

Sheep Farmer

JUNE/JULY 2015



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

**NSA SHEEP EVENTS AND NATIONAL
AGM PREVIEW**

**INDEPENDENT SUPPORT OF
SCOPS GUIDELINES**

LAMB PRICE ANALYSIS

**NEWS ON SHEEP SKINS, WOOL
PRICES AND WOOL RECYCLING**

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Front Cover

It is coming up for six months since NSA South Sheep was held at Blackcap Farm, Firle, Lewes, East Sussex. This picture was taken on the day, just a short distance from the English Channel and taking in part of Tony Monnington's flock of Mule and Suffolk Mule ewes. It was taken by Lisa Law, who is the daughter of Bob Blanden, NSA South East Region Manager.



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NSA's objectives include vital role of advancing sheep health

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

I never think it's a bad thing to periodically remind ourselves what we are here for.

In the simplest of terms, people often think of NSA as a club for sheep farming interests, and indeed we are. But the NSA's guiding document, our Articles of Association, say quite clearly that our objective is to 'encourage and improve breeding, management and promotion of sheep as a species and as an activity in the UK and elsewhere in pursuit of advancing education, health, heritage, science, environmental protection and improvement and animal welfare for the public benefit'.

There is nothing in there about profitability or farmer well-being, but it goes without saying that without both we will not hit our objectives and would be wasting our time, and it justifies why we devote resources to reminding whoever we can get to listen about the importance of business success.



Bringing people together through NSA enables us to do this – and the more people we get to join means the stronger mandate we have and the more resources we have to do it with.

Advancing sheep health is an essential part of our work. It's also an essential part of farm profitability, and to that end we work with many partners and allied organisations. To mention just a few, the Moredun Foundation is a formal partner with NSA with associate membership benefits, and the Sheep Veterinary Society is a very natural partner with which we work closely. There are specialist groups such as SCOPS, and on the Government front we have Defra and the devolved administrations, with each of those having animal health boards and strategic groups – the list of allies could go on.

Progress

Purely unscientifically, if I compare what I see now on my visits around the country with what I remember seeing say 20 or even 10 years ago, we have made progress. My impression is that the quality of stock has improved, visually at least, and a lot of what would not have been nice to see has gone. That's not to say there still aren't some examples that could easily be vastly improved, and I think most of us would agree we have plenty to go for in terms of bettering ourselves further.

Casual visual assessments are one thing but there are many sheep health problems that lie beneath the surface and affect productivity and profitability without being seen. Diseases like OPA, MV and CLA seriously limit efficiency and require screening, monitoring and working with specialists.

It's also becoming clearer that we are not using existing and potentially easy opportunities to their best effect. In fact it has become accepted recently that we are not even complying with EU requirements in terms of feedback from abattoirs via the FCI (Food Chain Information) declarations and checks that are being done by meat and veterinary inspections. CCIR (Collection and Communication of Inspection Results) is a legal requirement on member states in order to improve health and welfare. Some sheep farmers are lucky, they do get some basic information returned, but even then there is little confidence that traceability is accurate. But think what could be done if these checks could be broader, more consistent and more accurate.

NSA Articles

I started by mentioning the NSA's Articles of Association and I'll finish on them too. Some members might remember that we introduced a new set of Articles in 2012, just three years ago. We have learnt a lot in that time and have also found a few areas of our governing document that need tidying up and clarifying. The result is that we are proposing a number of changes, none that will affect the practicalities of our representational structure, and all are which are outlined on page 16 of this magazine.

The intention is to seek approval for these changes at our 2015 AGM – to be held on Wednesday 12th August at the Rhug Estate in North Wales – and to that end a copy of the Articles, with changes identified, is available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events again the 12th August date. Hard copies are also available by contacting the NSA office.

We are very lucky to have the Rhug Estate as a host for this event and I hope a profile of the estate – on page 18 of this magazine – will encourage you to come along.

If you plan to attend the NSA AGM and farm walk, please help us with catering requirements by booking a place. Call the NSA office or email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

News Update

Lambing list

If you used the NSA Lambing List this year to find cover for the busy season, you will be aware it was the first time the service ran fully online. It worked well at NSA Head Office and initial feedback from members has been positive, but to ensure we are running a useful service we will be seeking the opinion of users before launching for the 2015/16 season. We will be contacting users in the coming weeks so please look out for the survey.

SBV concerns

Recent communication between APHA and NSA has confirmed Schmallenberg as a continuing threat to UK sheep flocks.

The disease is still circulating in Europe, posing a risk to naïve replacement breeding females (and also possibly older ewes with falling natural immunity). It was with some surprise that, when answering queries from members with early lambing flocks, NSA discovered the two companies previously selling vaccine – MSD Animal

General election

We have of course had a new Government elected since the last issue of this magazine, and while a majority Conservative win was unexpected, it offers some unusual consistency in the form of farming ministers.

NSA has been in contact with Liz Truss (Defra Secretary of State) and George Eustice (Defra Under Secretary) to congratulate them on returning to office and highlight some priorities for the coming five years. These included the long-term strategy for food and farming, the importance of sheep health in maintaining disease-free status, and the need to relax TSE and carcass splitting rules.

NSA has also extended a welcome to Rory Stewart, MP for the rural constituency of Penrith and the Border, and newly appointed Defra Under Secretary.

With agricultural positions in Wales, Scotland and NI also unchanged, communication on important issues has not had to start from scratch again.

Do we have your email address? If not, you are missing out on valuable membership services including the popular NSA Weekly Email Update. To update your records please send your email address to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk with your membership number and/or postcode. **Did you know we can also now send texts?** This is a new service that will be used very occasionally to let you know about NSA events in your area. To 'opt in' and provide your mobile phone number, or 'opt out' and remove your number from our records, please email or call us.



Health and Merit Animal Health – were doing so under a temporary UK licence that has not been renewed.

We have not yet been able to confirm if any vaccine is being sold on the continent and if supplies can be exported to the UK on special licence, but will keep investigating and update members when we know more.

NSA sheep events

Sheep Farmer magazine went to press amongst the busy period of three back-to-

back NSA Sheep Events.

