned in the ewes/Number of ewes put to the ram) x 100	$(1070/600) \times 100 = 178\%$
Average daily liveweight gain to weaning	kg per day	(Average lamb weaning weight - 4)/Average age at weaning*	$(31 - 4)/102 = 0.26\text{kg per day}$
Lambs reared per 100 ewes to ram	Number	(Overall total of lambs reared/Number of ewes put to the ram) x 100	$(930/600) \times 100 = 155$
Lamb losses from scanning to rearing	% of lambs scanned for	$((\text{Number of lambs scanned in the ewes} - \text{Overall total of lambs reared})/\text{Number of lambs scanned in the ewes}) \times 100$	$((1070 - 930)/1070) \times 100 = 13.1\%$
Weight of lamb reared per ewe to ram	kg	Total weight of lamb reared/Number of ewes put to the ram	$37,300/600 = 62.2\text{kg}$

* Lamb birth weight is estimated at 4kg. Use the actual age if known or use the average age calculated from 10 days from start of lambing.

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Increasing interest in Wool Week

Campaign for Wool's Wool Week in early October was a hit once more, with a wide range of consumer-facing activities helping to cement it as a key date in the calendar for interior design and fashion retailers and designers.



The week kicked off with the 'Wool Ride', which saw more than 300 cyclists donned in woolen clothing ride 13 miles through the streets of London, taking in a range of activities laid on for riders by Campaign for Wool (CfW) partners.

Tim Booth, BWMB Head of Marketing, says: "The streets of Edinburgh were treated to a unique sight too, when Harris Tweed hosted a 'Tweed Ride' and riders took to their bikes in tweed outfits and stopping off at a number of key venues along the route, including tweed retailers, pubs and hotels."

Also helping showcase the versatility and vibrancy of wool as a fashion fabric were a number of high street retailers across the capital, including Austin Reed, Brora, Jaegar and John Smedley, which put on special woolen window displays.

On the interior design front, there was a full calendar of events and activities, spearheaded by the 'Wool Collection: Interiors' display at Southwark Cathedral, London, explains Mr Booth.

"This exhibition featured a range of wool interior pieces including some

specially commissioned items from leading retailers and designers, with more than 8,000 visitors passing through the exhibition during the week.

"Included in the exhibition was a tapestry by Weffaced and a Desert Rose rug from the Edward Fields Collection by Tai Ping, both of which drew plenty of admiration from visitors."

Alongside these more established designers and retailers, the Cathedral also hosted Wool Fringe, a selection of student award winners and innovative design concepts from the UK and New Zealand to showcase the versatility of wool in interior design.

Those visitors with a keen interest in wool and its various uses were also invited to take part in a range of knitting workshops and 'meet-the-maker' events, allowing them to gain further insight into the products and pieces on display.

Wool online

Another showcase event also took place at the Design Centre, Chelsea Harbour, where wool items from ONEWOOL.com (an online gallery showcasing a large collection of wool interior products) were placed on display, says Mr Booth.

"The display featured a range of items for the public to touch and enjoy and was aimed at highlighting the wide range of uses and applications which wool can be put to in the world of interior design."

British Wool Marketing Board Chairman



Items from the Wool Collection exhibition at Southwark Cathedral.

Malcolm Corbett says the growing success of Wool Week was a great endorsement for wool as a sustainable fibre which can be used in wide range of fashion and interior design products. "The success of the CfW and with it Wool Week, just goes to prove how interested the public are in the products around them.

"Interest in wool as both a fashion and interior design fibre continues to grow and that can only be good news for sheep farmers, as a growing demand should help maintain prices at more acceptable levels."

Interest rates lowest since 2008

By Richard Haines, Director of Old Mill Accountants

At the time of writing we have been involved in a deal with a client which resulted in a lending margin below 1%, something not seen since the early part of 2008.

This was for a loan over £1m for a strong business, resulting in good completion. But with many other deals also seeing well below 2% it is an interesting time for borrowing funds.

The challenge is what to invest in to take advantage of these cheap funds. With land values beyond a viable agricultural return based on current commodity prices, consider looking at developing your business or diversification. Looking at investment to add business efficiency or creating additional income streams

can only be a good thing, given the big fluctuations in farm gate prices.

With the Bank of England base rate at historic low levels and 25-year fixed rate loans available below 5% total cost, businesses can hedge interest rate risk a very attractive rate. While the very best rates are rarely available for refinancing alone, where this is combined with an investment opportunity many businesses have the scope to further reduce borrowing costs whilst the banks have the appetite.

