

Sheep Farmer

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2015



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

**MEET THE 2015 NSA NEXT
GENERATION AMBASSADORS**

**CAP UPDATE FOR ALL FOUR
UK NATIONS**

**SPECIAL FEATURE ON CLA, AN
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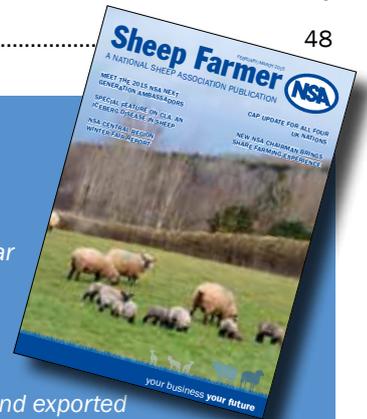
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Front Cover

The front page picture was taken by professional photographer Eric Beard and features January-born Shropshire lambs bred by NSA member Sue Farquhar of Ledbury, Herefordshire. Sue runs a registered flock of 55 breeding ewes, and lambs early in the year in preparation for the autumn pedigree sales. She is looking ahead to an exciting year with the Shropshires, saying the breed continues to do well and exported more than 200 breeding animals to Germany and France last year.



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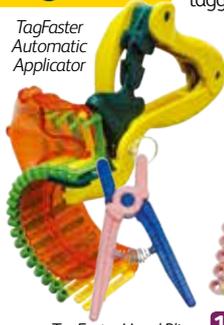
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Research can benefit us all – but only if it's 'good science'

I am certainly not anti-science, far from it in fact, and feel honoured to be part of an industry that is, and has been, so well served by the science and research community for so long.

But when I spoke at an Uplands Science meeting in Wales in late January, I sensed I made some comments that raised a hackle or two. The temperature of the meeting rose on a couple of occasions (as you come to expect with involvement from farming bodies, environmental researchers, social scientists and other academics) but my contribution to this was when I said quite clearly that while I didn't agree, I sympathised with the view that we could stop all new research and work harder at getting what has been done adopted by end users.

Knowledge transfer

I knew this comment in a room full of researchers would be a red rag to a bull, but there is a strong element of truth in it and most attendees accepted what I'd tried to say. In fact the increased investment in 'knowledge transfer' is



evidence of this being recognised already.

The topic has got me thinking since and I've concluded that there are at least two types of science, and probably more. The practical applied science that most farmers benefit from probably wouldn't succeed without the input of scientists who have a passion for the subject and its beneficiaries. This would include much of our research on soils, genetics, feeding, veterinary subjects and much more.

Blaming livestock

At the other extreme there is the science that sets out to prove a position that then influences policies and decisions, and far too often sets out to prove an already held position that is unlikely to change. This for me is bad science, with examples being some of the work that has been done seemingly to prove that livestock farming is bad. It's too often not independent or driven by commercial or political interest. Peer review processes should sort any problems out, but I'm still not convinced.

In the past there have been other categories of science that haven't always been helpful either – 'incomplete science', such as carbon accounting that doesn't consider complete life cycles and complex

interactions. It is this that supported the message that red meat production is climate-unfriendly in comparison with poultry and pork. Then there's been 'silo science' that has looked at things in isolation and ignored the impact or influence elsewhere. Examples here are some of the environmental science that has looked at single species and related habitat management that has ignored ecology and society in its wider sense.

But this meeting in Wales, and others I have attended, suggest there is the will to move on. The talk of holistic and connected research was refreshing, as was an acceptance that the involvement of farmers and practitioners would be helpful, and that knowledge transfer is a vital part of research work.

Farm assurance

Members may also have seen the NSA being vocal on Red Tractor Assurance standards over the last few months. NSA continues to support the principle of farm assurance in all UK nations. It gives confidence to the market, helps avoid the confusion of too many differing supply chain schemes, can be a good discipline for farmers, and already results in some earned recognition, reducing official inspections. We want this mainstream scheme to work alongside other smaller but more advanced schemes, to be the foundation of farm assurance, operating at a level that anyone can take part in. Our concern is that if it is perceived to move away from baseline requirements it will restrict the number of people who want to join and gold plate unnecessarily – *more on page 20*.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to John Geldard, who stood down as Chairman of the NSA Board in January. John has become a real friend as well, as being an incredible Chairman who has given so much time, energy and knowledge to the NSA's cause. John joins the NSA Vice Presidents and this will ensure his ongoing involvement. With John standing down I would like to welcome Samuel Wharry to the position of Chairman. Sam has already given three years of service as a Trustee Manager and we are all looking forward to the next chapter of an ongoing theme.

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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Save the date: NSA is supporting the Sheep Breeders Round Table event again this year, which will be held on Friday 20th - Sunday 22nd November in Nottinghamshire. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt.

News Update

Carcase splitting

Regular readers of this magazine will know that TSE controls in sheep and carcase splitting have been issues high on the NSA agenda for some time now, resulting in the TSEs: *The case for the relaxation of sheep controls* report last year.

The report concluded that while TSE controls in general had to be addressed by the EU to make them evidence-based and risk-proportionate, more immediate gains could be made by changing how the UK implements EU carcase splitting rules. NSA and NFU have been working closely on this and are pulling together a stakeholder meeting in early February to see if cross-industry agreement can be reached on using a calendar date for carcase splitting instead of checking for teeth.

NSA will keep members informed on the outcome of this meeting. In the meantime, you can read the NSA's TSE report at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/hot-topics.

Staff changes at NSA

January saw NSA Head Office wave goodbye to a member staff, as Caitlin Peck, NSA Communications Officer, left for pastures new. She is staying in the charity sector but has opted for a human cause other than sheep farmers!

Interviews for a replacement are in early February and we will update members of the addition to the NSA Head Office soon. Enquiries that were going to Caitlin are being handled by Joanne Briggs in the meantime – see panel opposite for contact details.

Chinese counsellor

Following the fact-finding tour of China by NSA, NFU and Eblex in September last year, NSA is very pleased to hear news of a new UK Agricultural and Food Counsellor to be based in Beijing.

The trip to China found there was huge potential for UK sheep meat exports, particularly third quarter but increasingly prime cuts over time, and a dedicated person in the role of furthering future trade opportunities is good news for the sheep sector.

This is a big investment by the UK Government and our own levy money via AHDB, and for the first time will see



New national chair

NSA offers a very warm welcome to Samuel Wharry as the organisation's new national chairman, as elected by the NSA Management Board in early January.

The national chairman is elected for a term of three years from within the pool of 12 regional trustee managers. Samuel comes from Carnlough, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, and has been an officeholder within NSA Northern Ireland Region for a number of years (including regional chairman), served on the NSA Board for three years and has a wealth of sheep farming knowledge to draw on for this national role. You can read about his sheep farming business, which includes a share farming agreement with new entrant James Davison, on page 24.

Samuel takes over from John Geldard,

an individual with responsibility to help British companies tap into China's growing interest in products and speciality foods. The role has been filled by Karen Morgan, who currently leads Defra's competitive farming team and will take up the new role this spring.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "We very much welcome the creation of this new role and, from what I saw on my trip to China last year, it is an essential step if we are to take advantage of this growing market. We are still some way from securing direct access into China for sheep meat, and to have someone based there and working for us will undoubtedly help pave the way. It is a big investment but should be a use of levy funds that reaps rewards in due course."

Read the NSA, NFU and Eblex report from China at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/hot-topics.

Wormer campaign

The consequences of not knowing whether your wormers are working efficiently are the focus of a new Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA) campaign, which was launched at its annual conference in late January.

The campaign will encourage sheep farmers to make sure their wormers are working, understand what could happen if they are not, and encourage them to take advice on worming strategy. This is the first campaign to be run by AHDA and will involve a variety of activities including advertising, farmer emails, press articles and printed materials.

Ian Mennie, AHDA Chairman, says: "AHDA's member companies and their staff are very much on the frontline when it comes to resistance. We have an



who has held the post of national chairman since January 2012. John reflects on his term in the top seat on page 22.

John and two other long-time supporters of NSA – John Cameron and David Prosser – were selected as NSA Vice Presidents at the same NSA Management Board meeting in January. A special welcome to all three of them.

obligation to make sure the advice we give and the products we recommend are absolutely right for the circumstances on each individual farm. The campaign will explain why such detailed information is required, and the amount of training undertaken and level of expertise that our SQPs are able to offer."

For more information on the campaign visit www.ahda.co.uk and look out for more information in NSA Weekly Email Updates and forthcoming editions of *Sheep Farmer*. Also see SCOPS advice on page 42.

NSA Lambing List

For members using the NSA Lambing List to advertise for help this lambing season, please note that a new feature for the list this year is the ability to remove your advert once you have filled the position. If you would like your details removed from the online listing please email membership@nationalsheep.org.uk or call NSA Head Office. Also please get in touch if you do not currently receive the NSA Weekly Email Update.

Book giveaway

There was an extra present under the tree for the 11 NSA members who were winners in our Christmas Book Giveaway. We gave away four copies of *Counting Sheep*, four of *Much Ado About Mutton* and three of *Dogs of the Shepherds* to: John Davies, Ceredigion; Chris Farnsworth, Wiltshire; John Flanders, Ceredigion; Shaun Hall Jones, Carmarthenshire; Kevin Harrison, Gloucestershire; Peter Little, Dumfries and Galloway; Colin Lowrie, East Lothain; Derek Parrish, Scottish Borders; Joe Pickford, Oxfordshire; Tuckett and Warne, Devon; and Alan West, Kent.



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Regional Reports

Central

By Richard Wheeldon, Chairman
Well it's been a busy couple of months here in NSA Central Region with many new exciting opportunities. We had our AGM in November where Bob Payne, Chairman of the last 13 years stood down.

Bob has been a fantastic Chairman throughout the last decade and is a great ambassador for the sheep industry. During Bob's time in the position we saw many threats and changes to the industry, including Schmallenberg, bluetongue and the introduction of EID recording. I am sure he will remain a strong member of NSA Central Region and will continue to work hard to promote the UK sheep industry. As well as myself being elected as the new Chairman, Sarah Helliwell came on as Vice Chairman.

As a brief introduction for readers, I am a sheep and beef lecturer at Reaseheath college, and also live and work on the family sheep and beef farm in Buxton, Derbyshire. Our new Vice Chairman Sarah Helliwell is a tutor at DART Training as well as running the family farm in Edale. Anne Payne has also returned as our Regional Manager and I am sure Anne needs no introduction due to her many years working within Central Region.

My first couple of months as Chairman have been busy, as for the rest of the region, in the run-up to the NSA Central Region Winter Fair. It was very exciting to be involved in this event and I hope visitors enjoyed the day as much as I did.

See the event report on page 10.

Cymru/Wales

By Helen Davies, Development Officer
NSA Cymru/Wales Region is looking ahead to its AGM on Thursday 19th February. Members from our region will find an AGM notice enclosed with this magazine, while the minutes of the last meeting are on the NSA website at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events. Copies of the accounts will be available at the meeting or by request.

Since the last edition of Sheep Farmer magazine you will be aware that the moorland rate has been scrapped and hard work has started on a new Wales-based CAP Basic Payment Scheme. The new options are expected to be available for consultation later in the month. The Deputy Minister has sought views from a number of bodies and formal consultation will commence when she is satisfied that the proposals are ready for wider consideration.

Although the Welsh Government has been clear throughout that all payment rates were indicative pending establishment of total entitlements under the new BPS, it is inevitable that this revised situation will result in change to the payments that farmers might have expected in the years ahead.

The budget available for Pillar I payments remains as before; some redistribution is therefore inevitable. It is also likely that there will be some consequential impacts on Welsh Government's ability to make payments in December 2015. NSA Cymru/Wales

continued on page 6

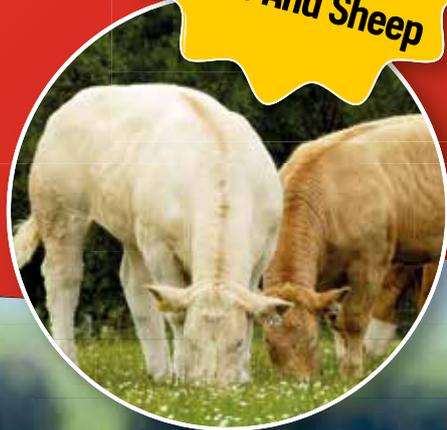


At the NSA Central Region AGM, Bob Payne (left) retired as Chairman, passing the role to Richard Wheeldon (right), supported by Sarah Helliwell (centre) as Vice Chairman.

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► Region will be seeking members' views when the consultation is available, and please feel free to get in touch at any time on this or other topics.

During December and January a survey of NSA members in Wales was conducted on quarantine units and the current six-day standstill rule; thank you to those members who replied, but unfortunately the meeting where we would have presented those views to the Welsh Government was postponed due to bad weather. That means further discussions on EID Cymru have also been delayed.

Please remember to put Tuesday 19th May 2015 in your diary for NSA Welsh Sheep at Glanmiheli and Drefor. This is an exceptional venue and looks to have the makings of another fantastic event.

Eastern

NSA Eastern Region is looking ahead to its Youthful Shepherd Event, which will build on the success of a similar event in 2013.

The date and venue are confirmed as Saturday 6th June at Darley Stud, Darley, Newmarket, Suffolk, by kind permission of Darley Stud Management. Look out for more details about this exciting event for young people in the sheep sector in due course.

Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman

Farm assurance, health plan templates and the new EID tagging rules would seem to be the hot topics of debate at the moment.

While the new Red Tractor Assurance health plan templates seem to have caused concern in other regions, NSA Marches Region members have remained quite quiet about them. Is that a sign that you are all happy to adopt the new standards?

Why do we as sheep farmers seem to fear the



NSA 2015 Sheep Events

As an ongoing effort to offer NSA members more for their subscription, entry to NSA regional sheep events will be FREE* this summer. Encourage friends, family and neighbours to become a member by calling 01684 892661 or going to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership.

*Conditions apply; see website for details. NSA Highland Sheep not yet confirmed for free entry

visitation of the farm assurance inspector so much? Is it a feeling of being judged to be guilty before proving your innocence? Is it because you feel you are being judged on your paperwork skills rather than your flock management or animal health and welfare skills? Do you feel the inspectors are there more as a box filling exercise than to be interested in what you actually do? Get in touch to share your views.

New EID regulations are now in place. Does this now make the EID rules easier to understand and implement, or are they just confusing you more? We have known these changes were going to happen for sometime, yet they still seem to be catching some sheep farmers out. Again, we would be interested to hear your views.

Health planning, good recordkeeping of flock performance and attention to detail are all good traits to have in any sheep business. The ability to trace animal movements fast and effectively could help slow down the spread of a disease outbreak. Unfortunately this technology cannot be 100% accurate and while sheep farms try their hardest to be efficient in recording their animal movements they are being penalised for the smallest unintentional errors.

The danger is that by having things forced upon us means some may see them as unnecessary bureaucracy and interference, and not see the benefits that many of these things could have on the performance of their flock!

On a final note, NSA Marches Region would like to congratulate Samuel Wharry on his appointment as NSA National Chairman and we would like to thank retiring Chairman John Geldard for all his work and support over the last three years.