All so far have been great successes, with the crowds at NSA Welsh Sheep pictured above between the rain storms. We are looking forward to two more in the coming weeks in Devon and County Antrim.

There is a full report from NSA Welsh Sheep on page 9 and previews of NSA Sheep SW and NSA Sheep NI on pages page 10 and 11 respectively. Reports from NSA North Sheep and NSA Highland Sheep will be in the next edition.

BBQ season

An annual complaint from NSA and lamb producers is that consumption drops off in hot weather due to a perception that lamb is not a barbecue meat.

It is therefore gratifying that Red Tractor Assurance, which has been much maligned in recent months, has responded with a very positive BBQ campaign for beef and lamb through April, May and

June. The on-pack promotional activity was launched with the aim of driving awareness and understanding of Red Tractor standards, offering BBQ-based giveaways and a top prize of meeting rock-star-turned-farmer Alex James.

NSA members who are Twitter enthusiasts will have seen promotion via the #redtractorbbq hashtag, with the challenge of posting pictures of 'ultimate burger builds'.



NSA welly boot giveaway at sheep events

Thanks to a generous link-up with Dunlop, NSA has been giving away free pairs of wellies at all five NSA sheep events this summer.

The first winner – drawn out of the hat at NSA Welsh Sheep – was Caroline Evans of Ludlow, Shropshire. She attended the event with her daughter Victoria and was delighted to receive a new pair of Dunlop Purofort Vally outdoor performance boots with leather trimming.



The draws are open to NSA members and non-members, with one winner selected at random per event. You can still enter at NSA Sheep South West and NSA Northern Ireland in the coming weeks, selecting your preference between the

Vally boot or the Dunlop Purofort Professional full safety (with a steel toe cap and midsole). All winners will be announced in due course. Terms and conditions at www.nationalsheep.org.uk.



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Regional Reports

Central

By Richard Wheeldon, Chairman
Well, as I sit here this morning preparing the regional report, rain is lashing at the window and the lambs are all hunched up together under the walls looking decidedly sorry for themselves. Thankfully this is not representative of this year's lambing season, with many of our members reporting good lambing percentages and a less stressful lambing. The seasonal weather plays such a critical role in outdoor lambing, and the good weather has helped to put some smiles back on weary faces.

Of course this hot weather also has its disadvantages, with reports of ewes fly blown as early as April and high levels of nematodirus worm burden in lambs. So it's time to drag the shearing equipment out of the shed, dust it off, sharpen it up and prepare yourself for another season of shearing and worming.

There have been some reports again of dog worrying in the region. This appears to have become a national problem and must be something that the newly elected Government needs to be considering.

NSA Cymru/Wales

By Helen Davies, Development Officer
Well done to everyone involved with NSA Welsh Sheep. It was a great and memorable event, all of which is not possible without cooperation of the host farmers, local community, sponsors, trade, breed societies and stewards, to mention just a few. NSA Cymru/Wales is very grateful and thanks everyone connected with the event - full report on page 9.

NSA Cymru/Wales has its next stakeholder meeting regarding EID Cymru in early June, when we will hear further details of how EID Cymru will be communicated to the industry and how it will work.

NSA Cymru/Wales attended the TAG Project day with a stand and found this to be a very interesting and informative day.

After many stakeholder meetings, we are very pleased that the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales have agreed to the introduction of quarantine units as an optional alternative to the six-day standstill. Welsh Government will continue to work with stakeholders to determine the fine details and timescales of implementation, and while there is still a lot to discuss and negotiate for, this is a step in the right direction.

NSA Cymru/Wales is now looking forward to the Royal Welsh Show and

would like to remind all members that they are most welcome to come and see us on the stand on any of the four days, or for a reception on the Monday afternoon.

We do hope that by the time you read this report that the lamb price has risen and the factors relating to the downturn have abated.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager
By the time you read this the NSA Youthful Shepherds Event at Darley will, I am sure, have been a great success.

Andrew Foulds, our Regional Chairman, did a great job in securing donations from many supporters locally and nationally.

The region has been working away to achieve the desired result of providing young people, whether potential new entrants or individuals who wish to find out more about how to progress in their work with sheep, a comprehensive and interesting programme. Our special thanks to Dan Phipps and Liam O'Rourke from Darley Stud Management, Suffolk, for allowing us the use of their outstanding facilities. If you visited on the day, let us have your views, or if you missed out do feel free to contact us if we can be of any help.

Prime lamb prices prior to and around the time of writing have not been good enough. The reason has been very well explained by NSA and others. It has been a complicated picture, but still disheartening, and in cases completely dire. Our thoughts go out to you all, but it will get better - hopefully by the time you read this, it is!

NSA Eastern Region's ram sales begin with Rugby on Friday 28th August, followed by the 30th Anniversary Sale



New Young Show Stars competition

NSA was delighted to support the inaugural National Young Show Stars event in April, an event organised in association with the Three Counties Agricultural Society to encourage young people in the skills of marketing and presentation, livestock preparation, handling, auctioneering, butchering and general knowledge of the industry.

More than 100 competitors from age 8 to 24 years old took part over two days, with the sheep classes culminating in a win for the 'Heads Up' team, sponsored by the Badger Face Welsh Mountain Sheep Society. Winners Ellin Havard and Christie Joseph from Brecon, Powys, and Aled Groucott of Newport, Gwent, are pictured (centre) with competition sponsors, including NSA's Charlotte Underwood (far left).

Teams working with Blue Texels and Hampshire Downs were second and third respectively, while the team in fourth place - a Bleu du Maine trio of Max and Finlay Shone and Will Price - were the lucky recipients of NSA goodie bags and a year's free membership each. Beef, dairy and pig classes were also well supported, as well as a fledgling butchery competition. Best butcher was 17-year old Ben Greenfield from Leicestershire, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society.



at Melton Mowbray on Friday 18th September. This year following discussions with Paul Gentry at Newark, a new sale will be held on Saturday 26th September too - full details on page 12.

Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman
After several months stuck on the farm looking after sheep and lambing it has been nice to get out and about on official NSA business recently.