Moving overdrafts

One opportunity for many businesses who have seen overdrafts rates quietly increase over the last six years is to look to move an element of this borrowing. This saves the annual arrangement fee, often attracts lower interest rates and sets out

a structured repayment plan on what for many has been long-term core debt. This is due to working capital requirements rising across almost all of agriculture but profits remaining stubbornly similar. The reality has seen bigger cash movement within the bank account for the same net return. Sound familiar? Moving this debt onto a structured term also removes the risk of your bank requesting the overdraft be repaid on demand.

Capitalising your business for the long term is key for stability, as the banks' appetite for farming businesses change like the wind. With current rates on offer there seems no time like the present. One thing to remember is, if your financial accounts for 2013/14 show reasonably strong profits, refinancing using the current accounts will most likely give you the best opportunity.



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On My Farm - The Next Generation

Our series focusing on young people in the sheep sector continues with Kate Robinson (24) the final of the 11 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors in 2014 to contribute to these pages. Kate is employed as a shepherd by P.G. and C.P. Whitehouse of Bradley Farm in the Forest of Dean, Gloucestershire, taking an active role with the breeding flock and store lamb finishing enterprise. The business also has large scale arable, beef and milking goat units.

We run a closed flock of 1,000 breeding ewes, which consist of pedigree Lleyms, pedigree Charollais and a commercial flock of Charollais-Lleyn crosses aimed at producing finished lambs. We lamb the majority of our Charollais and crosses indoors in January with the aim to meet the early finished lamb market, and follow in March with our Lleyn flock. We find the maternal traits of the Lleyn crossed with the Charollais works well for us in the fat lamb sector, but appreciate there are other equally good crosses for lowland flocks.

As a farm we like to embrace new technology. Although it often comes with glitches for a period of time, it allows the opportunity to enhance and tailor it to suit the farm. EID recording is often frustrating and time consuming with few immediate results compared to the sense of achievement found in drenching sheep, for example – but with added pressures from the Government and other sources, useful technology is needed within the industry for the future.

EID benefits

The positives for us include easily meeting farm assurance standards and aiding the development of our flock health plan. Although I believe it's important to not entirely rely on figures and lose sight of a good traditional breeding ewe, I also think the ease of recording will be utilised in the future to improve the quality of the ewes we produce to another level.

Another useful development in technology for us is mobile sheep handling systems, which have been crucial to the development of our flock. The farm itself is just under 1,000 acres but we have 15 different landlords with all the rented land we manage. This allows us to keep enough sheep to have efficiencies of scale, but as they are kept on multiple holdings, the furthest being around 14 miles away, the handling system allows us to be able to physically do it.

Mobility without the sheep handling system would be more of an exaggerated issue for us later in the year when we buy store lambs. This year we have bought just



Kate was taken on as a shepherd after work experience and part-time work.

under 2,000 store lambs, which are sold straight to slaughter through the nearby May Hill Collection Centre.

One of the questions many would ask is why take such large risks in a market which is known to fluctuate so rapidly. For us the store lambs are used largely to compliment our arable rotation, a demand we would struggle to meet with our breeding ewes alone.

From a financial perspective, to employ a full-time shepherd on the farm the work available must justify that employment throughout the year. The store lambs help facilitate this, but the price needs to be such that a living and profit can be made. The price of buying store lambs this year is around the same as last year, but the finished price is starting to increase compared to last year, hopefully offering a better return. I also spend a lot of time on the tractor at harvest and lend a hand at different times of the year with different jobs. That improves my efficiency as an employee.

When considering the future for young shepherds, it's ever more important for flocks to be productive businesses. For that reason I believe it is important that opportunities for young, interested and



Kate is enthusiastic about benefits offered offered by mobile handling and EID.

active people remain. I came from a non-farming background and started my full time employment as a shepherd with a degree in criminology and psychology! My interest in animals and farming has been encouraged from a young age however, and weekend sheep work experience as a teenager with the Whitehouse's and part time employment within their goat enterprise have given me the opportunity to enter the sheep sector.

Not every individual has the opportunity to develop a flock of their own through financial and industry related inhibitors, but I believe the future of sheep farming can continue successfully through new partnerships and employment arrangements not previously considered within the traditional sheep farmer image. For this to continue I feel it is important that the sector as a whole remains open and encourages young people, giving them the opportunities similar to those I have received.

Applications for the 2015 NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group are open until Friday 12th December at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk. Also visit the 'Case Studies' area of the website for more pictures of Kate's farm.



The Charollais flocks lamb in January, followed by the pure Lleyms in March.

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