Northern

By Julie Sedgewick, Manager

The NSA Northern Region AGM will take place on Wednesday 25th February 2015 at The Hired Lad, Penrith Mart, Penrith, Cumbria. The members AGM will commence at 7.30pm and then at 8pm we will have an open meeting. Please look out for the AGM invitation and agenda enclosed with this edition of Sheep Farmer.

NSA North Sheep 2015 will be held on Wednesday 3rd June at Millstone Moor

Farm, Cockermouth, Cumbria. There will be regular updates at www.northsheep.org.uk and members are admitted for free in 2015.

NSA Northern Region is always keen to encourage the next generation of sheep farmers and we are excited about the NSA North Sheep Young Shepherd of the Year Competition at the event, sponsored by Newton Rigg and Askham Bryan colleges.

The competition is open to young people aged 16-26 on 30th July 2016. All entrants must have a British Wool Marketing Board Blue Seal Certificate for shearing and complete an application form; no entry on the day. The winner will receive £300 prize money, together with the Ali Johnson Perpetual Trophy; there will also be cash prizes paid to sixth place.

During the day entrants will take part in five rounds designed to test their shepherding skills and wisdom. They will be expected to show judgement in lamb selection; their speed and handling abilities in sheep shearing; their dosing, vaccinating and foot trimming skills; answer questions on flock management and health issues; and demonstrate ATV handling skills. Rules and entry forms are on the website.

Northern Ireland

By Edward Adams, Development Officer

NSA NI Region feels honoured, delighted and very proud (but not surprised) that Samuel Wharry has been elected as the new Chairman of NSA.

The region first identified his potential in 1992 when he won the NI Region Sheep Farmer of the Year. The next year he agreed to sit on our regional committee and as they say 'the rest is history'. In choosing Samuel the Board of Trustees has elected a chairman who is a person of great integrity, who is genuine, a wise counsel and dedicated to the sheep industry.

As 15th May looms closer and the deadline for applications for payment under the new CAP nears the advice is to read the new rules carefully and fill in the forms accurately as mistakes will attract increased and unwelcome scrutiny from DARD. Pillar II funding is slow to be finalised but we are in regular contact with DARD officials lobbying for a fair share of the funding to be allocated to the sheep sector.

As is always the case at the beginning of a new year we look forward to what we hope will happen in the sheep sector (which is seldom the same as what actually does happen!) On the island of Ireland, both north and south, we depend on exports of sheep meat for our survival. China and potential exports to that vast country and its huge population is regularly commented on, but should be

looked upon as an aspiration not a forgone conclusion.

Sheep meat production in Great Britain and Ireland may increase this year but we are unlikely to see much increase in the rest of the EU and with the likelihood of a continued market in China for New Zealand demand for our lamb should be steady. Unfortunately the retail price of lamb is something of a barrier to increased sales, so we should not expect huge increases in farm gate prices.

Hopefully the input costs for the incoming year will have stabilised and while we keep a careful eye to our production costs 2015 should be a reasonable year for sheep producers.

Good luck with lambing and try to keep as many as possible alive. Remember those extra ones are the profit!

Scotland

By George Milne, Development Officer
Our Scottish Region AGM and Dinner took place at the beginning of January, this year at a new venue, the Novotel in Edinburgh. The hotel proved to be an excellent venue and, most importantly, the lamb was cooked to perfection!

Earlier in the afternoon we held a question and answer session where two Scottish Government officials, Ian Davidson and John Maxwell, took questions from the audience on a variety of issues under CAP reform. This gave members the opportunity to have direct contact with key decision-makers in our new scheme, which will see the shifting to area based payments across Scotland this year. Topics ranged from setting regions, regional boundaries and the new entrants scheme, right through to LFASS.

The AGM saw business as usual, with Sybil Macpherson retuning to the Chair, Ian Hepburn remaining as Vice



NSA Scottish Region Ambassadors Jennifer Craig and Andrew Prentice have been invited to join the regional committee. They are pictured here at NSA Scot Sheep 2014 with Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead.

Chairman and Maimie Paterson re-elected as Treasurer. Sybil and Neale McQuistin remain on the national Board of Trustees as our Scottish Region representatives. It was agreed that our two regional NSA Next Generation Ambassadors from 2014, Jennifer Craig and Andrew Prentice (pictured), would become full committee members, and it is great to see their enthusiasm continued in this way.

The 40 plus attendees at the AGM received a chairman's report for the year, a financial report and a presentation from myself on lamb numbers, volumes and pricing. In the evening numbers increased to 60 plus for the dinner, where we were joined by other industry representatives and sponsors as our guests.

After the meal we were treated to speeches from Jennifer Craig and former

NSA Chief Executive John Thorley, which gave us the young to old!! Or rather shared visions of the sheep sector from the new to the more experienced. Unfortunately our third speaker Andrew Prentice was unable to travel across from Iona in the bad weather, but he filmed a short speech and you can watch it on the NSA YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/user/natsheepassoc. The evening was rounded off with a fantastic performance from Lauren McQuistin, whose singing was simply brilliant. In addition £570 was raised for charity.

Thank you to everyone who made the event highly successful and I would encourage many more of you to try and attend next year.

continued on page 8

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► NSA South West

By Bryan Griffiths, Chairman

The new year heralded in the almost comically chaotic new tagging regulations and some very wet weather.

My rain gauge registered over five inches in the first two weeks of January. With lambing fast approaching on many farms in South West England, dry ground and shed space are at a premium.

In spite of some confusion over tagging requirements, the store market appears very tempting for small, tail-end hoggets. The buoyant trade for draft ewes has certainly taken the sting out of finding empty ewes at scanning.

It is worth sparing a thought for the rams at this time of year. The average life expectancy is pitifully short. The poor old breeder is often blamed for producing 'soft' stock but how often do we see exhausted rams left to fend for themselves in the winter on the pretext that they will not be needed until next season? A little TLC might pay dividends in the long term.

I would like to thank all those who applied to the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme this year. The project is growing in popularity and it is a great shame that due to limited places we had to turn away so many strong candidates.

Just a reminder that our AGM will be held at Fingle Glen Golf Hotel on Wednesday 18th February at 7.30pm. The business will be followed by two

presentations, one from NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker on his trip to China, and one from Sam Bullingham, recently selected NSA Next Generation Ambassador, on becoming world champion Young Shepherd.

South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

The NSA South East Region AGM was held at FAI Farms near Oxford in early December, and prior to the AGM there was a farm walk around the farm to hear about some of the research work carried out there.

We saw pigs being fed silage, and ducks on a former slurry lagoon that was now stocked with carp which feed on the ducks' excrement (*pictured*). Another interesting subject that was covered was on 'short scrotum castration', which is carried out there.

One change made at the AGM saw Martyn Fletcher elected to replace David Prosser as one of the regional representatives on the NSA English Committee. We are very grateful to David for all the time he has given to the region over many years on the NSA Council and then the English Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee and, of course, the Executive Committee when David was our Regional Chairman. David has been and still is a very staunch supporter of our region and the NSA in general.



A flock of a different type! This flock of ducks was one of the sights on the NSA South East Region farm walk at FAI farms, which support a diversification enterprise of carp in the dirty water lagoon.

After the AGM we had a very interesting presentation from Gareth Jones of the British Wool Marketing Board and another from Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, who reported on his recent visit to China.

We are very pleased to report that there has been a winner from NSA South East Region in the NSA membership recruitment campaign. Congratulations to Tom Dabron from Surrey for winning a 3in1 Advantage Feeder (*more on page 12*).

Finally, it is good to report that the region had five excellent candidates apply for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme. Our thanks to NSA South East Region committee members Peter Fairbanks, Alan West and James Hamilton for joining Joanne Briggs from NSA Head Office to interview and select our candidate (*more on page 14*). We are planning to have some training days within the region for all of the candidates from both this and last year.



NSA 2015 cut-out-and-keep diary

- **NSA Sheep Centre at Balmoral Show:** Wednesday 13th to Friday 15th May at Balmoral Park, Belfast
- **NSA Welsh Sheep:** Tuesday 19th May at Glanmeheli and Drefor Farms, Kerry, Newtown, SY16 4LN. See www.welshsheep.org.uk
- **NSA North Sheep:** Wednesday 3rd June at Millstone Moor Farm, Cockermouth, Cumbria, CA13 0QA. See www.northsheep.org.uk
- **NSA Highland Sheep:** Tuesday 9th June at Fearn Farm, Fearn, Ross-shire, IV20 1TL. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-scotland/highlandsheep
- **NSA Sheep South West:** Tuesday 16th June at Higher Nichols Nymet, North Tawton, Devon, EX20 2BP. See www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk
- **NSA Sheep Centre at Royal Highland Show:** Thursday 18th to Sunday 21st June at the Royal Highland Showground, Edinburgh
- **NSA Sheep Northern Ireland:** Monday 6th July at Ballymena Market, Woodside Road, Ballymena, Co. Antrim, BT42 4QJ. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events
- **NSA Sheep Centre at Royal Welsh Show:** Monday 20th to Thursday 23rd July at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells
- **NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale:** Monday 3rd August at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY. See www.nsaramsales.co.uk
- **NSA South West Ram Sale:** Wednesday 19th August – TBC – at Exeter Livestock Centre, Exeter, EX2 8FD. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events
- **NSA Eastern Region Shearling Ram Sale:** Friday 21st August at Rugby Farmers Mart, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, CV8 2RG. www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events
- **NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale:** Friday 17th September at Melton Mowbray Market, Leicestershire, LE13 1JY. See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events
- **NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale:** Monday 21st September at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY. See www.nsaramsales.co.uk

STOP PRESS

The second ever NSA Highland Sheep was announced as Sheep Farmer went to press. It is a very exciting venue, by kind permission of award-winning farmer John Scott; more information in the next Issue of the magazine.

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Positive day for those who braved snow at Central Region Winter Fair

Some extreme winter weather affected attendance at the NSA Central Region Winter Fair, but those who battled through the snow were rewarded with a useful and enjoyable day.

An impressive 22 under 27-year-olds made it to the event to compete in the Young Shepherd of the Year competition, with Tom Bird taking the overall title and best under 21-year old.

It was a busy month for Tom Bird with NSA competitions, as he also won a free EID stick reader kit in a prize draw – see page 12 for more information about Tom's win and his family farm in Derbyshire.

School closures made the Inter-Schools Junior Shepherd competition impossible, but DART has agreed to run it in the coming months so the young agricultural students can still develop their shepherding skills.

Seminar area

Trade stands enjoyed a busy enough day considering the conditions, with many reporting quality time spent with the visitors who made it, but it was the seminar area that saw the most activity, with good attendance throughout the day.

Nicola Dodds of Eblex provided an insight into the consumer's view of lamb and how this understanding could be used to increase the amount of lamb meat bought in this country.

"Lamb is the highest priced form of



A demonstration of flystrike protection by Novartis drew a strong crowd.



Alan Alderson was one of the speakers in the popular seminar area.



Winning young shepherds, both students at Reaseheath College, Cheshire, Richard Bailey (left) and Tom Bird (right).

protein and as household budgets have tightened we have seen a fall in sales," she said. "Most people have a repertoire of four dishes per week. Within the weekly list of meals there has been a shift to 'one pot' meals such as pasta and research shows younger people love spices. We need to be mindful of this when we promote lamb to different audiences."

Targeting the mass and inexperienced cooks in the younger age groups is the priority for Eblex, Mrs Dodds said: "We want to rejuvenate the great British roast and we have successfully launched the lamb mini roast which retails at around £5 and is quick and easy to cook."

Carcase consistency

Future lamb promotions must be underpinned by high quality carcase production, she added: "Consistency in terms of product and pricing is central to our campaign. It is vital customers have a good experience every time they buy lamb, so the product must be right."

The topic of sheep identification and recording generated lively debate later in the day, with Terry Gurnhill of Defra describing the new Animal Reporting and Movement Service (ARAMS) for England.

"The new ARAMS database brings together a number of statutory requirements within one system. It allows farmers to maintain a fully editable electronic holding register and it solves the problem of mixed batch recording," Mrs Gurnhill said. "Currently it does not have the capacity to allow for multi-species movements or updating of miscellaneous flock data, such as medicine records or abattoir kill figures, but these enhancements could be added over time."

Mrs Gurnhill suggested farmers may

Winter Fair 2013 Fact File

Venue: Bakewell Market, Derbyshire.

Date: Thursday 29th January.

Young Shepherd of the Year: Tom Bird, Derbyshire.

Inter-Schools Junior Shepherd: Postponed.

Schools Wool Challenge: Hope Valley Close.

Under 17s photos: Louis Foster (12).

Breed society stand: North Country Cheviot Sheep Society.

Trade stand: Rumenco.

benefit from some relaxation in sheep movement recording in the future:

"In 2016, we hope to introduce a system of land association within a 10-mile radius of the main holding. This would mean farmers who regularly use land parcels within this area could register them annually and move animals between them without the need for reporting or recording."

Shearwell Data, major sponsor for the event, highlighted the options available to link farm management software with ARAMS, while Frank Langrish, a sheep producer from Sussex, said more had to be done to make the system simpler to use.

EID potential

"Electronic identification represents a great opportunity to reduce paperwork and offers potential to improve disease traceability. Unfortunately the ARAMS website is very user unfriendly and is a very tedious way of recording flock movements," he said.

A constructive discussion on managing land in agri-environment schemes rounded off the day. Alan Alderson, Chairman of the Swaledale Breeders Association commented on the positives and pitfalls of stewardship schemes:

"The extra income is very useful and schemes can integrate well into farming systems," he said. "But I am very concerned about very low stocking levels in some agreements and I do not think this is good for the ground or the wildlife."

Other event highlights included a popular flystrike demonstration by Novartis, a hands-on Eblex area and a 'make more of wool' feature led by the British Wool Marketing Board.

More online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/crwf.

NSA Welsh Sheep

Two very different farming systems run by two brothers will be open to visitors to NSA Welsh Sheep.

The adjoining holdings have great variation, yet the two families face the same difficult question – how much longer will they be able to afford to produce top quality livestock with the change in the system of support payment looming?

This and other key questions facing the sheep sector will be tackled at the event, which will offer farm tours, seminars and demonstrations. Welsh Sheepdog Society trials and a sale of hogs will also be



Views from Glanmiheli stretch most of the way from Shrewsbury to Snowdon.

Host farms

The event will be based at Glanmiheli Farm, Kerry, Newtown, farmed by Geraint and Anabel Powell, Rose (21), Lloyd (19) and Billie-Jo (16). They put Welsh Mules to Suffolk, Charollais and Texel tups, selling finished lambs to Waitrose and at Welshpool Market. The event also takes in Drefor, farmed by Morton and Mandy Powell, with children Megan, Mary and David. They run 800 Welsh Mules, 400 Beulahs and 400 Welsh Mountain ewes, and farm some rented ground just over the border in England. The two farms stand 600-1,400 feet above sea level.

among the attractions, while competitions will include Welsh Young Shepherd of the Year, Ready Steady Cook and wool on the hoof.

Competition entries and more information at www.welshsheep.org.uk.