A trip to Stoneleigh along with other NSA representatives saw two meetings. The first was held with Red Tractor to discuss the current sheep-related standards and put forward any concerns that sheep farmers may have about the scheme both currently and going forward. The second was a meeting with Stuart Roberts, the new Chairman for Eblex (soon to be AHDB Beef and Lamb), to hear how he intends to steer things through the changes and beyond. We have also had our recent NSA English Committee meeting, including a session with Tim Morris from AHWBE.

The great thing about being part of the NSA is that it has allowed me - a humble sheep farmer - to talk to the people who

continued on page 6



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► make the decisions about the way the sheep industry goes forward and to share not only mine but others' concerns and experiences.

One of the strengths of NSA is its ability to truly represent the views of sheep farmers from the ground up. It does this in the unique way it is structured; regional members can share their views through regional committees, which can then be fed up to the higher committees without the fear of that message being diluted. Now you might find the word 'committee' boring or off-putting, but it is far from that at a regional level. Think of it more as a discussion group but with a bit of structure.

Our region has over 600 members yet we only have a small committee, not by choice but governed by who is willing to get involved. It would be nice to have more members attend our regional meetings so we can truly represent your concerns, whether you are a commercial sheep farmer, a pedigree sheep farmer or both. We also need to be looking down the line for the next Chairman and next English committee representatives. So if this interests you, or you just want to get your voice heard, please come along and get involved. We are a friendly bunch.

Northern

By Eddie Eastham, Vice Chairman
I was lucky enough to represent NSA at the 2015 Upland Conference, held at the National Centre for the Uplands at Newton Rigg, Cumbria, for three days in May. With a thoughtfully selected range of speakers and lively debates, this second annual conference showed signs of maturity.

A highlight of the conference was the launch of the Uplands Alliance, the aim of which is to bring together, for the first time, practitioners, researchers and policy makers with interests in the upland areas. The challenges for the uplands are immense and complex and there are many competing interests. Only by having a collaborative approach will different issues be understood and solutions found which work for everyone. Hopefully, in time, the aims of the alliance will be fulfilled, although for now judgement must be reserved.

There is a lot of unease around the way agri-environmental schemes have been implemented in the past. Many have been over-prescriptive and would have benefited from some local knowledge in order to meet the needs of different land types. As a result there have been many unintended and unwanted consequences.

There was however an upbeat mood at the conference, creating a feeling that corners have been turned and perhaps there is a promise of something better.

Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer
We attended the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show in the middle of May, where the NSA Sheep Centre provided trade space for several breed societies and sheep related companies. And now NSA Sheep NI 2015 is almost upon us and hopefully we will have a good number of visitors to support us – see page 11 for details.

This spring lamb and hogget prices have been a disaster! A culmination of a weak euro, a carryover of heavy hoggets and newly introduced EU labelling rules in the South of Ireland have given the other links in the food chain an excuse to exploit the vulnerability of sheep producers in Northern Ireland who have to sell their product when it reaches sale weight. We find it unacceptable to produce lamb at a loss with a year-on-year drop of at least £25, yet see shoppers still paying the same prices as before the drop. Where, I wonder, did the money producers lost go if retail price has not changed?

NSA Northern Ireland representatives spoke with the agriculture committee explaining the situation sheep producers find themselves in and requesting its

support in solving the problem. Throughout the UK there was a fall in producer prices, but there was no reason to explain why it should be so much more of a drop in NI.

We need the problem sorted before the peak sale season starts. The lamb plants in the South rely on our lambs later in the season to keep them operating at an economical level. If this usual movement of lamb is restricted, Southern plants will become uneconomic and we will be left with a situation where NI plants will not have the capacity to cope at peak times. All involved must work to find a solution. Interpretation of EU labelling rules this spring will not only effect beef and lamb but also pork and milk.

Scotland

By George Milne, Development Officer
Like all other parts of the UK, the drop in hogg prices after Easter is a major concern for most sheep farmers in Scotland. Finishers have in many cases had their fingers burnt and the concern of where store lambs will level out this year is on many producers' minds.

With breeding ewe numbers seeing an increase this year in Scotland to nearly three million, thought has to turn to the

potential number of lambs that will be on the ground this year and, if similar trends are replicated across the UK, then potentially we could be looking at a larger number of lambs to find a market. With this issue in mind NSA Scotland has raised it with QMS and several meetings have taken place to see what can be done to try and make sure there will be sufficient demand for extra tonnage of lamb this year.

An NSA Scottish Region committee meeting was held at the end of May and covered a large range of topics, including full updates on policy issues such as sheep disease eradication, CAP reform, climate change and, of course, the lamb supply chain. NSA office bearers met with Cabinet Secretary Richard Lochhead a few weeks ago to discuss the problems around grass lets, as we have a large number of members experiencing great difficulty in renewing grass let contracts with some land owners choosing to take the opportunity of keeping land in their own name in order to receive area payments going forward. This has come about mainly as a result of the Scottish Government choosing to use 2015 instead of 2013 as the reference year.

With nearly 15% of the land in Scotland under seasonal lets this has proved to be a disaster for many graziers. On the back of the meeting the Government announced they would be particularly strict on any claims that looked to be false or not a robust agreement. The reality however still remains that some payments may not go to the active livestock farmer and this is totally against the principle that everyone wanted to see achieved.

With the Royal Highland Show just around the corner, we welcome everyone to visit our NSA stand to have a chat with office bearers. This year we have been invited by the Royal Highland Education Trust to address in the region of 500 school children ranging from age eight to 18 years. This is a great opportunity to let schools know more about sheep farming in Scotland.

South West

By Bryan Griffiths, Chairman
What on earth has happened? Over the past few years we have heard a great deal about the need to feed the seven billion people in the world. Terms such as 'food security' and 'sustainable intensification' have crept into our vocabulary. It has therefore come as a mighty shock that meat, milk and grain prices have crashed, in some sectors to a level below that of 30 years ago.

With tuppings fast approaching for South West England's early lamb producers, some tough decisions need to be made. Can we risk committing to such a high input production system given such

Mutton supply chain in good health, survey says

Early feedback from the NSA's new Make More of Mutton project has revealed that the mutton supply chain is buoyant with plenty of good quality products on the market.