NSA North Sheep

With a return to the county of Cumbria, NSA North Sheep will be hosted this year at Neil and Sally Martson's 350-acre Millstone Moor Farm, near Cockermouth.

This traditional Lake District farm offers something for everyone, and the event's farm tours will showcase the family's management techniques and renowned Highberries crossing Blue Faced Leicester flock and top quality North of England Mule ewe lambs. There will be in the region of 5,500 head of sheep on the farm, a full cross-section from the hardy hill ewes to lowland sheep.

The packed one-day event, supported this year by Carrs Billington as major sponsor, provides a showcase for anyone involved in the sheep industry with competitions, demonstrations, seminars and around 200 trade stands.

Julie Sedgewick, NSA North Sheep 2015 Event



Neil Marston is proud to host NSA North Sheep 2015.

Organiser, says: "This will be a tremendous industry event where visitors can meet with industry experts, visit the many trade stands and see first-hand one of Cumbria's most notable flocks."

Features include the Young Shepherd of the Year contest for 16-26-year olds, North of England inter-county shearing competition, and a Ready, Steady Cook-style cookery contest.

Competition entries and more information at www.northsheep.org.uk.



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Ag-student wins first stick reader

The first winner in this year's NSA membership recruitment prize draw, in conjunction with Shearwell Data, is 18-year-old student Tom Bird.

Tom attends Reaseheath College in Cheshire, as well as working on the family's sheep and arable farm in South Derbyshire, running 1,800 North Country Mules.

"When I got the email to say I had won the draw I thought it was some of my college mates having a laugh, but fortunately it wasn't and I had actually won it," Tom says. "It will be a great tool on the farm to be able to quickly and easily record eartags when dosing sheep, moving them and doing other jobs.

"My interest in sheep started from the moment I was born. I have spent virtually every day when I'm not in education helping my dad run the farm, and I am currently studying at Reaseheath for a level 3 extended diploma in agriculture."

The kit won by Tom is the first of 12 being given away by NSA in the membership recruitment campaign. New NSA members automatically get entered into the draw, as well as existing members who recommend a friend or neighbour to sign up to NSA. Anyone in the draw who is not lucky enough to win the first time has their entry rolled over to the subsequent draws, and there is no limit to the number of entries existing members have, so the



Richard Wheeldon, NSA Central Region Chairman (right), congratulates Tom Bird (left) on his win.

more new members you recommend the higher your chance of winning. Simply add your membership details to the form on the facing page and pass it to someone you know to join up as an NSA member.

Tom joined the NSA just before Christmas. He says: "I joined up after spending many years reading my dad's copy of NSA Sheep Farmer magazine. I find it a great place to get new ideas and be able to follow the trends in a modern and evolving sheep industry."

Tom is looking forward to the

Winner's Profile:

- 18-year-old agricultural student at Reaseheath College.
- Actively involved in family farm near Derby, running sheep and arable enterprises.
- 1,800 North Country Mules, with replacements sourced from the same breeder every year to reduce disease risk.
- Texel, Suffolk and Charollais rams used, all with high EBVs and sourced directly from farms.
- 1,000 best Mule crosses sold each year as breeding females.
- Remaining lambs sold deadweight.

forthcoming lambing season, saying the family's in-lamb Mule ewes will return from winter grazing six weeks beforehand, ready to be lambed outside. A custom-built trailer is used to move ewes and newborn lambs inside for a few days, before being turned out to good grass. Most of the grazing land on the farm is adjacent to the rivers Trent and Derwent, which Tom says is prone to quite bad flooding in winter and spring and 'makes for some interesting sleepless nights!'

NSA is giving away a total of 12 readers between 1st December 2014 and 30th November 2015. More information, terms and conditions at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.

Sixth and final 3in1 feeder won

Another young NSA member was the recipient of the final Advantage 3in1 Feeder given away in last year's NSA membership recruitment campaign – 19-year-old Tom Daborn (pictured) of Chobham, Surrey.

Tom balances the running of a small sheep enterprise of pedigree Suffolks and commercial Lleys with his vet training at the Royal Veterinary College, London.

He and his father have access to around 70 acres, most of which is offered as grazing in return for pasture



maintenance. Although Tom considers himself lucky to have secured this land, there are limited options for improving grassland and much of the land is also unavailable in the summer months due to haymaking.

Tom says: "I look forward to using the 3in1 feeder to help finish lambs when we are short of pasture during haymaking. What excites me the most about the feeder is its ability to utilise feeds that would otherwise cause acidosis or bloat. I'm hoping that, in time, this might bring the feed bill down, as I can tailor the feed to the demands of the sheep more closely."

Tom received his NSA membership as a Christmas gift in 2013, and feels that the information and support NSA provides will be invaluable in his career as a vet. He says: "As someone training to enter a profession very close to agriculture, I feel it's important to keep in contact with the commercial end of the sheep sector. NSA is very good at providing an overview of

the entire industry, which is good because there's always something or someone to learn from that you otherwise wouldn't have heard of."

Tom is the final winner in NSA's 2014 membership recruitment prize giveaway, which has seen six feeders given to NSA members in Warwickshire, Worcestershire, Somerset, County Antrim, the Isle of Man, and now Surrey.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "It is always a great pleasure to give such exciting prizes to NSA members, but particularly so for the last two draws when it has been young members just getting started in the industry and with a passion for new ideas and technology. We wish both Tom Bird and Tom Daborn great success completing their studies and all the best for their sheep enterprises. I would like to extend a special thank you to Advantage Feeders for generously providing the six 3in1 feeders given away in 2014, and look forward to working with Shearwell Data on this year's campaign."

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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Exciting year ahead for NSA

Next Generation Ambassadors

After a hugely successful year for the first ever NSA Next Generation Ambassadors in 2014, it was with great excitement that NSA opened the application process for the 2015 programme.

Word had spread of the scheme – which offers professional and personal development training for young people in the sheep sector – and NSA Head Office was swamped with an incredibly high standard of application. NSA regional committees shortlisted and met with applicants in their area, and with nine interview panels set up around the UK the 12 places on the programme were quickly allocated.

Joanne Briggs, NSA Communications Manager, comments: “We thought it was tough to select our 2014 Ambassadors, but it was even harder this year. With only 12 slots available we were forced to turn away some truly remarkable young people and it was with great difficulty that we whittled the applicants down. Our thanks go to everyone who put in an application. Your passion and enthusiasm shows the depth and strength of our sector, and how fortunate we are in the professionalism and dedication of the young people coming through as the sheep farmers of the future.”

The 12 individuals selected for the 2015 NSA Next Generation Ambassador Programme will attend



five delivery sessions through the year, covering a wide range of sheep topics, business skills and personal training, as well as gaining the qualities to promote and support the sheep sector in the future as a long-term NSA Ambassador. They will meet the 2014 Ambassadors, who are all still closely linked to NSA and play an active part in encouraging other young farmers and discussing the issues facing sheep keepers around the UK.

Keep an eye out for coming editions of Sheep Farmer magazine for reports of the delivery sessions running throughout the year and the partners who generously support NSA in providing them.

The NSA Next Generation project is not just about the ambassadors that are selected each year, but also provides information and promotes opportunities via the website, runs an annual conference and sees NSA regional committees sponsor and support young people in their area. Find out more at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors 2015

1. Lynn Allison, Newton Stewart, Wigtownshire
2. Sam Bullingham, Okehampton, Devon
3. Thomas Carrick, Alston, Cumbria
4. Ewan Cumming, Denton, Norfolk
5. Jonny Farmer, Ballymena, County Antrim
6. Harry Frederick, Tonbridge, Kent
7. George Gough, Knighton, Powys
8. George Hartley-Webb, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
9. Clarke Hibberd, Inverurie, Aberdeenshire
10. Oliver Newman, Cirencester, Gloucestershire
11. Georgie Radmore, Yelverton, Devon
12. Lewis Sayers, Bingham, Nottinghamshire

Lynn Allison (22)

Having graduated from the Scottish Agricultural College (SRUC) in July, Lynn is now helping on the family farm, establishing her own flock and working in the local market at Newton Stewart.



She currently has 30 Scottish Blackface ewes, but says she is reliant on the goodwill of her mother letting her have land at home and will need to rent grazing locally to increase numbers further. She spent some time in New Zealand this summer and is also keen to head back there to better understand farming without subsidies.

Lynn believes there are lessons to be learnt from New Zealand, but at the same time understands the importance of a payment system for farmers at home. She is concerned that higher payments for better land in Scotland and a focus on forestry on poorer land will reduce areas of sheep grazing and make it even harder for people like herself getting started. She therefore wants to keep all her options open.

She says: “I hope to gain further knowledge and skills as an Ambassador, to increase my chances of acquiring extra land to increase my flock size. But being an Ambassador also improves my employability if I were unable to increase my flock size.”

Top fact: Lynn did her university honours project on the effect of genotype on lambing ease and lamb survival. She collected data on Lleyns and Blackies.

Sam Bullingham (23)

With 200 New Zealand Romneys on rented land, a shearing round of 20,000-head and trips to New Zealand, Australia, Iceland and Greece to shear



there, you would think Sam had plenty of work on his hands. However, he has also been approached by an abattoir as a local, seasonal lamb procurer, jointly owns some Romney stud ewes for genetics work and is starting a Southdown flock for genetic improvement too.

And his ambition does not stop there, with plans to increase to 1,000 highly productive ewes in the next five years, plus the aim of selling 100 Romney and 20 Southdown rams from the two stud flocks.

The farming bug 'skipped a generation' in Sam's family, and he says starting from scratch has been more of an advantage than a disadvantage, as it has given him a clean slate to start from.

"I don't follow, I make my own path," he says. "I am a passionate, intelligent young man who is not afraid to try new things. I am also happy to stand up for what I believe in."

Top fact: Sam is the reigning World Champion Young Shepherd of the Year, qualifying at NSA Sheep South West in 2013 and progressing through the UK final in 2014 to the world final in September.

Thomas Carrick (32)

Sheep farming is about balancing tradition and innovation, says Thomas, who is a partner in the family business breeding Swaledales and North of England Mules from a 1,800-ewe upland flock. He believes in the diversity of UK



breeds and the traditional stratified system but wants to continue making improvements within it by keeping a keen eye on commercial attributes. Thomas embraces all available tools and new technology to improve health and performance and, having completed a degree in human genetics, believes there is huge potential for the science to be used more by the livestock industry.

"By keeping up to date, and even pushing to the forefront of technology-based breeding, rearing and finishing, the UK will always be in a position to produce sheep meat in an efficient and competitive way," he says.

Situated high in the uplands means Thomas is familiar with the range of environmental problems that sheep are blamed for. "It is important that we restore public faith and demonstrate the vitally important role that sheep play in the upland ecosystem," he says, adding that this can be achieved at the same time as driving for efficiency and productivity in the sheep sector.

Top fact: Thomas was sponsored by NSA Northern Region to attend the Northern Farming Conference last year and has since joined the regional committee and is involved in NSA North Sheep on Wednesday 3rd June. See www.northsheep.org.uk

Ewan Cumming (21)

His job on a pig farm and numerous grazing agreements for this sheep scattered over the local area means Ewan spends a lot of time moving himself, sheep and feed around the place.



But he has forged this into a successful business, constantly fuelled by his passion for sheep farming.

Ewan is keen to transfer lessons about efficiency from the pig sector to his sheep flock and, having tried lambing his 60 Poll Dorset ewes three times in two years, is improving genetics and health in order to try again in the future. He is savvy enough to know the risks of such a high cost system, but believes he can manage these and simultaneously increase output.

Increasing the quantity and quality of his flock will be challenging given the often poor quality grazing Ewan has access too, so he is looking for local arable farmers interesting in introducing grazing into their rotations.

"The rising price of fertilisers, increased issues with blackgrass resistance to sprays, a reduction in soil quality from

continued on page 16

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▶ repeated growing of annual crops and a lack of organic matter to breakdown into the soil means there is opportunity to work closely with arable farmers to make use of grass as an alternative break-crop," Ewan says.

Top fact: Ewan boosted ewe numbers in 2011 when he was the recipient of the Chris Lewis Award, a grant awarded biennially to young farmers in memory of an inspirational Norfolk stockman.

Jonny Farmer (33)

Splitting his time between farming, contract shearing and landscape gardening means Jonny is never short of work, but his passion is for sheep and he is



constantly on the look-out for land and opportunities to make a living solely from his flock.

He rents sufficient land for 130-head currently and also has a contract with a local farmer to rear 100 Lleyne ewe lambs. This contract allows Jonny to tup the females and keep the resulting lambs, as long as he returns the Lleyne to the farmer in good enough condition to go to the tup again. Through this and other expansion plans, Jonny hopes to get to 700+ ewes in the future. This will involve a keen focus on breeding, management and good grassland, he says.

"My business operates on a standalone basis and must generate a true profit to be sustainable," he says. "This drives me to generate as much income as I can and gives me the catalyst to devise the best management strategies at the lowest cost."

Jonny is also dedicated to educating the public. He uses social media to spread the word and also plans a 'learning to lamb' sheep experience for sheep enthusiasts in the future.

Top fact: Jonny helps co-ordinate Mid-Ulster Lamb, a local producer group founded by his father in the early 1990s. The groups markets 15,000 lambs a year from local farmers to Linden Food Group.

Harry Frederick (27)

Despite the family farm always having a focus on beef and arable, Harry introduced a sheep flock to the business in 2010, quickly building up to 240 ewes.

He rents land from his father as part of his wages



and has additional grazing agreements with neighbours, allowing him to rear and finish lambs for local butchers and farmers' markets. There is scope to increase numbers to 400, so Harry is closely monitoring performance to aid breeding and buying decisions for this expansion.

Regular engagement with the public is something Harry values, for his direct-sales business and for the wider sheep sector, so he also hosts open days and charity events on the farm.

Harry believes dialogue between farmers, on issues such as new technology, health status and biosecurity, is equally important. "It's not only communication to the public, but importantly communication between ourselves as farmers," he says. "The public views the industry as a whole, so we should want everyone to succeed and produce fit, healthy lambs. The possibilities are there to improve our industry, and if we want the public to trust our product then we need to start trusting each other first."

Top fact: Harry's has a degree in architecture. He says his time at university made him realise how much he wanted to farm for a living, and in the future his hand-built sheep barns may be the envy of farmers for miles around!

George Gough (22)

The sheep farming year for George kicks off with lambing from January through to the end of May, taking him from Devon to the Scottish Highlands.

This is followed by several months of shearing and general shepherding work, as well as running 80 ewe lambs of his own and 200 for an employer to prepare and sell in the autumn months. He is also a sheepdog enthusiast and trains collies as a lucrative hobby.

George's ambitions are not small, with sheep scanning and jetting two options being considered for his contract shepherding business, and a dream of one day renting a farm and/or land. He is also looking to buy faecal egg counting equipment, to benefit his own flock and provide on-farm services, as he believes anthelmintic resistance needs more attention.

"I feel on-farm testing involving the farmer would build confidence in the task, as he can see the process from start to finish, not just receive the results on paper. I would also work with the farmer



to draw up a drenching /grazing plan. I feel more preventative action should take place now before the problem consumes the industry."

Top fact: George has just invested in some Bleu du Maine females to start breeding Millennium Bleus 'to have some fun and success on the show circuit with'. This is part of his interest in new commercial breeds.

George Hartley-Webb (23)

As a self-employed shepherd with regular work for one of the biggest store finishers in the country, George gets to handle more sheep than a lot of people.



He sorts up to 3,000 store lambs a week at busy times of the year, choosing up to 1,000 a time to go to slaughter. He also looks after 1,600 January and February-lambing Suffolk Mules from turn-out to weaning, while simultaneously running his own flock of 100 North Country Mules on various grazing agreements.

George says he is keen to build up his business skills, flock health, marketing and management knowledge, and with plans to purchase an EID reader and new software before his ewes start lambing in March, is also looking for ways to better understand and utilise performance data.

"After being in full-time work within the sheep sector since I was 17, I now really want to expand my knowledge of sheep and the industry," he says. "In return I believe I will be a very enthusiastic member of the sheep farming community who is prepared to promote the industry and embrace new technology."

Top fact: George sits on the NSA Eastern Region Committee and is involved in organising the region's NSA Youthful Shepherd Event on Saturday 6th June in Suffolk. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

Clarke Hibberd (24)

Building up a run of 4,000 ewes in his first year as a shearer shows the type of resolve Clarke has to carve a niche for himself in the sheep sector.

He started as a shepherd for a 600-ewe flock, but went self employed this year, retaining management of the original flock and adding additional contract shepherding



continued on page 18

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▶ and shearing work.

Clarke aims to have a farm tenancy or a share-farming agreement in the future, while also keeping his contracting work. He plans to build up commercial and pedigree flocks and considers EBVs to be vital in selecting stock to do this.

"For sheep to be pleasing to the eye, with a combination of looks and figures, will only improve the quality of sheep we breed. I plan to introduce recording of EBVs in my own flock, and the flocks I work with, and continuously promote the advantages of this system to others.

"Being from a non-farming family, I understand that this industry is not easy to get into. Anything I learn I pass on, teaching and encouraging individuals in a similar position."

Top fact: The shearing trailer Clarke bought last year has three stands, so he plans to keep building his round into a business capable of supporting two other shearers in addition to him.

Oliver Newman (21)

Working alongside your father is not unusual for people born onto sheep farms – but Oliver applied for the job!

He is the employed shepherd for a flock of 600 outdoor-lambing

Lleys, on a mixed organic unit where his father is farm manager. Oliver says he gets no special treatment by 'knowing the 'boss', having to pitch ideas and changes to his dad like any other employee.

He took the job in June 2014 and has sole responsibility for the flock, which he is keen to increase to 850+ ewes and begin recording 'much more precise data' to back up management decisions. Oliver's aim is to increase ewe quality so they are all good enough to breed replacements from, with fewer and fewer being put to a terminal sire instead.

The farm is open to the public and has



a popular farm shop and cafe. Oliver says: "I feel I am in a privileged position to be able to share new knowledge with people who are interested in advancements and improvements to the sheep industry, but also to educate and show those who come with no background but with just an interest or a question."

Top fact: The farm café serves vegetarian meals six days a week, but an excellent roast on Sundays. All of the lambs not selected for breeding in Oliver's flock are finished on the farm, some for the shop and café.

Georgie Radmore (23)

In her final few months of an Agriculture and Animal Science degree at Harper Adams, Georgie is looking ahead to a career supporting the livestock sector, running her own sheep alongside it and continuing to spend time on the family farm.

She already has plenty of practical experience, working for six months in Australian shearing sheds, spending her university holidays with a 5,500-ewe flock in Wales, and splitting her placement year between an animal health company (where she qualified to be an SQP) and the Waitrose procurement team. She used the knowledge gained to run a profitable flying flock and is looking forward to having a commercial flock again after her exams.

Georgie is looking forward to being an Ambassador, saying she will benefit in her graduate job from the skills she learns, while her growing confidence as she finishes her degree will also assist her in her Ambassador role.

"My increased knowledge from the scheme would not only benefit my future



flock and my parents' flock, but also give me the opportunity to bring things I learnt to my career in knowledge transfer."

Top fact: Despite being away from home for her studies, Georgie remains involved in decisions on the family farm, saying she recently converted her father to using EBV rams.

Lewis Sayers (19)

Entering the sheep sector in 2012 means Lewis is the newest of the Ambassadors to the industry and the youngest of the group – but his drive and initiative means he is more than worthy of a place.

From tracking down the owner of an abandoned piece of land to ask for the grazing, to working for ewes instead of wages, Lewis has taken some unorthodox approaches to getting started. He has now finished agricultural college and is building up his flock (currently at 75-head) by taking grazing when he can and earning money through shepherding. He has a regular collection of friends and family buying lamb from him and is identifying local pubs and restaurants to sell to, with the dream of one day having his own farm shop.

Lewis says he knows he has a lot to learn and is looking forward to meeting more sheep farmers by being an Ambassador, but hopes his progress so far will inspire new entrants and industry stalwarts alike. "Sometimes the old ways are the best, but they can also hinder us if we are not willing to try new things and to embrace new ways of thinking," he says. "I bring a fresh perspective to the industry and a drive to keep it going and make it better in whatever way I can."

Top fact: Lewis was shortlisted for the 'Against All Odds' category at the British Farming Awards last autumn, a category for new entrants who refuse to take no for an answer.



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² Maes L., Vanparijs O., Lauwers H. (1990) Activité douvicide du closantel contre Fasciola hepatica: approche pharmacodynamique. Revue Méd. Vet., 141, 12, 991-995.

³ Res Vet Sci. 1988 Mar;44(2):229-32. Flukicidal action of closantel against immature and mature Fasciola hepatica in experimentally infected rats and sheep. Maes L, Lauwers H, Deckers W, Vanparijs O

⁴ Coles, G. C., Rhodes, A. C., Stafford, K. A. (2000) Activity of closantel against adult triclabendazole-resistant Fasciola hepatica. Veterinary Record 146, 504.

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Take note of historic flock tag rules

Reports suggest that changes to EID tagging rules on 1st January 2015 are continuing to catch sheep keepers out, so please be aware of the regulations surrounding the historic flock (ewes and rams tagged before 2010).

The derogation from Europe protecting the historic flock from EID rules has now expired and these animals must now be individually identified on movement records unless they are going to slaughter (either directly or via a market). NSA stresses that the end of the derogation does not mean older animals have to be

retagged with full EID, but many producers may choose to take that step if it makes it easier to legally report movements.

It is also worth checking with any auction markets that you sell stock though, as many (including all in Scotland) will require that older animals carry full EID.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "It is not a legal requirement to re-tag ewes and rams from the historic flock with electronic identifiers, but please carefully consider what moves you are likely to make with older animals in the future and, if these will not be direct to slaughter,

Note on non-EID slaughter tags

In response to phone calls taken at NSA Head Office, please can we reassure farmers in England that while you can no longer use non-EID slaughter tags, lambs born before 1st January 2015 and less than 12 months of age can still legally carry a single plastic tag; there is no need to re-tag these animals.

For farmers in Wales who have until the end of this year before non-EID slaughter tags are disallowed, please note that the advice to 'use up your plastic tags this year' is not always appropriate. Please think about the destination of lambs sold when making tagging decisions. A non-EID tag is suitable if lambs are going to slaughter (either directly or via a market) but if there is any chance they may be considered suitable for extra finishing it is important to use an EID tag in order to maximise the number of selling options.

double-tagging is likely to be the sensible option. It makes sense to do this when you are handling sheep in the coming months – and don't forget to make a note in your flock register."



The historic flock refers to all animals tagged before 2010.

Farm assurance changes must take sheep sector with them, says NSA

Red Tractor Assurance (RTA) has been a hot topic since the new standards were introduced for scheme members in England from October last year.

Information packs on the new standards were sent out with an animal health template, which caused a great deal of upset and meant RTA was even higher up the agenda than usual at the NSA English Committee meeting in December.

NSA has been assured by RTA that the animal health template is just that – a template that farmers can choose to use for recording required information on animal mortality and illness. The requirement to record that information is part of the standards (for inspection from autumn 2015 onwards); how farmers chose to keep the data is up to them and does not have to be done on the template.

With regards to the wider debate about farm assurance standards, NSA remains committed to the principle of assurance and is also looking forward to assurance

scheme members being rewarded in the future through 'earned recognition' and the guarantee of fewer RPA inspections. NSA accepts changes to the standards will be required to make 'earned recognition' a reality, but more generally, NSA is concerned that the collective aim of increasing the number of sheep farmers being part of an assurance scheme is being jeopardised by the speed of change and associated communication.

Foundation scheme

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "Red Tractor originated as, and should continue to be, a foundation scheme that gives voluntary declaration of legal compliance. It is important that the first step onto the assurance ladder is not too great for farm businesses to sign up, and that standards for long-standing scheme members do not 'creep up' without clear communication or justification.

"NSA wants to see the industry always striving to improve performance, health,

and efficiency, as well as environmental and welfare outcomes, but we want this to be achieved through farmers' own actions rather than being expected to jump through hoops. RTA standards have to relate to the practical, land-related and environmentally-affected nature of sheep farming. We understand the interest in 'harmonising' standards across all farm assurance schemes but sheep farming is fundamentally different to poultry and pig farming in the way stock are managed and relate to the land"

RTA is consulting on whole life assurance for beef in the coming months, which would require all holdings a beast is registered at during its lifetime to be farm assured. NSA is keeping a close eye on this process, as while RTA has stated whole life assurance is not on the agenda for lamb, the consultation on beef is a result of desired harmonisation across all RTA food sectors and could mean sheep will soon be the odd one out.



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Retiring NSA chairmen reflects on three busy years in NSA role

By John Geldard

I started my career 40 years ago as a tenant farmer. Shortly afterwards I joined NSA, an organisation I felt would offer real benefits to my career. Fast forward to 2012 when I began what was to be a challenging, exciting and stimulating journey as NSA Chairman.

I've been delighted to serve NSA in this position and to have the opportunity to give back to an association which I believe punches far above its weight. During my chairmanship there have been a number of highlights which I'd like to summarise.

It was only 10 weeks into my position when our then new Chief Executive Phil Stocker started in office. One of the first tasks was to develop a new three-year strategy which delivered to meet with the membership's interests. In advance of this, a new set of Articles of Association were approved at the NSA AGM for implementation in January 2012; together they were to define the way ahead.

Expertise and opinion

The Articles of Association introduced a regional committee structure and also a network of specialist committees, including UK Policy and Technical, which bring together expertise and opinion and embrace all our members – sheep farmers and those working in an ancillary trade including auctioneers, processors, vets and consultants.

We ensured our various communication vehicles – our flagship Sheep Farmer magazine, together with the NSA Weekly Email Update – kept members informed



During his chairmanship, John invited both Owen Paterson (then Secretary for State, above) and David Heath (then Farming Minister, below) to his farm in Cumbria.

of our activities. We also launched a new membership campaign, which following years of reducing UK sheep farmer numbers, is beginning to see an upturn in NSA members.

We encourage all members to get involved at a regional level, attending events and even progressing to be a regional representative if they wish, while we make sure the door is also always open at our Malvern headquarters for members with questions, concerns, good news or bright ideas.

Next Generation

There was also the launch of NSA Next Generation, which included the elite Ambassador Group with up to 12 young people selected each year to take part in a series of special training and personal development events. I am very proud to have been part of steering this project in its formative stages; equally I'm grateful to NSA staff for driving the initiative in a professional manner. These youngsters should be encouraged and applauded; they are the bedrock of our future industry – one which continues to be able to provide that essential rung on the ladder.

A real highlight for me has been engaging with Ministers and senior Government officials, with whom NSA has achieved a far closer working relationship than ever before, and subsequently the opportunity to influence, following countless meetings in venues from

Westminster to on-farm.

We have already started looking ahead to CAP reform 2017, to help provide Government with the background decision-making material to take to Brussels; we can't afford to wait for the proposals to emerge. This time we'd like to turn the tide on modulation payments heading towards Pillar II and environment schemes and instead towards the farm gate, for example towards improving sheep health and welfare. The Welsh Government has already picked up on our proposals for a pilot scheme to develop a farm health planning-style strategy with sheep producers and their vets.

NSA has led a high level campaign on TSEs and the elimination of carcass splitting. After several years of hard work we are making progress on some immediate gains in UK implementation of the rules, and continuing to fight for a breakthrough on the wider regulations.

Common sense

We have also continued to highlight the detriment impact of standstill rules to Ministers and senior Government officials. We have made headway proposing common sense alternatives, such as on-farm quarantine facilities managed by the farmer and his vet.

And finally, the NSA sheep events, which nationally and regionally provide those unique opportunities for the entire sector to come together to share, to listen, to learn and to be challenged.

During the last three years, the sheep sector itself has experienced numerous major challenges, from extreme weather to major fluke infestation and volatile markets. However it has coped with its usual resilience while continuing to produce a high quality, high value product of which all sheep breeders and producers should be exceptionally proud.

As I sign off I too am extremely proud to have worked with such a great bunch of people within NSA – a small dedicated team of NSA staff together with the Trustee Managers and volunteer members. NSA is very fortunate to have a Chief Executive in Phil Stocker whose skill, passion, enthusiasm and ability to motivate staff knows no bounds. My very best wishes to my successor Samuel Wharry, who I am confident will prove to be an excellent choice to continue driving forward the association on your behalf.

Turn over to meet the new NSA Chairman, Samuel Wharry.

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National chairman's share farming deal provides inspiration for others

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

Samuel Wharry has known James Davison all his life, being good friends with his father and watching him grow up as a 'farming mad' youngster – but little did he know he would one day become his business partner.

James' father exited the dairy industry 10 years ago and rented out the small family farm, and while James took some of the land back when he was old enough to keep his own sheep, his passion for the industry yearned for something bigger.

James (now 21) was an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2014, and stated his interest in share farming from the moment he applied for the programme, often voicing frustration at the lack of information and examples about the business practice, particularly in the sheep sector. Part of the answer to James' many questions about share farming was that there is no 'one-size fits all' template, as the pair discovered when Sam suggested they gave it a go on his hill farm in Carnlough, County Antrim, Northern Ireland.

“The most important thing in share farming is goodwill and trust and talking about it.”

Samuel Wharry



James (left) and Samuel (right) started share farming in September.

“Our way might not work for everyone, as we're both actively farming the land, but there's no right or wrong way of doing it,” says Sam. “We have found that the main thing is getting two people who are compatible. It's a matter of saying 'we're going to do this and we'll find a way around the problems if and when they come up'. The most important thing is goodwill and trust and talking about it.”

James says one person providing the land and the other the labour is just one way of share farming, and wasn't what he was looking for. “I always thought share farming should be a joint thing; joint decisions,” says James. “If Sam just let the land I wouldn't know how to farm it, particularly with it being a hill farm with a lot of tradition associated. It's the experience Sam has and showing me the

husbandry of his stock. Also, if I have an idea, we can talk it over and decide if it'll work or not – Sam keeps me in touch with reality when I need it!”