An initial fact-finding exercise carried out since the project was launched last October has shown that average confidence levels of those in the supply chain are 3.5 out of 5. There are clear areas where

improvements could be made, but levels of enthusiasm and interest are high.

Project Manager Bob Kennard says those responding to the survey so far are mostly sheep farmers retailing their own mutton in small volumes. "Supply chains were therefore relatively short, with half of the participants having their own butchery facilities, and two traditional butcher's shops also taking part," he says.

"The markets for mutton identified are wide ranging, with respondents to the survey selling from farm shops, farmers' markets, butchers and other retail premises, by mail order, wholesale, pubs and restaurants and other caterers.

"There was great innovation illustrated by the responses, with about a quarter of producers supplying various cured and smoked mutton products, and most offering a wide variety of fresh mutton cuts. Between them, the initial respondents offered mutton from 20 breeds of sheep."

Problems highlighted include variable quality of carcasses and many producers finding it hard to retail the entire carcass (carcass balance). The survey also raised issues such as a lack of availability of



local abattoirs and difficulty recruiting skilled butchers. Public awareness of the benefits of quality mutton was thought by some to be lacking too.

This information is vital to enable more development within the industry, Mr Kennard says, with the Make More of Mutton project already offering point of sale material and three upcoming

regional mutton events. A dedicated website is under construction at www.makemoreofmutton.org.uk and more activity will come on stream in the coming months.

He adds that he is keen to hear from other farmers, processors, retailers and caterers involved in the quality mutton supply chain, and urges them to complete the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/r/nsamutton.

"The more information we can gather directly from those involved in the sector the better we can target our future resources," says Mr Kennard.

NSA's Make More of Mutton is sponsored by Eblex, HCC and LMC, and extends the work of the Mutton Renaissance Club, an initiative of HRH The Prince of Wales.



an uncertain market?

NSA can offer no easy answers but we can continue to tackle such issues as out-of-season New Zealand imports. In the meantime my best suggestion is that

you come to our NSA Sheep South West event on Tuesday 16th June and spend a day talking to others in the sheep industry – see page 10 for details. You will have a great day and feel much better.

NSA Marches Region welcomes NZ speakers

NSA Marches Region is laying on an exciting event on Thursday 9th July, at Pikes End Farm, English Frankton, Ellesmere, Shropshire, SY12 0JZ, by kind invitation of Robyn, Philippa, Nicholas, James and Lucy Hulme.

The 'Rams – Sustainably and Profitably' meeting will include a farm walk and presentations from three speakers to generate discussion about ram production, ram longevity and sustainable sheep breeding for the commercial farmer.

Host Robyn Hulme (pictured on the left with his family) will start the discussion by describing the philosophy around his EasyRams business, which aims to produce grass-fed rams

to enhance the profitability of UK sheep enterprises through increased output and reduced costs. He uses New Zealand genetics to breed Suffolk, Texel and

Sufftex rams, and fully embraces the NZ philosophy of producing rams under management systems similar to those their clients use.

The other two speakers are Murray Rohloff and Wrex Dolby, both visiting from New Zealand and eager to share their views on profitable sheep enterprises. This is a unique opportunity to hear them both talk and view a farm putting some of their messages into action.

The event starts at 3.30pm and will conclude at 6.30pm with a hog roast.

It will also incorporate the Montgomery and Shropshire Suffolk Club annual stock judging competition.

The event is free of charge and open to NSA members and non-members,

but please register your attendance with Dy Webb on dy@nationalsheep.org.uk or 07971 409259. Directions to the venue at www.easyrans.co.uk/contact.html.



Strong communication the focus for annual Breed Society Forum

By Wendy Short, contributor

NSA-affiliated sheep breed societies received an update on the association's activities and heard presentations from two industry experts at the 2015 NSA Breed Society Forum, which was held in early May.

The venue was Edenhall, Penrith, Cumbria, followed by a farm walk at the nearby Whinfell Park, by kind permission of Messrs Jenkinson.

Samuel Wharry, NSA Chairman, travelled from his home in County Antrim, Northern Ireland, to assure breed society representatives that their involvement was highly valued. He also emphasised the importance of keeping the lines of communication open between NSA and breed societies.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, explained proposed measures to refresh the NSA Articles. These included a move to change the voting system applicable to breed societies – see page 16 for details.

The NSA Breed Society Forum was part of the structure agreed when the Articles were put in place in 2012, and had proved popular with those who regularly attended, Mr Stocker said. Following feedback from breed societies, the forums were held annually, but NSA was willing to organise twice-yearly meetings if there was a demand.

Mr Stocker stressed that NSA was a 'ground up' organisation, with 80 affiliated sheep societies. Among its objectives as a charitable organisation was encouraging and improve breeding, management and promotion.

He said: "We want the public to view sheep meat as a core element of their diet. We would also like farming to be perceived as an attractive and rewarding career, and a lot of effort has been put into our Next Generation programme.

"Another goal is to ensure that sheep are seen as beneficial to both upland and lowland environments and ecology. They should be recognised as having a positive influence on climate change and carbon sequestration. Sheep in lowland and arable areas should be central to resource management and soil fertility; integrating grazing sheep in an arable rotation had gone out of fashion, but there is growing



The farm tour took in Whinfell Park's 3,000 Texel and Texel Mule ewes, as well as Texel and Beltex tupes. Left: Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, shared an update on NSA activity with the breed societies in attendance.



awareness of the benefits it can bring."

Joanne Briggs, NSA Communications Manager, reported that the 'education' part of the NSA website was currently being updated, partly to accommodate the numerous email enquiries and website hits received from members of the public with a general interest in sheep.

Public-facing

"We get a lot of queries about the various sheep breeds, so we plan to refresh the sheep breeds area into a 'Know Your Sheep' section that contains basic information for non-farmers, as well as more detailed descriptions and data for producers. There will also be more general information about sheep farming, as it is becoming apparent that the website is being used by the general public as much as the sheep farming community. I appeal to each of our affiliated societies to send me a couple of good quality photographs for this purpose."