Sam adds: “James is an eternal optimist and I'm a pessimist, so we usually meet somewhere in the middle.

Decisions

“I wouldn't want to just let the land, but if I'd stayed here on my own for another 10 years, making the most of the SFP, the land and the fences would have started to go down,” says Sam. “It is a hard decision to let someone else in; there's a worry about letting go, admitting that you're getting older and someone else making a mess of it. But I'm not going to live forever and now I benefit from the enthusiasm James brings. He comes up with ideas that challenge how we do things and it's good to be challenged. Sometimes there is a reason why you do it that way, but often it makes you stop and think.”

Sam and James created their own share farming agreement, with some help from an accountant. Sam set up a partnership to manage his farm, renting the land to the partnership for a nominal



Sam says the Swaledale cross Blackface females are 'unbelievably good mothers' but considers their male siblings to be a poorer wether than the pure Blackie.

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Meet Samuel Wharry, NSA's new national chairman, as he describes a share farming agreement he initiated in September last year.

fee of £3,000 per year. He and James now work for the partnership, splitting the profit at the end of each year roughly 50:50. Joint decisions are made about all expenditure, with the partnership paying for inputs to the flock, fencing and general costs. Anything separate to the sheep enterprise (such as a renewable energy project Sam is looking at) or that adds value to Sam's asset (such as building upkeep) is handled outside the partnership. The stock was valued at the outset and James is using his share of the annual profits to buy a 50% share in the stock over five years. A planned increase in stock numbers will therefore increase James' equity.

There are currently 400 ewes, but all the homebred females were kept back last year, as the first step in plans to increase to 600 head. Of those 400, 140 are

involved in an Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) breeding project. AFBI pays a research fee in return for dictating management and breeding decisions, and regularly monitors and records the animals within a larger project looking at maternal traits in crossbred ewes. Additional work with anthelmintic resistance, fluke, footrot and mineral supplementation has been added at various times.

The research has concluded that a white faced composite (Texel, Lleyn, Highlander breeding) is less suitable for hill farms, so these are being bred out, but the hybrid vigour and maternal ability of the Blackface-Swaledale-Blackface cross is performing well for both AFBI and the farm business.

Breeding

Outside of the research flock there are 110 Scottish Blackfaces producing purebred lambs, plus 150 Blackies and crossbred ewes put to various tups. Both Sam and James are 'open to options' for crossing sires and recent/planned experiments include the Lleyn, Easycare, Texel, Belcare, SuffTex and Meatlinc.

Sam and James' expansion plan is loosely based on 150 each of: Blackies kept pure; Blackies for crossing (mainly to

the Lleyn); Lleyn cross Blackies to put to the Belcare; and Lleyn cross Blackies to put to a terminal sire.

The Blackface breeding has been the bedrock of the farm for many years, with Sam's father making a name for the flock when he started recording back in the 1980s; they joined the Signet scheme in 1997. Sam's continuation with that work means he has cornered the market in Northern Ireland for recorded Blackface tups, but he will be the first to say that market is much smaller than it should be. He is a strong advocate of performance

continued on page 26

Farm facts

- 200ha (500-acre) farm near to the coast, with 70ha (170 acres) of common grazing.
- Land rises steeply from 15 meters above sea level to 300m (50ft-1,000ft).
- 15ha (40 acres) of better quality lower-lying land, 60ha (150 acres) of in-bye and the rest heather and moorland.
- The Antrim Coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty takes in the whole farm, with the farm also having two Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) and an additional Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA). A stewardship agreement for some of the farm is waiting to be renewed. Winter grazing restrictions have led to shed space being erected for lambing.

Blackface ewes running with a Swaledale tup to produce a maternal line with hybrid vigour.



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► data and would like to see more breeders buying on figures and EBVs.

"Eventually the demand will come and we will be ahead of the game," he says. "We've gone down the route of selling tups in the top 5% of the breed for maternal traits, because if that's where you start from, good mothering ability goes all the way down the line."

Tup lambs are sorted by eye first, with only the strongest left entire. Their figures plus the index and breed characteristics of the dam are then referred to before deciding which males are kept for breeding.

Tupping is in mid-November on the in-bye land, with ewes then spread over parts of the hill that aren't restricted during the winter by environmental designations. Thinner ewes are housed from January, with ewes carrying twins (or the rare set of triplets) housed from scanning in early February. Singles come in just before lambing starts in early April.

Lambing

There will be pressure on housing as the flock starts to increase, but Sam says he would prefer to house ewes in shifts (according to raddle marks) than lamb some outside, as it is easier to record data indoors.

Singles are turned out straight to the hill and twins to better grazing, with a few store lambs sold from August onwards and fat lambs from October through to February. Breeding males are sold as tup lambs or shearlings, but all females will be kept for the time being.

James says: "We won't be able to select ewe lambs too much while we increase numbers, but because the recording means we've been selecting for maternal traits we should have a decent type of ewe lamb anyway."

Sam agrees: "We'd certainly prefer to keep all our own and have the figures, rather than buy them in. And we can tighten up once we've got the numbers up."

So how long until they get to 600 ewes? "Two years," James says, without hesitation. "Three years," Sam says, a second later. And it is the grin that James and his mentor give each other that makes it clear their mix of experience and enthusiasm will see this share farming venture thrive.



The farm rises steeply from the coast at Carnlough, with moorland and heather perched above lower-lying pasture and in-bye land.

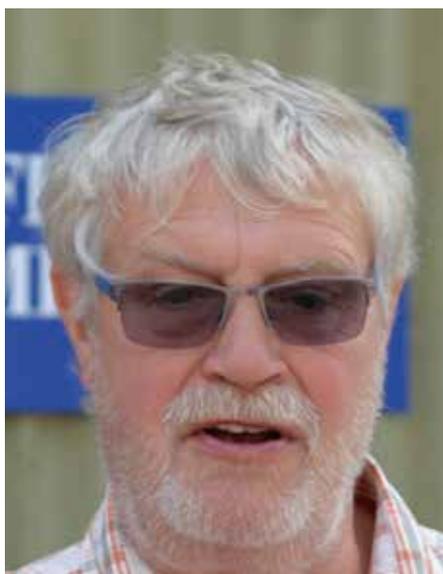
Outstanding contribution award

David Croston MBE has been announced as the recipient of the George Hedley Memorial Award, awarded annually for outstanding contributions to the sheep industry.

Over a career spanning four decades, David worked to advance almost every area of the sheep sector, from breeding programmes to export markets. He joined the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC) in 1970, taking responsibility for the individual ewe recording schemes, later known as Sheepbreeder, and the creation of Sire Reference Schemes.

David moved onto roles within MLC as Chief Sheep Advisor and Sheep Strategy Manager, before transferring to the Commission's Export Marketing Department and eventually taking it over in the late 1990s. In January 1998 he was appointed Head of Sheep Strategy at MLC and in 2003 became Eblex Chief Executive. While at the levy board he drew up proposals for the Better Returns knowledge transfer programme.

Following his retirement in 2005 David became involved with NSA, playing a key role in the running of NSA events and



using his industry experience to help steer the organisation through a period of reform. In 2010 he became NSA Honorary Treasurer, a post he held for five years before stepping down from the role in June 2014.

On announcing the winner in early January, NSA Chairman John Geldard said:

George Hedley

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

"David Croston's service to agriculture is well-documented, and his support for NSA in particular has been enormously appreciated. The award has been extremely well earned and richly deserved. That David has achieved so much for the sheep sector without ever farming himself goes to show the breadth of opportunities available in agriculture."

David will be formally presented with the award at NSA North Sheep on Wednesday 3rd June. He is the 2014 award winner; nominations for the 2015 recipient will be invited later in the year.

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CAP concerns in all four UK nations

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

This year is the one every agricultural minister, industry group and farmer in Europe has been looking to for some time – the year when the reformed Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is implemented.

This will be a year of considerable upheaval, as we move from the Single Payment Scheme to the Basic Payment Scheme incorporating the new EU greening requirements. Wales, Scotland Northern Ireland will also start the move from historic to area payments, and while England thought it could look on smugly, having completed its own painful transition under the previous CAP, it is instead facing considerable problems with a new online payment system.

The immediate concern is Wales, where the legal challenge to the moorland rate means regions and payment rates for area payments are not yet agreed.

There was understandable uproar from many Welsh upland farmers when the €20/ha moorland payment rate was announced, and while NSA appealed to the Welsh Government to deal with the subsequent legal challenge quickly and out of court, there is no doubt the decision to revisit area payments is causing confusion and delays.

The original Welsh Government consultation in 2013 offered two and three-region systems, but the suggested payments for moorland were very low in both situations (although not as low as €20) so NSA waits with interest for the results of the new modelling work and the



All four nations are encouraging online applications, but in England online is the only option this year.

next consultation process.

Very few farmers in England will have forgotten the delay in payments experienced in the first years of the Single Payment Scheme, when the transition from historic to area payments was made.

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How have we got to where we are?

Having been created in 1962 in the long shadow of World War II and its associated food shortages, CAP quickly became a victim of its own success when increased production led to oversupply.

Subsequent reforms focused on supply management, until a major shift in the 21st century saw food production and payments 'decoupled' and farmers given 'income aid' in return for respecting specific environmental, animal welfare and food safety standards.

The problem of a 'Single Farm Payment' linked to the land is placing a value on that acreage. Historical entitlements link the land value to what it has produced in the past, but a payment system based on farming activity in 2002 (as opted for by Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in the last CAP reform) has a shelf life, hence the forced move to flat rate area payments now.

In its simplest form, an area payment is the total money available divided by the number of eligible hectares, but there is also the ability within the EU rules for member states to determine their own payment regions under Pillar I and provide additional financial provision to 'areas of natural constraint' (usually under Pillar II).

And there we come to the nub of the problem for the UK agricultural support system today – should the higher value be placed on the more productive land, because it produces the most food, historically and in the future – or should the higher value be placed on the less productive land, because it needs the financial support due to limitations on how much food it can produce?

Scotland (and Wales initially) has weighted the payment towards the more productive land, which is similar to the decision made by England in 2006 when it decided to immediately initiate the



The original CAP reform was born out of World War II food security issues. Picture credit: Imperial War Museum; Wikimedia.

transition from historical payments to an area system – see table. England has since moved back from that position, moving the money 'up the hill' in the current round of CAP reform, towards the less productive land.

continued on page 30



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¹ Agneessens et al. Build up of immunity after Diclazuril treatment in calves. Poster at World Buiatrics Congress, France October 2006
² Cieslicki M, Diclazuril (Vecoxan[®]), ein neues produkt zur metaphylaxe und therapie der kokzidiose des schafes, Tierärztl Prax 2001; 29(G): 73-77

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► That is the situation now faced by farmers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as their governments implement entitlement allocations, speed of transition and new payment systems.

The Welsh Government announced it would be making partial payments in December 2015 (to be topped up at a later stage) even before it was forced to review the area payment rates. The Scottish Government is saying it will get funds to farmers 'as early as possible' in the December-June payment window, but with much of the detail yet to be confirmed in Scotland it is looking increasingly unlikely that farmers will receive their payments as early as they are used to.

Jeremy Moody of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV) says: "All Basic Payment Scheme applicants need to consider that their payment will be a lot later. If it comes sooner, so much the better, but it's far better to brace yourself and your bank manager that this will be a payment in 2016 not 2015. Sorting cash flow is one of the major practical problems with this



As lambing time approaches, there are still some difficult questions to be answered in Wales and Scotland, but direct action required by farmers in England to 'verify' themselves for the new system.

Transition period from historical to area payments

	Start	End
Wales	2015	2019
Scotland	2015	2019
Northern Ireland	2015	2021

and will require more tolerance from many people than they have yet realised."

DARD in Northern Ireland appears hopeful of getting there in December, but is encouraging applicants to do everything online in order to achieve that timetable. Wales and Scotland are also encouraging online applicants, saying this is of benefit to farmers as well as rural payment agencies. System providers claim the application form will be shorter online, as it will adapt the form based on your answers at the beginning of the application to offer only questions relevant to you. There is also question-specific help and some auto-validation to avoid predictable or inconsistent entry errors.

In England the situation is different, as claims online are compulsory, using a new system that is already causing problems

and may prevent claimants getting their applications submitted by 15th May, affecting the timetable for payments.

The problem is that English farmers have to be 'verified' before being able to access the online application process. NSA members selected for a trial late last year to complete the verification system online reported huge

problems, and Defra has now said farmers can be verified over the phone instead – call 03000 200301 seven days a week. NSA understands the process takes between 20 minutes and two hours and it is vital to get verified sooner rather than later, as this is just the first step in the process, before going online to submit your application. In late January only 15,000 farmers were registered, with more than 70,000 still to get in touch.

Mr Moody says the new online system requires a different approach for English claimants, as it can 'progressively accumulate information' rather than being a one-off form to complete. He recommends registering as soon as possible and starting to find your way around the system and inputting information, even though the IT will evolve during this period too.

Time needed

"There is nothing on the new system that can't be solved if you give yourself enough time," he says. "If you are going to use an agent make sure you go to them in good time too. They will be well briefed on the new system and well placed to do your claim for you, but don't leave it too late."

Mr Moody says early thought is also important because of the new greening rules, which apply from 1st January 2015 and will affect sheep farmers who grow arable or fodder crops.

Farmers with no 'digital history' have been assumed by Defra to not have internet access and have been contacted about alternative ways to submit claims. If you feel you should have been contacted and have not then please use the phone number provided earlier to contact RPA.

While Scotland has provided some updated information on greening and confirmed how the national reserve will

continued on page 32

► Defra says the the new rates in England area a way to support upland landscapes, wildlife habitats, tourism and the rural economy. The decision was also part of a reform package that included an end to universal access to agri-environment schemes in England.

NSA supports a higher payment for less favoured land, as upland farming systems by their nature provide greater public good and are more restricted than lowland farms. There is also less risk of tax payers questioning spending of public money through direct payments to these farm types. Lowland farms generally have more options available to them and can make a faster transition towards thriving with less support.

This position was echoed but those who were most vocal in the backlash against the Welsh decision to weight payments toward the better land. It will

Area payments for UK nations

England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
New rates:- • €70/ha moorland • €244/ha SDA and lowland	Originally set at:- • €240/ha DA and lowland • €200/ha SDA • €20/ha moorland	• €220/ha arable, temporary grassland and permanent grassland • €35/ha rough grazing • €10/ha rough grazing in LFASS [+ coupled payment scheme for ewe hoggs]	€329/ha all eligible land
Previously:- • €37/ha moorland • €211/ha SDA • €263/ha lowland	Now being reviewed; consultation expected soon		

Figures are approximate and based on predicted claims for each nation. Figures for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are the area payment that will be combined with the historic payment during the transition period.

be very interesting to see whether Wales sticks with a three-area system but reduces the difference between rates for moorland and other land, or moves to a two or even one-area system.

Until Wales makes that decision, Northern Ireland is the only UK nation to opt for a flat rate system, meaning

farmers there will see the greatest redistribution of funds since decoupling, with those in the hills set to gain the most.

With four nations operating four very different systems of area payments, we can only wait to see how farming businesses react and what further changes we face in the coming years.