Guest speaker, David Hall of Eblex, presented a largely positive report on the sheep meat market. Domestic production was on the rise, following an increase in the national flock and a successful lambing period, he said. While the exchange rate was unfavourable to UK producers, Eblex had been running several marketing campaigns, in order to drive consumption.

Dr Amanda Carson attended the forum

as secretary of the Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association, as well as her role with APHA and the Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR) committee. She outlined the role of FAnGR, which advises the Government on the use of farm animal genetic resources.

"In 1992, 150 countries signed up to address the decline in biodiversity, including farm animal genetics," said Dr Carson. "At some point in the future, we may have different requirements of our animals and therefore we need a reservoir of alternative genetics on hand."

The FAnGR committee acknowledged that a number of groups and organisations – including NSA – held frozen semen in storage, but the data had not been collated to give an overall picture of reserves. This was one area of work that breed societies would be encouraged to play a role in.

Dr Carson also spoke about the EU zootechnical legislation that governs how breed societies are officially recognised by Defra and Europe. She gave the Herdwick perspective of becoming recognised, saying it only affected the export of genetics to Europe at the moment, but was viewed by the society as a way to safeguard against any future changes.

A more detailed report of the NSA Breed Society Forum can be found in the 'meeting correspondence' area of the members-only area of the website, along with slides from the various presentations.

'Buzzing atmosphere' as record crowds flock to NSA Welsh Sheep

A sell-out crowd, overflowing car parks, plenty of good cheer and a wonderful venue meant that NSA Welsh Sheep 2015 was a truly memorable event.

Jointly hosted by Geraint and Morton Powell and their families, the day showcased some of the finest livestock farming Wales has to offer. Trade stands, show areas and seminars were packed and the rainclouds were enough to enable farmers to leave their work at home, while the intermittent spells of sunshine lifted spirits. The organisers were well pleased with a day that has become one of the highlights of the farming calendar.

Paul Wozencraft, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman, said: "We had an extraordinarily large attendance. The weather was a bit unkind in the morning, but we managed to park everyone up which was a big achievement. The stewards and all the helpers were exceptional. The event as a whole was absolutely fantastic, the atmosphere was buzzing, and we appreciate the Powells for letting us stage it here."

Top location

Mr Wozencraft, who farms near Rhayader, said the central location had contributed to the success of the event. It had been ideal to locate it in mid-Wales, pulling in people from all over Wales and beyond.

Event Organiser Helen Davies added that it had been the best ever NSA Welsh Sheep, with record crowds and trade attendance. She thanked the sponsors and host farmers, saying that the weather added to the pressure but had a positive affect on the gate.

The event was opened by Chris Dodds, Livestock Auctioneers Association

Chairman, who voiced concern over the effects of devolution on livestock trading. He also stressed the critical need for competition in the red meat industry.

He said: "One thing that a lot of farmers both in England and Wales are concerned about is the devolved governments drifting apart and making slightly different rules and regulations about sheep and cattle. There are issues such as EID and bovine TB where we've got very clear differences between the WAG stance and Defra's stance. I believe that we as auctioneers and the NSA as the sheep organisation representative body have a big part to play in pushing governments to try and implement regulations that have similar consequences on both sides of the border.

"We cannot, as an industry, have a situation where it is difficult to trade between England and Wales, simply because our governments want to introduce small, but very important, tweaks to their decision making."

Generally, Mr Dodds said he was very optimistic about the sheep trade and confident that exports would remain strong, even though it was heavily dependent on the exchange rate. It was, though, critical to retain competition



NSA Welsh Sheep 2015 Fact File

Venue: Glanmiheli and Drefor Farms, Kerry, Powys.

Date: Tuesday 19th May.

Young Shepherd of the Year: 1, Bleddyn Pugh, Llandrindod Wells; 2, Aled Jones, Builth Wells; 3, Arran Johnson, Machynlleth.

Ready Steady Cook: Host farmer, Geraint Powell.

Ewe hogg show: Upland: W. Morgan, Llanddeusant (Llandoverly White Face); Lowland: G.P. Williams and Co, Abergele (Bluefaced Leicester); Continentals: A.B. Bennett (Texels).

Indoor trade stand: Campaign for Wool.

Outdoor trade stand: Charlies Coed y Dinas.

Breed society stand: Welsh Mules.

Wool-on-the-hoof: Penny Chandler (Romney).

NSA Welsh Sheep spread through the buildings and nearby fields at Glanmiheli, while the tour took in the home farm and neighbouring Drefor.

as the growing power of the supermarkets concerned him. He warned that they already had a lot of power in the beef trade.

He added: "I think it's up to us as an industry that we manage to maintain

the open, transparent and competitiveness that we have within our red meat sector. Approximately a third of all our sheep are exported as carcasses, one third are consumed by the ethnic trade and the other third go into the supermarkets and larger retailers. I genuinely believe the market system offers you that and that we need to use it."

The first ewe hogg show and sale to be held at an NSA Welsh Sheep event was a huge success, with upland, lowland and continental class winners in the show. The highest price at the sale was achieved by David Pittendreigh, a previous NSA Cymru/Wales Chairman, who had 580gns for his pair of North Country Cheviots. He was followed by John Price, who had 500gns for his pair of Suffolks.



As well as hosting the event, Geraint Powell also won the Ready Steady Cook competition.

Farming family with pedigree record host NSA Sheep SW

Just over 35 years ago Bill Quick ran 500 commercial ewes and finished bought-in store cattle at Loosebeare, Zeal Monochorum, Devon. With an eye to the future and three sons keen on farming, he bought a Texel ewe from Charles Scott's East Middle flock and three cows carrying Limousin embryos. The rest is history.

It was 12 years ago that the Texel shearling Loosebeare Imp achieved a record breaking 120,000gns at Carlisle. Texels and Charollais – the latter sourced 10 years ago from Geoff and John Probert's Mortimore flock – are never out of the ribbons at county shows and interbreed championships are almost a certainty these days. The same applies to the pedigree Limousins.

There are now four farms run by E.W. Quick and Sons. Eldest son Paul and his son Taylor (8) live at Higher Nichols Nymet farm – the site for NSA Sheep South West on Tuesday 16th June. Bill and Marian live at Loosebeare, as do youngest son Mark, wife Carrie and their sons Harry (11) and Oliver (8). Andrew is based at Bury Barton, Lapford, but also farms nearby Court Barton with Julie, son Ed and daughter Becky. This is where the commercial enterprises are based.



The Quick family are looking forward to hosting NSA Sheep South West on Tuesday 16th June.

lambled on 12th February. The rest of this flock go naturally to a selection of registered rams to lamb mid-March. Around 100 pedigree Charollais ewes are also lambled down.

There is no rush to wean pedigree lambs, which have been on ad lib creep from birth. They are weaned onto the 400 acres of after-grass which is made into the season's pit silage from just one cut.

Just short of 130 Texel shearling rams and 45 Charollais are prepared for sales across the country each year. Up to 50 Texel and 20 Charollais gimmers are kept back for breeding, leaving 100 Texel yearlings for private buyers and the society sales.

"Topline and a good skin are the most important traits to get right when selling rams," says Paul. "The first thing a potential buyer notices when looking in over your pen is a good straight back and wool. We have been lucky and are very proud to have sold some stock for record prices – but it all takes a great deal of hard work and planning, not to mention years of breeding. I personally get real satisfaction from producing a good pen of shearlings. Satisfied customers are the key to everything."

Early lambing flock

Between 200 and 300 Suffolk Mules are bought each year to level this flock at 1,200 head. Half are put with Texel and Charollais rams to lamb from the beginning of January for a month. The second batch lamb down from mid-March.

Nearly all early lambs are sold to St Merryn. This spring the first batch of 100 was ready within 12 weeks and averaged 20.8kg deadweight, attracting the early bonus for Tesco's West Country Lamb label. Lambs from the second flock are also creep fed but taken to heavier weights – at the request of Michael Alford from Stillmans butchers.

"He requires lambs between 48kg to 50kg liveweight to meet demand in the middle of the summer when finished lambs are more difficult to source," explains Paul.

Of the 270 total pedigree Texel ewes, last autumn just three were flushed and used for embryo transfer. Paul is pleased with the lambs, sired by Mossknowe Pudsey and Humeston River Dance, which resulted at the beginning of March. These offspring are Loosebeare Texels' shop window at shows and major sales.

A further 120 pedigree ewes were Al'ed to Milnbank Vorderman, Whiteheart Spot On and Douganhill Ferrari. These



The family breeds pedigree Texel and Charollais sheep, as well as running a commercial flock.

Northern Ireland gearing up for action-packed NSA sheep event

Everything is in place for NSA Sheep NI 2015, the biennial sheep event in Ballymena Livestock Mart on Monday 6th July, organised by the NSA Northern Ireland Region Committee.

Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer and Event Organiser, says: "This year's event will see a number of successful attractions from previous events, including a commercial sheep stockjudging competition, being run in conjunction with the YFCU, and an open fleece competition, with support from British Wool Marketing Board

"A new attraction this year just confirmed is a demonstration of hand shearing by Godfrey Potterton from the south of Ireland and our own well-known William Jones from Templepatrick. This should be a spectacle for the older shepherds, when they can reminisce about how it used to be done, and the younger ones can see the skill required to blade shear."

The NSA Sheep NI farm tour returns after an absence for a number of years, with a visit to the CAFRE hill farm at Glenwherry, where CAFRE staff will be available to explain and advise sheep farmers on a range of related subjects. CAFRE, AFBI and Agrisearch, as well as Moredun, will all be on hand to update farmers on the latest research work and advice.

The NSA Young Shepherd of the Year competition, sponsored by First Trust Bank, offers shepherds under the age of 26 the



The popular stockjudging competition and sheepdog sale will return to this year's event.



opportunity, not only to win a cash prize of £250, but also the chance to represent Northern Ireland at UK and European level, with all expenses paid trips to compete.

Adam Crockett and Jonathan McKelvey, winners at NSA Sheep NI 2013, represented Northern Ireland in the UK final in Worcestershire and the European finals in Limoges, France. They also competed at the World Final in France, where they travelled from Paris to visit farms and colleges right down to Mountpellier in the south, and visited Sommet de L'Eleavage, the largest livestock show in Europe, in Clermont Ferrand.

The Young Shepherd of the Year competition consists of five tasks: sheep shearing, prime lamb selection, a sheep management quiz, veterinary and handling tasks, and quad bike handling. Entry is free and there is a special prize for the best competitor under 18.

Topical seminars

A range of topical seminars will be held in the calf ring at the mart, with presentations by experts from across the UK. Each seminar will last for about 25-30 minutes, with opportunities for questions and discussion, so offer farmers a great chance to keep up to speed on the latest thinking on topical subjects.

Gemma Daly from CAFRE will advise on dosing regimes and anthelmintic resistance; Miriam Parker of Livestockwise will shed a new perspective on sheep handling systems and how the sheep themselves see and react in a confined space; and Phillip Creighton from Teagasc will concentrate on grassland management and how to get the best out of your grass.

Of course no NSA Sheep NI event would be complete without the ever popular Closamectin sale of working sheepdogs and puppies, which will be held as usual in a field adjacent to the mart, kindly loaned by John Anderson.

All in all, a day not to be missed by sheep farmers and their families, or anyone interested in sheep and their part in rural life.

Mr Adamson says: "As we get nearer the event everything is falling into place for an enjoyable day for all those with an interest in sheep. It is good to get a day away from the farm and to meet up with friends. At a time like this, with ever increasing costs and tightening margins, events like this offer sheep farmers the chance to see what is new in the world of sheep farming and to meet and talk with independent experts to discuss what is relevant to the profitability of their own farm businesses."