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► work, there is still a great deal of work to be done. Mr Moody says the biggest issue is differing views over the definition of land types, saying anyone with land currently classified as rough grazing who believes they can justify it as such instead should state it as permanent grassland on their claim form.

"The amount of rough grazing you have now and into the future will be determined by what you put on your form this year," he says, adding that it is vital to get it right now as it will affect the value of your land for many years to come, beyond this current round of CAP. "If it delays your payment this time then it is better to be delayed for a higher payment per hectare over the longer term future; this is the year that matters."

Because of this ambiguity over how much land will qualify for the higher payment rate, Mr Moody says the €220/ha predicted by Scottish Government for arable, temporary grassland and permanent grassland may come down when payments are actually made.

The biggest change in Northern Ireland is that land rented out in conacre or under a lease must be declared only on the application of the person who is farming the land, not the landowner, unless there are exceptional circumstances. This is already having a huge impact, with conacre arrangements that have stood for many years being reconsidered as landowners fear losing their payment.

Mr Moody says CAAV has been working closely with the Northern Ireland Rural Valuers Association to create a conacre agreement template to accommodate the new system. This allows the grazer to link past entitlements to conacre land to ensure the security of those entitlements for this round of CAP (to 2019). Contact your local land agent for more information.

NSA will keep members up-to-date on CAP reform developments via the NSA Weekly Email Update. If we do not already have your email address please send it to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk.

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Where next?

There will be a mid-term review of the current CAP (2015-2020) in 2017, which is the next point in time that NSA is already looking to.

With the big decisions now made, it is important to provide information to government ministers and decisions-makers early about what is working and what is not, not wait until 2017.

NSA is already uncomfortable about some of the decisions made under Pillar II so will look to these in particular. NSA's position during the CAP reform process was for modulated funds to be spent on animal health and welfare, and while there has been some acknowledgement of this, it is important these monies are made available directly to farmers.

Greening will also be in the spotlight, as the biggest change within the new CAP. The EU has already committed to review the ecological focus area (EFA) element of greening in 2017, with a view to increasing from 5% of arable areas (including temporary grassland) to 7%. However, with the 5% policy only having been in place for two years by then there will be no evidence to support an increase in area, and even the staunch environmentalists do not appear to be anticipating a rise so soon.

Mid-term review

It could also be assumed that EU President, Jean-Claude Juncker, and his European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Phil Hogan, will not want to see radical change to the CAP during this current term. Mr Hogan is on the record emphasising the importance of food production and saying that it is not good for market certainty for farmers to have too many changes in quick succession.

If the Conservative party remains in power after the UK general election this year, then it is possible the mid-term review of the CAP will coincide with David Cameron's promised EU referendum. The timetable for a UK vote on our future in Europe is 'before the end of 2017', by which time the Prime Minister promises to have renegotiated the EU treaty.

Looking further ahead to the next round of CAP reform in 2020 – assuming the UK is still a member of the EU by then – we will have had another European election (2019) and the new European Parliament will be beginning to review the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MMF, or EU budget) again. One thing we can be sure of is increasing public pressure to reduce the percentage of the EU budget spent on agriculture, as we saw in the last budgetary review.



Will the UK still be in Europe for the next CAP reform?

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Still opportunities for farmers under revised regulations for solar power

Farmers looking to diversify their income in 2015 by installing solar farms need to be aware of a change in legislation that will see an end to funding for significantly larger developments.

From 1st April new projects with an installed capacity greater than 5MWp – which translates to around 10ha (25 acres) of land – will no longer receive money under the Government's Renewable Obligation Certificates (ROC) scheme.

The change is predicted to cause a shift towards smaller developments and means anyone thinking of installing a larger project needs to act soon.

Conor McGuigan, Business Development Director at Lightsource Renewable Energy, which manages around 4,000 acres of solar farms across the country, said decisions need to be made wisely.

"Solar farms are still an attractive proposition but choices need to be made wisely," he said. "Our advice, in

order to make the most of the current political landscape and to avoid being left disappointed by missing the deadlines, is that people need to move forward quickly and choose a developer to partner that has the capability, sound financial backing and track record of delivering on time."

Mr McGuigan said there was still a huge future for solar farms beyond 1st

April, although they were likely to be on a smaller scale.

"Subsidies will still be available for installations below 5MWp and they're still a very good option for many farmers looking to diversify their income," he said. "The UK has a legal commitment to reduce its carbon footprint and solar remains an important part of that mix."

Top tips for installing a solar farm

- Use a well-established UK-based firm. They will have a greater understanding of legislation, the planning process and working with local communities.
- Choose a company that has a good track record and previous experience.
- Prioritise your values – a good developer will design the solar farm around the core values of your business.
- Always ask who is going to be managing the solar farm for the duration of the lease. A good place to start is to research operators of solar farms in your local area.
- View past projects and request to speak with other clients. Can the developer put you in touch with a client which has similar requirements to yours?
- How much emphasis does the developer put on community engagement and community benefit? Being a good neighbour should be high on the agenda.
- Finally, ask a developer how many planning applications they have made and how many were successful. This will give you an idea of how the planning process will go.

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Managing early spring grassland

Early grass growth will depend on many factors including soil type, soil temperatures, when the field was last grazed, grass variety, the aspect and nutrient availability.



The temperature of the soil provides an indication of grass growth and the appropriate time for nutrient application if required. Records taken over a 25-year period at Bronydd Mawr (Brecon Beacons) for the Met Office showed that once 5°C had been recorded (at about 10 cm depth) for five consecutive days it was a good indicator that temperatures would continue to rise and fertiliser nitrogen efficiency would be at the optimum.

Liz Genever, Eblex Livestock Scientist, says: "There is noticeable grass growth above 5°C, bacteria start to break down organic material and produce nitrogen in plant available form. White clover gets going at 8°C."

Poor soil structure, which could be due to soil types or previous management, will reduce early growth. It is likely that it will cause soils to be wetter, meaning it takes longer to reach the target soil temperature. Plus root penetration may be

reduced, which will affect the ability of the plants to extract nutrients to support grass growth.

Understanding the nutrient status of the soil by taking a soil test and analysing the results is something more sheep farmers should do, says Dr Genever. A soil test costs around £8-10 per field and should be done every three years for fields run regularly for silage or hay, or every five years for fields purely used for grazing.

Acting on the results is important, with the priority being to address any issues with pH level. Lime is the most important nutrient, as it is required to ensure other nutrients in the soil are available to the plant. Phosphate (P) and potash (K) should then be focused on, with manures being a good source (especially of K).

Spring is the time to apply manures to make the most of the nutrients they contain and minimise loss of nitrogen through leaching or in the air (as ammonia). Early season applications can be vulnerable to losses so must be timed carefully.

Applied nitrogen is a very cost-effective way to produce feed, but the amount used should be adapted through the season



Watch your grassland this spring for improvements that might need making ready for next year.

based on grass availability. And white clover needs to be a focus for the farmer due to its ability to fix nitrogen and improve feed quality.

The best way to know that grass is growing and how much is available for grazing is to get out and measure it. Use a sward stick or the side of a welly boot when walking the fields to measure the height of the sward. Each field will have a different growth pattern so take a notebook to write it down.

Email brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or call 08702 418829 for a free sward stick or to sign up for the Eblex Grazing Club for regular grassland updates.

Good reasons to renew pasture

By Mhairi Dawson,
Barenbrug

One of the best ways to reduce costs and increase output in a sheep enterprise is by growing as much top quality grass on farm as possible.

Quality and quantity directly impacts on the ability of ewes to feed their young and, post-weaning, of lambs to feed themselves. Lambs reared on well-managed grass should sustain liveweight gains of 220-250g/day to weaning, without high levels of supplements. At 25kg a lamb's rumen has fully developed and by 12-14 weeks old they are no longer dependent on milk and can gain nearly all their nutrition from grass.

Grazing quality for lambs is particularly important in summer when grasses seed and pastures can burn off, particularly in drought conditions. For high weight gain lambs need a diet with more than 11 ME. This means green leafy pasture with low levels of dead matter or stem and high levels of clover. Feeds with ME less than 9.0 will not support growth of your lambs, and this includes hay, poor silage and stemmy or dead pasture. One alternative that should be considered seriously is sowing brassicas, like stubble turnips, for

mid-summer use.

Optimum grazing heights for grass are 4-6cm from May, rising to 6-7cm in June. Let sward heights increase to 8cm on grazing intended for weaned lambs. Weaned lambs can gain well over 1kg a week on good grazing.

With frequent moves and good control over sward heights you can utilise 80% of grass by paddock grazing. But where there is limited control over sward heights and a lack of management during adverse conditions, such as very wet or very dry weather, utilisation can dip as low as 50%.

For efficient grass utilisation it is important to keep your leys in good condition and free from weed grasses that do not respond to expensive fertiliser. Over a seven-year period the yield of a hybrid / perennial ley that is not reseeded will drop from 13 tonnes DM/ha to just seven. With grass dry matter valued at £100/t this can equate to a production loss of £600 per hectare.

Innovation and intensive research is driving the development of new generations of grass seed, precision-bred and blended to suit the digestion of sheep and lambs in specific microclimates and environments. Reseeding pastures with these high quality grass varieties can

Top tips for great grazing

1. Regularly test and address any soil surface compaction
2. Keep grassland short (4-10cm) to maximise intake
3. Add white clover to improve protein levels and boost intakes
4. Timothy, cocksfoot and tall fescue are ideal for sheep grazing – growing earlier in spring and later in autumn
5. Avoid red clover six weeks pre-tupping and until six weeks after tupping.

significantly boost profits.

We also know that farmers grazing their sheep on land that is grade 3 or even more challenging can benefit from switching from conventional perennial ryegrass to a specialist highland grazing mix. A typical blend could include cocksfoot, strong creeping red fescue and higher timothy content. Taking this approach would deliver a larger plant population, giving a dense sward than can carry more stock.

Timothy provides a more fibrous diet, while clover can assist with finishing/flushing and add extra protein for palatability, so improving intakes. Cutting this type of mixture would also produce a good conserved fodder for winter feed.

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Lambing losses remain the biggest factor in sheep business profitability

By Simon Wragg,
Contributor

A recent series of Business Efficiency meetings, supported by NSA, echoed the importance lamb survivability can have in making sheep enterprises profitable.

With an eye on reducing the losses, people who attended the meetings also raised questions about what needs to be recorded, monitored and actioned in order to make improvements.

Eblex and HCC figures on lamb losses make stark reading. Up to 30% are lost between scanning and lambing due to poor ewe nutrition and/or disease, and of lambs born alive 50% of subsequent deaths occur within the first 48 hours.

Do these figures reflect your own experiences? Most producers and advisors accept some loss is inevitable but it's important to find out how much occurs and what can be done about it.

Key figures

Unless you have access to historical records, a few key figures noted this lambing period will be valuable to assess your flock's performance, suggests Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive.

"Being brutally honest, if we cannot find time to record what is happening in the business then we are merely gambling on an outcome," he says.

There is a harsh reality to this statement. Last year an average lowland flock incurred a loss of £16.51 per ewe put to the tup, despite reasonable market prices for lambs and culls. These are the figures from Eblex's Stocktake 2014 report on English businesses, but are not dissimilar for other parts of the UK either. They also show the poorest performing

farms lost £66.49/ewe, with the best achieving a slim margin of £10.51/ewe.

Phil continues: "From the Business Efficiency meetings we've held it is clear producers already keeping records have found it enlightening to interrogate the numbers with advisors, using software we've had on hand. But the key is knowing what figures are needed."

This is a theme Katie Brian, Eblex Better Returns Programme Manager, picks up: "It's not just about keeping records for records sake, but keeping information that will be useful to you. It doesn't have to be complicated – a sheet on a barn wall or a notebook will do so long as it can be used easily.

"At home on the family farm we were losing lambs but didn't know why. We used a tally chart on a wall to record every lamb lost and the likely cause. It showed too many weak lambs were being born and, eventually, we discovered low-level abortion in the flock."

From basic recorded information – see *panel* – and other sheep records you should be able to work out five key performance indicators:

- Scanning percentage per ewe scanned (%)
- Lambs reared per 100 ewes to ram (%)
- Lamb losses, scanning to rearing (% of lambs scanned)
- Daily liveweight gain to weaning (kg/day)
- 90-day lamb weight per ewe to ram (kg)

Compare these each year to monitor your flock's performance, Katie says.

Kate Phillips, independent sheep consultant and senior lecturer in ruminant production at Harper Adams University, Shropshire, says a few figures collected at scanning is a good place to start.

"We need to know how many ewes are

What to record and why?

Eblex's Katie Brian suggests basic records around lambing should include:-

- How many ewes put to a tup scan empty or are empty/barren at lambing?
- How many lambs are lost between scanning and lambing?
- How many lambs are born dead, and what were the likely causes?
- How many are lost between birth and turn-out, and what were the likely causes?
- How many are lost between turn-out and sale?

empty or barren, as well as splitting the flock into feeding groups for those carrying singles, twins and triplets," she says. "As a guide, 2% barren is acceptable; 5% is unacceptable. Don't just sell barrens – which is a temptation when market prices are good – as they are the resource to identify what's at large. Blood testing a portion will allow a vet to establish the cause and action needed."

Body condition scoring (BCS) of ewes is the key driver to decision-making across the whole production year, emphasises advisors and consultants. At lambing it impacts on colostrum and milk production, lamb survivability and growth, and fertility at tugging next autumn.

It's judged by assessing fat and muscle mass covering a ewe's backbone – the pointed transverse and spinous processes – with the flat of a hand just behind the last rib. Condition is scored on a scale of 1 (thin) to 5 (fat) and may include half scores, for example 3.5. What level of cover to expect depends on the breed of ewe and stage in the production calendar – see *table above right*.



Getting the basics right, such as adequate trough space and good hygiene, will ensure ewes are well equipped to birth and rear healthy lambs. Pictures courtesy of Stephen Burden.

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Ewe Body Condition Score (BCS)

Targets

	Lowland	Upland	Hill
Mid-pregnancy	3.0	2.5	2.0
Lambing	3.0	2.5	2.0
At weaning	2.5	2.0	2.0
At tugging	3.5	3.0	2.5

A ewe with BCS 3.5 at the time of lambing is likely to produce twice as much colostrum that a ewe at BCS 2.5, suggest recent studies. Similarly, it can increase lamb weaning weights by 1.5kg/head at eight weeks old, or 5.4kg for a pair of twin lambs weaned at 12 weeks old.

But producers need to strike a balance, says Mrs Phillips. "It's probably the hardest element of ewe management to get right as there are many variables. For example, ewe BCS will vary year-to-year because the quality of forage changes year-to-year.

"A starting point should be to establish two things: Get forage analysed so you know what you're actually feeding. Then – either with your nutritionist, consultant or advisor if you use one – work out what a ewe needs for her own maintenance before offering any supplementary feed."

As an example, a 70kg ewe carrying two lambs in the last week of pregnancy requires 18.3MJ/day energy. If feeding a good quality silage analysed at 10.5ME the ewe needs 1.4kg of dry matter to meet her daily requirement.