NSA Sheep South West 2015
Organised by NSA South West Region

Tuesday 16th June 9.30am - 5pm
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- * Farm Tour
- * Competitions
- * Demonstrations
- * Sheepdog Sale
- * Shepherd of the Future - £1,000 prize fund
- * Student Shepherd of the Future - £500 prize fund
- * Trade & Breed Society Stands
- * Carcass Competition
- * Auctioneering Competition
- * Fleece Competitions

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

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

Further information from Sue Martyn.
Tel: 01409 271385. Mob: 07967 512660.
Email: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk
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- Seminars
- Trade Stands
- First Trust Bank Young Shepherd Competition
- Norbrook Sheepdog Sale
- Fleece Competition
- Stockjudging Competition
- Cookery Demonstration








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£5 for non-members

Further details from Edward Adamson on 07711 071290 or edward.adamson1@gmail.com
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NSA ram sale season in sight

Sheep producers who buy at the **NSA Wales & Border early ram sale on Monday 3rd August will have the advantage of giving their new rams time to settle in before they are put to work.**

Jane Smith, Executive Director, says the few extra weeks in which tups can be quarantined and given time to adapt to a new regime are an added bonus. The sale also affords sheep producers the opportunity to select from some of the country's top rams ahead of the season's main sales. There is the added advantage that all rams (as at all NSA sales) are inspected, with quality and a good health status a hallmark of the sale.



John Owens with (from the left) Hannah, Pippa and Ellie, and their Suffolks.

This year's sale is the first to be held under the chairmanship of noted breeder John Owens, who farms with his wife Pippa and daughters, Hannah and Ellie, in the Welsh Borders. The new Vice Chairman is McCartneys' Richard Gwilliam, a long standing member of the NSA Wales & Border ram sales committee.

The Owens family breed Suffolks, Texels and Beltex cross breeds to 'do the business' in commercial terms, but the Kerry Hills are very close to John's heart. They have been breeding them since they first moved to Woodhouse Farm, Leominster, almost a century ago and John has had considerable success in the showing.

The sheep trade itself has, he feels, a good solid future, as have the talented and committed young people keen to make their way in the industry. John feels there is no better way of producing meat than off grass – and there is a great pay-off in terms of preserving and enhancing the uplands.

Mr Owens says: "As the third chairman of Wales and Border ram sale committee, I feel very honoured to be following in the footsteps of Gwynne Davies and the late George Hughes MBE. As a committee we will work to overcome the problems caused

2015 NSA Ram Sales

- **NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale:** Monday 3rd August at the Royal Welsh Showground.
- **NSA South West Ram Sale:** Wednesday 19th August at Exeter Livestock Centre.
- **NSA Eastern Region Shearling Ram Sale:** Friday 28th August at Rugby Farmers Mart.
- **NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale:** Friday 18th September at Melton Mowbray Market.
- **NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale:** Monday 21st September at the Royal Welsh Showground.
- **NSA Eastern Region Terminal Sire Ram Sale:** Saturday 26th September at Newark Market.

by ever-changing rules, regulations and rising costs, in order to provide purchasers with the opportunity to compare, select and purchase the rams of their choice. Our sale allows both purchasers and vendors to have the sheep valued by live auction.

"You can't beat Builth for choice and quality. There's plenty of choice, with the quality and health status guaranteed."

Details from Jane Smith on 01291 673939 or jane@nsaramsales.co.uk.

thank Melton auctioneers and staff for their continued support for this event."

This year, due to demand and following discussions with Paul Gentry at Newark, NSA Eastern Region will also be holding an inaugural sale of terminal sires on Saturday 26th September.

Mr Barber continues: "This new joint venture is the result of increased sheep sales at Newark in recent years - so keep some good ones back for this promising sale.

"I would like to thank in advance our Ram Sale Chairman, Vice Chairman, the committee and all the stewards, inspectors, judges, helpers and auctioneers and everyone who works hard voluntarily to make these sales a great success."

Entry forms and catalogues for all three sales are available from Mr Barber on 01953 607860 or jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk.

NSA South West Ram Sale

Exeter Livestock Centre will be the venue for the **NSA South West Ram Sale on Wednesday 19th August.**

At a recent meeting it was agreed that in an effort to move with the times and cater for the current demand for crossbred rams, crossbred shearlings would be able to be sold. Traditionally the sale attracts in excess of 600 sheep across 14 breeds.

Entry forms will be sent to all previous vendors (from the last three years) in early June. If any new vendors would like an entry form they can be obtained from Sue Martyn. Entries close on Monday 6th July.

Details from Sue Martyn on 01409 271385, 07967 512660 or suem@nationalsheep.org.uk.

NSA Eastern Region Ram Sales

The first of the region's ram sales takes place at Rugby Farmers Auction Mart at Stoneleigh on Friday 28th August, which is slightly later than last year.

It provides a facility for NSA members, as either vendors or purchasers alike, the opportunity to access quality inspected rams from Charollais, Texel and Suffolk breeds.

The region will celebrate a milestone at Melton Mowbray Market on Friday 18th September, as it will be the 30th Eastern Region Ram Sale at this venue. It is an inspected sale and the winners of the show classes are presented with their awards and cash prizes in the ring by the Mayor of Melton Mowbray. The council at Melton is highly supportive of the sale.

Jonathan Barber, NSA Eastern Region Manager, says: "Prices at the sale have rewarded vendors well in previous years and enable purchasers to take home top quality tups of a range of breeds. The quality continues to improve year on year. This sale is well-established in the calendar as a top quality sale and we

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale

With 37 years of experience, this event is a significant force in the UK sheep industry. It is the largest held under the auspices of the NSA, with about 30 breeds represented, 5,000+ rams and 550 vendors.

The sale will take place on Monday 21st September at the Royal Welsh Showground and is noted for its wide choice of quality, inspected rams with a record price of 17,000gns in 2010 for a Bluefaced Leicester. It attracts 2,500 vehicles and 5,000 people from all over the UK.

Vendors and buyers regularly travel from the Orkneys, North of Scotland, Cambridge and Cornwall. The furthest a ram has travelled to its new home is to Anstruther, Fife, while sheep producers have travelled from as far as Texas, simply to enjoy the famed atmosphere.

For more information contact Jane Smith, Executive Director, as for the early sale at Builth.