"While these calculations help establish a ewe's energy requirement it may be necessary to speak to a nutritionist or feed supplier to balance the ewe's need for protein," says Mrs Phillips.

Feeding in late pregnancy is fraught with conflict. A lamb foetus grows 70% in the last six weeks, limiting a ewe's appetite by 30%. Over-feeding at this time can result in large lambs, difficult lambings, weak ewes and increased risk of prolapse, warn advisors.

If a thin ewe is too close to lambing to alter BCS, aim to maintain her condition and feed to support production of colostrum and milk post lambing. Milk yield peaks at around four weeks.

"Don't forget the basics such as allowing sufficient trough space," adds Mrs Phillips. "For unrestricted feed allow six inches or 15cm per ewe or 18in/45cm for restricted feed. Big bossy ewes can rule the roost, limiting feed for others, which can lead to twin lamb disease."

Just like mothers in a hospital maternity ward, all ewes handle lambing differently, suggests Miss Brian. The key is to observe and only intervene when sure a ewe is struggling.

"Ensure you give her plenty of time," she says. "Some ewes will show first signs of labour (restlessness) for a long time before actually getting on with straining to expel a lamb. To investigate problems, use disposable gloves to prevent spreading infection and plenty of lubrication. It is often advisable to give an antibiotic with assisted lambings too

Newborn lambs

"Lambing pens need to be disinfected or limed thoroughly between ewes and made up with clean, dry bedding," she says. "To limit risk of disease entering through the navel in lambs, spray or dip the navel with strong (10% iodine), ideally on two separate occasions to dry it out completely."

Once born, lambs require 50ml of colostrum per kg of bodyweight in the first six hours of life. This should be repeated four times in the first 24 hours. Ensure all equipment is sterilised if tubing or bottle feeding is necessary. Ewes with a low BCS or carrying triplets may have insufficient colostrum, so be prepared to foster or bottle feed.

Turn out ewes and lambs onto clean pasture, prioritising better grazing for those ewes with a low BCS.

When to wean should be determined by ewe BCS, feed availability and lamb growth rates, says Miss Brian. These factors change every year, so an ideal weaning date cannot be set in stone. Thin ewes need sufficient time and a good diet to reach the optimum BCS at tugging.

Recording shouldn't stop at turnout,

continues Mrs Phillips. "Early lambing flocks feeding concentrate need to be monitor daily liveweight gain (DLWG) closely. The *Stocktake 2014* report suggested the top third of lowland producers achieved a net margin of just £1.77/ewe tugged, compared to £15.44 for later lambing flocks that focused more on grass."

To simplify recording of DLWG mark around 10 lambs per grazing/feeding group to act as a monitor. Weigh weekly if drafting lambs regularly, or monthly if not. On a lowland all-grass system aim for 250-300g DLWG; if supplementing aim for 350-400g/day to justify the extra feed cost.

"Continue to monitor lamb losses through to the point of sale," says Mrs Phillips. "This may help identify if you are losing lambs at grass due to clostridial disease or worm burden. Faecal egg counts – done either by your vet, with the help of an SQP in the local pharmacy or on-farm if you have the equipment and knowledge – will allow you to pick the most effective wormer."

Once finished and ready for marketing, prospects for the 2015 lamb campaign look encouraging, advises Mr Stocker. "Large exporting countries such as New Zealand haven't reported significant increases in numbers and more of its product is serving developing markets such as China. The UK still exports a considerable percentage in to mainland Europe, and while sterling remains an issue, as an industry we are in not too bad a place at this time."

More information

Eblex BRP Sheep Manual 4 (Managing Ewes for Better Returns) for a pictorial guide to help assess BCS and more detail on target BCS for different flocks. Eblex BRP Sheep Manual 12 (Improving Ewe Nutrition for Better Returns) for help on balancing forage to meet ewes' nutritional needs. Visit www.eblex.org.uk/returns or call 08702 418829 for copies.

Monitoring ewe body condition throughout pregnancy and beyond will ensure her nutritional needs are met and she had colostrum and milk for her lambs.

CLA is an increasing problem

By Dr Michael Fontaine and
Professor Lee Innes, Moredun
Research Institute



Caseous lymphadenitis (CLA) is a chronic bacterial infection that causes abscesses to form in lymph nodes and other tissues.

The prevalence of the disease is increasing in the UK, resulting in welfare issues for the affected animals and economic losses to producers due to ill thrift. At the abattoir, affected carcasses also require careful trimming to remove diseased tissues and may be condemned outright in extreme cases. Chronic diseases such as CLA can reduce an animal's ability to fend off other diseases, and hence an underlying CLA problem contributes to an overall decline in flock health.

To-date the increase in prevalence of CLA in the UK has largely followed the pattern observed in other countries, such as Australia, that have experienced a longer-term CLA problem. Consequently, with increasing incidence, the impact of CLA in the UK is predicted to become more significant.

The disease is caused by infection with the bacterium *Corynebacterium pseudotuberculosis*, which is highly infectious and can survive for long periods of time in cold and damp environments.

Animals usually become infected through cuts or abrasions to the skin, which may occur through shearing/clipping, tagging, docking castration or from rubbing against rough surfaces.

Once the bacteria gain entry to the animal they are recognised and captured by the cells of the animals' immune system. However, some of the invading bacteria survive the attack from the animal's immune system and are transported to the lymph nodes, and elsewhere around the body, where they establish a site of infection leading to the development of characteristic abscesses.

The on-going attempt by the immune system of the animal to fight the infection results in the development of the abscesses, which may present as visible lumps around the head and neck region, and may go on to lose overlying hair.

Abscesses

The abscesses may rupture to release a cheese-like pus which contains many millions of bacterial cells. This pus contaminates the infected animal's environment and serves as a source of infection for other animals. Subsequent contact with the pus allows the bacteria within to gain access to un-infected animals through breaks in the skin. Although not widely reported, humans are also susceptible to infection with the CLA-causing pathogen, and care should be taken during handling of infected animals.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to treat infected animals with antibiotics, as the bacteria are protected within the thick-walled abscesses which become surrounded by a tough fibrous capsule.

However, through a better understanding of how the infection is spread and transmitted, disease prevention and control strategies can be put in place. Biosecurity measures involve the screening and quarantine of replacement animals to the farm. Animals should be inspected for any lumps and lesions, in particular around the head and neck area. In addition, a blood test may help to determine whether an animal has been exposed to the infection. Research conducted at Moredun has led to the development of a blood test which is designed to detect specific antibodies recognising a toxin produced by the bacterium, providing an indication of whether or not the animal has been infected. This test can be a useful aid in developing biosecurity



CLA can present visible lumps, but also causes unseen abscesses internally.

CLA Special:

Three-page focus,
plus Moredun technical
newsheet enclosed with
this edition.

measures and as a flock management tool to cull-out affected animals.

As *C. pseudotuberculosis* can persist in the environment, pens and sheds should be disinfected and shearing equipment should be cleaned in a strong disinfectant or chlorine bleach prior to use. The incidence of CLA has been shown to increase with age (due to increased likelihood of exposure over time) so older animals should also be handled last during routine procedures to help minimise the risk of disease transmission.

Vaccination

Vaccination to help prevent CLA is a very attractive option and one that scientists at Moredun have been actively pursuing. Several prototype vaccines have been tested and an innovative approach has led to the development of a new CLA vaccine that could be used alongside blood-testing to enable differentiation between infected and vaccinated animals. This would be a very useful tool to help prevent disease and help towards eradication going forward. The next steps are to seek a commercial partnership to help make this vaccine available to sheep producers.

All NSA members are automatically associate members of Moredun too and receive occasional technical newsheets. Included in this edition is an in-depth look at CLA; if yours is missing please contact NSA Head Office.

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CLA Case Study 1:

Kevin Harrison, Gloucestershire

Quick action after a shearer found a CLA lump in one of Kevin Harrison's rams resulted in him culling two tupps for lesions and another eight out of 18 for positive blood results.

Blood tests later down the line saw more rams culled, at great expense in terms of veterinary support and replacement costs, but Kevin is convinced the quick action stopped CLA becoming a huge problem in his flock of 800 bought-in commercial ewes.

He is still faced with the challenge of keeping the risk low, so is hyper-aware when he buys in rams, regularly checks stock for physical lumps and clinical signs, and has 10-20 thin ewes blood tested before tupping each year to check for CLA and MV.

Quarantine

"I know there are other diseases out there that are as big, or a bigger treat, than CLA, but this is the one that had affected us and we're aware of," Kevin says. "I still have to be aware of other diseases and observe strict quarantining rules when buying stock in. If we hadn't have taken action when we did, I think CLA would have got into the flock and we would have been looking at having to cull a lot of ewes to get rid of it. Hopefully by early surveillance and spotting it we've managed to protect our flock.

"The problem with CLA is the practicalities of putting the veterinary advice into practice. A lot of ram breeders won't agree to blood testing before sale, and if they have vaccinated for CLA the vaccine will give a positive result anyway. I haven't got a problem with someone vaccinating, but they need to be up-front about it.

Below: Kevin Harrison says he has manage to keep his ewes free from disease, struggling in his rams instead, whereas Philip Sabin has had the exact opposite problem.

Kevin's wish list

- Rams breeders blood testing stock before sale and declaring if they use the vaccine
- Development of a cheaper blood test
- A UK vaccine that does not result in a positive result when blood testing
- An industry accreditation scheme for CLA

"People see it as a dirty disease and would be worried that they would lose their reputation if it was known they had it in their flocks, but that is putting your head in the sand; protecting yourself in the short-term but not helping yourself or the UK sheep industry in the long-term."

Buying rams

Kevin now only buys rams from vendors who declare if they are vaccinating or not, and who agree for rams to be tested for CLA on arrival, with the whole batch returned if one tests positive. Knowing that the test is not 100% accurate he also keeps older rams, which have had the most exposure and are the most likely to be infected, separate from his newer rams and younger ewes, using them instead on older ewes that will be exiting the flock soon anyway. He says the next step is vaccinating his stock to rams, for further protection.

"We have to do all we can to stop the endemic diseases getting into our flocks, whether it's MV, CLA, OPA, Johne's, scab or whatever, or we're doing the sheep industry a disservice," he says.

CLA Vet Comment:

Phillipa Page, Wood Veterinary Group

Having seen CLA is client's flocks, Phillipa knows that it is a difficult disease to deal with and one that sheep keepers cannot assume is limited to terminal sire breeds (as has been thought over the years).

She believes growing awareness will start to see a change in attitude: "Sheep producers who are actively flock health planning and taking veterinary advice on quarantine procedures are aware of CLA and asking pedigree vendors about clinical signs, if they are blood testing and if they are vaccinating. Vendors should be aware that if they are monitoring for CLA they will be looked on favourably by buyers."

If people are fearful that they have a problem or looking to

CLA Special:

Three-page focus, plus Moredun technical newsheet enclosed with this edition.

CLA Case Study 2:

Philip Sabin, Suffolk

One bought in shearling ewe with a 'boil' on its throat that erupted with cheese-like pus was the beginning of a very serious problem for Philip Sabin.

He recognised it as CLA and had heard it was a serious problem, but culling six other bought-in shearlings with lesions and keeping the rest as a separate group was not enough to stop the spread through his flock of 500 cross-bred commercial females.

He started seeing more sheep with lumps over the next six months and, within two years, was losing a lot of (mainly older) ewes. This increased his average annual mortality from 3% to 7-8%.

"It became endemic in the flock with high older ewe losses," he says. "I was getting a lot of poor animals, sometimes not breathing well, and keeling over. A hot spell in summer would take these weaker animals even sooner."

Lost income

Philip said he never had lambs condemned at the abattoir but had a 'double-hit' elsewhere, as he had to spend more on replacements and was also losing his usual income from selling strong cull ewes.

"The good sheep were still producing," he says, adding that scanning and lambing percentages never fell. "But by the time they were three or five years old they were suffering badly. They went poor and died really quite quickly, within a month or six weeks. They must have had internal lesions, as although the majority had external lumps not all of them did."

start a control programme, Phillipa says you have to control the disease at a whole-flock level, as the blood test does not pick up all animals. This is because antibodies levels in animals wax and wane at different times (similar to TB) so an infected animal will not always give a positive result.

However, that is not a reason not to test, as it is still a 'very useful tool' and the more people who start testing the more the cost will come down and the more likelihood of multi-disease tests becoming available and affordable.

"I am trying to encourage ram breeders to test, as well as commercial farmers, and if vendors repeatedly get negative tests they can promote that at point of sale," says Phillipa. She adds that Glanvac (the only vaccine currently on sale, but only available via special licence) is a useful and effective vaccine, but like all vaccines will not cure infected sheep so must be used as part of a testing and control plan in conjunction with your vet.

Philip looked into vaccination options and was disappointed to hear a UK-developed vaccine (by Moredun) had not received enough commercial support to get it to market yet. However, his vet explained an Australian vaccine (Glanvac) could be imported under licence.

"The vet said the vaccine would take five years to make an impact and we're five years in and seeing no signs of CLA at all now," he says. "It has worked very well for me. It's not an expensive vaccine. We do everything coming into the flock twice and everything else annually with one injection."

Vaccination

Philip says he would prefer to use a UK vaccine if it were available, as Glanvac (which is a combination CLA and clostridial vaccine) was developed for Australian disease strains. He chooses to jab with a clostridial and pasteurilla vaccine in addition, to ensure his females are protected.

"Without the vaccine I think we'd have had to think about whether we continued in sheep, because it really was devastating at one time," Phil says. "Before we had the problem, I was aware of the disease but just didn't think we would ever see it. People think it's just in pedigree sheep but it's not. CLA has cost me a lot over the years, but I think we are through it now and protecting ourselves for the future."

Fact File

- Rapid spread
- High replacement rate for older ewes
- Fewer cull ewes to sell



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Act to protect third wormer group

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



Preliminary results from a survey of anthelmintic resistance status on sheep farms in Wales last autumn highlight the need to redouble our efforts to try to slow the march of resistance on farms.

The survey reported widespread resistance to the white (1-BZ) group and resistance to the yellow (2-LV) groups was detected on two thirds of farms. However, the real shock was the discovery that one in five farms tested had detectable resistance to moxidectin. It was thought by many that resistance to this sub-group of the clear (3-ML) products was very rare in the UK. Urgent action is needed if we are to preserve the efficacy of this group for the foreseeable future.

Resistance is always a threat, and is inevitable in the long term, but why has this happened more quickly than many people expected? The Achilles heel is sheep scab. Cases of sheep scab have continued to escalate in parallel with the demise of dipping, resulting in heavy reliance on the use of 3-ML endectocides

(and increasingly 2% LA moxidectin) as the main control measure on farms. Every time we use an endectocide we are putting selection pressure on the worms present in that sheep for resistance to that product. This has undoubtedly accelerated the development of resistance.

The timing of these treatments is also a factor, as scab treatments are more often given during the winter months. At this time the larger proportion of the worm population is living in the sheep (rather than on pasture), and coupled with the need to treat 100% of the sheep to get on top of scab, demonstrates how heavily some farms have been selecting for resistance.

We need to act fast to try to reduce the selection pressure on the 3-ML (and moxidectin) group. In practice that means using them more carefully and less frequently. Before you start ordering your wormers this year have a talk to your vet or adviser and see what changes you can make to try and protect your flock for as long as possible.

Start this year with a discussion about worming ewes around lambing. Do you need to treat them all? What product should you use for those that are treated? When is the best time to treat them? Most importantly, if you are thinking about using



The first step in protecting the 3-ML (clear) group is thinking about worming ewes around lambing time. Do you need to treat them all and what product should you use?

a product that is persistent (moxidectin) then you need to be very clear on which versions to use and how to do so to minimise the risk of resistance developing.

Over the coming year SCOPS will take a step by step look, with farm examples and practical tips, at the actions sheep farmers can take to reduce the risk of one day fighting worms with ineffective products due to resistance. SCOPS will also be running its interactive nematodirus warning map and advice service this spring – see www.scops.org.uk for more details.

(The survey referred to in this article is a HCC / WAARD sponsored project.)

Nematodirus prevention this spring

By Rachel Mallet, Bimeda Veterinary Advisor

The perennial problem of nematodirus-caused profuse, watery yellowy-green diarrhoea still leads to acute dehydration and lamb losses on many farms.

As the onset of disease can be very fast, farmers have to be vigilant and respond rapidly, as sudden changes in spring weather can lead to severe problems

Nematodirus affects lambs because they have never encountered the *nematodirus battus* parasite before and have no immunity from it, unlike adult sheep who have previous exposure and acquired resistance.

When the weather suddenly changes from cold winter days to warmer spring weather it provides ideal conditions for a mass hatching of parasites, which have over-wintered on the pasture. If this coincides with the time lambs begin to eat significant amounts of grass (six to 12 weeks old) this can have devastating effects. The challenge will vary depending

Signs of nematodirus infection

- Sudden onset profuse diarrhoea
- Faecal staining of tail and perineum
- Dull/depressed lambs
- Lambs which stop sucking
- Gaunt condition
- Dehydration
- Rapid loss of body condition
- Lambs congregating around water to rehydrate

on the weather and region, with problems tending to become apparent earliest in the milder, South East of the UK, and slightly later in Northern England and Scotland.

As soon as the mass hatching is triggered by the weather they are active and ready to infect lambs. The nature of the parasite life cycle means that once symptoms appear or eggs appear in a faecal egg count the damage is already being done to the flock. It is therefore vital to know the parasite forecast for your region (see www.nadis.org.uk, www.scops.org.uk or discuss it with your vet), but due to the quick-striking nature of nematodirus, it also helps to have the

High risk factors for nematodirus battus

- Lambs grazing pasture that carried lambs the previous spring
- A sudden, late cold snap which is followed by a period of warm weather
- Lambs that are old enough to be eating significant amounts of grass (6–12 weeks old)
- Groups where there is also likely to be a challenge from coccidiosis
- Lambs that are under other stresses e.g. triplets, fostered-on, young or older ewes

issue in mind and be ready to take action.

Treatment with an appropriate white drench is highly effective, relatively inexpensive and safe in lambs. It is extremely important to dose for the correct weight of lamb to ensure we do not select for resistant worms, and to test 7–10 days after anthelmintic drenching to ensure the treatment was effective. Multiple treatments may be required, which your vet or health advisor will be able to advise you on.

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A vet's eye view of the Sheep Health and Welfare Conference

By Joe Henry,
Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group



I know it shouldn't, but the word welfare in a course title does fill me with images of well-meaning but hopelessly impractical measures being talked about.

Happily this was not the case with the Sheep Health and Welfare Conference held in Staffordshire at the end of last year, where there were lots of good speakers sharing their own experiences and explaining good examples of best practice.

Peter Baber, Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG) Chairman and commercial sheep farmer, opened the conference



The ability of the scab mite to live off the sheep for 18 days means pens used to treat infected sheep remain potentially infectious for more than a fortnight.

with comments about the importance of the sheep industry coming together and interacting with the Government to try and reduce disease and increase sheep welfare, which would make sheep farming more productive and therefore more profitable. Excellent, I thought. More collaboration between the various bodies representing sheep farmers can only allow the industry to progress more quickly.

Collaboration was a topic I covered as a speaker on sheep scab, describing our approach at Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group to the parasite.

Sheep scab

I was preceded by some very good speakers, who looked at the science behind sheep scab. Professor Richard Wall from Bristol University told us about the very real difficulties in eradicating it nationally, as it requires close cooperation and collaboration of all sheep farmers. As this was not being led by the Government, he thought it likely we would just have to go on living with scab as an endemic disease, especially where there was common grazing. Unfortunately the scab mites will become resistant to the medicines we have available to kill them and it will be an ongoing cost to the sheep farming industry.

I am more optimistic that we can eradicate scab nationally, as we have products that work. All that is lacking is the will to use them in a coordinated fashion.

Dr Peter Bates, ex-chief parasitologist at AHVLA, reminded us that the biggest practical difficulty in managing scab is that



A debate on sheep scab at the SHAWG conference involved Joe Henry (far left), other experts and sheep farmers.

the mite can live for 18 days off the sheep. Most new infections come in on infected sheep that are not yet showing signs of itching, so risk factors are obviously bringing on sheep (either new or returning from grass parks), boundaries with sheep neighbours, and contractors such as shearers, scan men, hauliers etc. Assume brought-on sheep are infected and treat and isolate accordingly, remembering that the pens used to treat the new sheep will be infectious for 19 days. Feral sheep can be a source of infection and should be culled or treated.

Coordination

And then it was my turn – the graveyard slot of last speaker of the day! I explained that if sheep scab is suspected on one of our farms then we get a definitive laboratory diagnosis. Due to its infectious nature, scab cannot be tackled one farm at a time. It will need a coordinated effort by a group of neighbouring farmers, all at least one farm clear of any confirmed

Joe Henry reflects on other topics from the conference

Chief Veterinary Officer Alick Simmons talked about the importance of monitoring disease levels and, importantly, getting early warnings of new emerging diseases.

Professor Alex Cook from the University of Surrey said new, animal-side testing should speed up diagnosis of disease, as there is no delay in sending to a laboratory. This can only be a good thing, especially for new exotic diseases.

The four speakers covering the topic of minimising the risks of buying in disease with new sheep were excellent. Michael Barker from Yorkshire, Dominic Naylor from Northumberland and Robert Tucker from Cornwall all spoke of their farms. Common themes were knowing the disease status of your own flock

and monitoring it, and the importance of quarantine procedures, medications and farm biosecurity (e.g. double fencing boundaries) to avoid bringing new diseases to your farm which could cost your business. Paul Roger, a Yorkshire vet, emphasised the importance of all this by explaining the science behind the procedures.

Quarantine

All the speakers demonstrated that every farm is different and individual businesses need to speak to their private vet to draw up a quarantine plan, for when new sheep are brought on especially.

During a debate on biosecurity and quarantine, the six-day standstill rule was brought up and the very real logistical



Good disinfection protocol.

problems that complying with this brings, leading to circumventing the rule being widespread. A better rule of isolation facilities on each farm and correct reporting of movements would prove to be more workable and allow more accurate traceability in case of a disease outbreak, it was argued.

diagnosis, to eradicate it from the district.

A meeting is therefore arranged and consensus is reached as to when all the sheep are to be treated in a coordinated fashion. Guidance is given by ourselves as to type and timing of treatments. A chairman from the farmers is selected to follow up and make sure everyone does what was agreed.

It is imperative that every single scab mite is killed, so 100% full gathers are required. Weighing of sheep and a full dose from calibrated guns for every sheep, or following dip instructions exactly, is vital. If one sheep gets an injection into the wool by mistake the whole treatment will fail and time and money is wasted.

If this is not done scab merely circulates from farm to farm and becomes endemic, with farmers having to treat two or three times a year independently, with the cost of medicine and time. Worryingly this will select for resistance in the scab mites. By using our coordinated approach instead, we have cleaned scab out from different practice areas.

Enforcement

A discussion about sheep scab, chaired by Chris Lloyd of Eblex, revealed large regional variations in current enforcement by trading standards when scab was present. This must be sorted out as a priority.

What amazed me was the fact that the vast majority of sheep farmers present at the conference had not seen scab in their flocks in the last few years. I feel this is a real opportunity if the sheep industry wants to eradicate scab.

The conference was an exciting place to be and it felt as if industry direction could be influenced here. Overall I found it a very informative and would recommend it to anyone connected to the sheep industry.

Find papers from the Sheep Health and Welfare Conference at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SHAWG. The event is organised biennially. Also see page 42 for SCOPS information on sheep scab control.

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Flock health plan and focus on lameness-control reap rewards

Gloucestershire farmer Donna Bowen is focusing on improving output of her flock by using active veterinary flock health planning to reduce lameness – and sharing the results with other sheep keepers by being an Eblex Focus Farm.

Donna Bowen and family farm more than 1,500 ewes at Bicknor Court Farm, Coleford, Gloucestershire. These are mostly Welsh Mules, with a few hundred pure Welsh and some Aberdale crosses. The Aberdale crosses lambed for the first time in 2014, outside in April, while the Mules lamb indoors in March. All lambs are sold finished.

Donna became an Eblex Focus Farm in May 2014 and has been working closely with Mair Morgan, Adas Livestock Consultant, and Phillipa Page from Wood Vet Group to improve the flock by looking at lameness, condition scoring and parasites.

Phillipa has spent considerable time with Donna aiming to improve the lambing percentage by improving overall health and production, particularly lameness, as like many sheep farms, lameness has been a significant problem at Bicknor Court.

Lameness control

The large flock size and small labour force meant controlling lameness was difficult and levels had increased to an unmanageable amount on the current system of individual treatments and footbathing. There were 6-8% lame across the ewe flock (in particular the Mules) and 10-15% of the weaned lambs going into the late summer/autumn period.

At the flock health planning review a workable lameness control plan was developed between Phillipa and Donna to help reduce the levels of lameness and the overall use of antibiotics. The focus was placed upon prevention and management.

Firstly the lame sheep were examined and the causes of lameness identified. These included interdigital dermatitis (scald), footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD). These are the most common causes of lameness across the whole of the UK flock.

The lameness plan was then implemented, with ewes and rams vaccinated after weaning and individuals who were actively lame treated with a long acting injection of oxytetracycline and a topical engemycin spray. This was then



Phillipa Page of Wood Vet Group leading an Eblex Focus Farm session at Donna Bowen's Bicknor Court Farm in Gloucestershire.

recorded by spray-marking the affected ewe and the affected leg. In the future Donna plans to use EID to record this information.

Ewes that had been repeatedly lame (three times plus) were culled and did not go to the ram next time around. This will reduce the challenge of infection to the rest of the flock and reduce the associated costs of repeated treatments and loss in production from chronic lameness.

Vaccination

The vaccine was administered again before the risk period of winter and housing. This is usually at scanning time. Again, any lame sheep at this handling were treated with an antibiotic.

Any new sheep that had been purchased or were returning to the main flock from a period away at tack were quarantined and monitored for lameness before entering the main flock. Any lame animals were then able to be treated and identified. This aspect is often difficult to manage with sheep having to enter the main flock immediately. This makes the use of vaccination important in terms of protecting the flock from further infection.

Management decisions were also taken to avoid practices that may increase the chance of infection. During a period of lameness in weaned lambs the method of creep feeding was changed from hopper to snacker feeding to reduce poor underfoot

conditions.

Over the flock as a whole the lameness has reduced this winter to 3.8%, which is a very encouraging reduction in the first eight months of a lameness control plan. Donna Bowen says: "The number of cases of lameness has reduced dramatically and this has reduced labour and improved flock output."

Focus on lameness

This article is part of NSA's support of the Eblex Focus Farm programme, which involves 19 sheep focus farms throughout England, including Donna Bowen's.

Topics covered on the focus farms depend on the sheep enterprise there, but lameness has been a common theme. A recent survey of farmers who have attended lameness meetings on the 19 farms has revealed that three-quarters of them plan to change their management practices as a result. The most popular management change was to treat lame sheep earlier (51%), followed by culling repeatedly-lame ewes (45%). The events also prompted attendees to question their use of foot trimming, with those that routinely trim feet being more likely to stop as a result of attending the events.

Find your local focus farm at www.eblex.org.uk/returns/cattle-sheep-health-welfare-project.



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Understanding the wool supply chain, from start to finish

Not only is the British Wool Market Board committed to marketing wool to the best effect, it is also fully involved in every aspect of wool handling, collection and marketing, says Board Chairman Malcolm Corbett, and provides a number of valuable services across where is a complex and fragmented supply chain.



In this first of two articles examining the role of the BWMB, Mr Corbett explains that the organisation's commitment to market wool from every sheep farmer, no matter their size or location, makes them unique in agriculture.

As it has been for centuries, the first step in marketing wool is getting it from the sheep – and that means shearing.

"The board has always been and continues to be at the forefront of providing shearing training across the UK," says Mr Corbett. "Through our network of experienced and dedicated shearing instructors across the country we provide high quality training to a new generation of shearers every year, with BWMB's shearing qualification and 'seals' recognised across the world."

However, shearing is not just about getting the wool off the sheep; it is an important step in ensuring the fleece is presented in the correct manner to the wool grading depot.

Mr Corbett says: "Having sheep sheared and the wool presented correctly ensures producers can maximise the value of their wool. For shearers, taking maximum opportunity of the training offered by BWMB can be a route to building a business. It can be a great route in to farming for many young people and offers the chance to earn money and the potential to see the world too."

Quality control

Good presentation of producer's fleeces at the depot is recognised by the quality control systems put in place for the 2014 season. Over 550 Excellent Clip Presentation certificates have been issued to producers by the depot this season.

After shearing the wool needs to be packed into wool sheets and delivered to one of the board's 11 grading depots or 14 intermediate depots ready for grading or onward transport.

"Grading is a vital cog in the machine," says Mr Corbett. "It is only by skilful grading the board can make the best of every fleece



Fleece graders serve a five-year apprenticeship before becoming qualified.



Wool comes to BWMB via 11 grading depots and 14 intermediate depots.

for producers. Grading means we can offer a uniform and quality product, which means buyers are able to bid with confidence and ensures every kilo earns the best possible price for the producer. BWMB graders serve

a five year apprenticeship, demonstrating the immense level of skill needed to sort through the huge variety of wool produced by British sheep."

Fleece grading

Contrary to the beliefs of some, Mr Corbett says fleeces are not graded according to breed. "BWMB grades according to type rather than specific breeds, as this ensures we are providing the global market with wool possessing the unique characteristics required to suit the end users' requirements. Every fleece graded falls in to a specific grade, with these grades broadly fitting into six categories; fine, medium, cross, lustre, hill and mountain."

Once fleeces have been graded and approximately 400kg have been allocated to each grade, it is packed in to a bale for auction.

"Once there are 22-24 bales of that grade available the wool is allocated to a sale, with all the board's wool sold in eight or nine-tonne lots."

The next steps in the wool supply chain – testing, wool at auction and dispatch – will be discussed in the next issue of Sheep Farmer.



Training young shearers is an important part of the wool supply chain, as it ensures fleeces are sent to BWMB in good order.

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