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Signing up a friend reaps rewards

The latest NSA member to be rewarded in the NSA membership recruitment drive for encouraging a friend to join the organisation is **Ian Andrews and his wife Fiona from Cattistock, Dorset.**

Ian explains how they got into the draw: "We were at the South Counties Texel Regional AGM and dinner, where the guest speaker happened to be NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. While having a chat with him we discovered that one of our friends on the table was not a member. We



Ian Andrews (centre) receives his prize from Bryan Griffiths, NSA South West Region Chairman (left), and Hilary O'Keefe of Shearwell.

encouraged them to join NSA – and are really glad that they did!"

Ian and Fiona started their own pedigree Texel flock in 2009, having taken to the breed when they helped friends during the showing season. They have already built up to 50 ewes and have ambitious plans for a strong flock of good quality commercial and show sheep.

Ian also works as a self-employed agricultural worker, setting aside a couple of days a week to work with a commercial flock of 1,600 ewes as well as additional season work, fencing, hedging and other jobs. Fiona has a full-time job as an equine nurse, so the time-saving potential of being able to use their prize to read eartags and record management information appeals to the couple.

Time saving

Ian says: "When we heard we had won the Shearwell EID stick we were thrilled. It will be very useful and save a lot of much needed time that was spent fulfilling movement recording requirements. The whole process will now be much quicker and records will be kept up to date in a more manageable way.

"We hope our flock continues to thrive and keeps growing and producing good quality Texels. We have been in our farm cottage for about four years, and luckily our landlords Robert and Nicky Atkinson

Prize draw

NSA is giving away 12 Shearwell EID stick reader kits in 2015, worth £860 each. Don't miss your chance to win one of these top prizes.

New members are automatically entered into the draw when they join NSA, and existing members get an entry for each new member they recommend. There is no limit to the number of entries existing members can have, so the more people you refer the better your chance of winning. And if you don't win the first time, don't worry, as your name will stay in the hat for the subsequent draws through the year.

Add your name and NSA membership number to the bottom of the membership form opposite and pass it to a friend or neighbour so they can join NSA too.

are friends and have always been very good about us having the sheep. We have been able to put sheds up so we can lamb at home, which makes life a lot easier. We started off with around 10 acres and have built it up to around 100 acres. The long-term plan was always to build the land up first and then keep expanding the sheep."

More on both winners featured here can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw, along with terms and conditions for the prize draw.

Prize provides 'next puzzle piece'

With big business ambitions and an expanding flock, young sheep farmer **Harry Frederick will be putting his prize to good use on the family farm in Tonbridge, Kent.**

Harry joined NSA early this year, and says the timing of winning a stick reader could not be better. He explains: "I was out weighing my lambs when I received the phone call telling me I'd won. I was writing down their weights and corresponding number, which I had written on the back of their EID tags in permanent marker. I am looking forward to continuing this process in a much more efficient way now! Last year I bought a mobile handling system and weigh-crate through the Farming and Forestry Improvement Scheme – and the next piece of the puzzle was getting an EID stick reader.

"Using a stick reader will enable me to monitor performance so much more easily. I will be able to back up my general feeling that some of my sheep are more profitable than others with hard facts, and issues such as lameness will be simpler to



Harry Frederick accepts this Shearwell stick reader from NSA Communications Manager Joanne Briggs.

record and a strict culling programme can be followed."

Winning the stick reader is the second positive NSA activity for happen to Harry this year, as in January he was also selected to take part in the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme –

more on pages 48-49.

Harry's involvement in the industry is relatively new, as despite lived on a farm all his life, it was not until he spent a year working on a livestock unit in the Scottish Borders that he developed a particular interest in sheep. Now aged 27, he runs 240 of his own ewes alongside the family's South Devon beef herd and arable enterprises, and has future expansion plans.

Data collection

He says: "I have several Romney ewes but the bulk of the flock are North Country Mules and Suffolk Mules, the latter being bred on the farm with my Suffolk rams and subsequently put on a Charollais ram to produce a good finishing lamb. These breeds have worked well for me so far to produce high quality lamb for my local butcher and the farmers' market in our village of Peshurst, but I am keen to collect as much data as possible to make more informed decisions about the direction of my flock."

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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Please supply copy of photo ID e.g. passport, driving licence, YFC/student card.

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Supplying your email address will allow us to send you the Members' Weekly Update, packed full of news and information.

Please state where you obtained this form from:

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No of commercial breeding females?

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No of bought-in store lambs finished per year?

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Return this form to

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Fax: 01684 892 663 Email: membership@nationalsheep.org.uk

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Bank/building society account number

Reference

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Signature(s)

Date

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Notice of Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the 122nd Annual General Meeting of National Sheep Association will be held at the Rhug Estate, A5, Corwen, Denbighshire, LL21 0EH, on Wednesday 12th August 2015 at 10am, to transact the following business:-

1. To approve the Minutes of the 121st Annual General Meeting.
2. To receive the Trustees Report to year ended 31st December 2014.
3. To receive the Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2014.
4. To adopt (2) and (3) above.
5. To elect officers for the ensuing year; President and Honorary Treasurer.
6. To elect Vice-President(s).
7. To elect Auditors.
8. To pass the following special resolution

that the new Articles of Association produced to the meeting be adopted as the new Articles of Association of the company in substitution for and to the exclusion of the existing Articles of Association.

By order of the Board.

Proxy votes

Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form, or appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. Proxy forms and all documents referred to are available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events (against the 12th August date).

All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by post, fax or by attaching a signed scanned copy by

email no later than 10am on Monday 10th August 2015. For full details of the use and completion of proxy forms please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or call NSA Head Office.

The AGM will be followed by an introduction to the Rhug Estate at 11.30am, lunch and then a tour of the estate, by kind permission of Lord Robert Newborough.

For more information about the Rhug Estate please turn to page 18. If you plan to attend the NSA AGM and farm walk, please help us with catering requirements by booking a place. Call NSA Head Office on 01684 892661 or email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Why we need a special resolution

By Phil Stocker, NSA

The NSA Board of Trustees has been working with our solicitor to review the constitutional document behind NSA company – the Articles of Association.

Many of you may recall that we adopted new articles back in 2012. Now the articles have been in use for a number of years, it has become clear that there are some provisions that are not quite fit for purpose, or perhaps not as clear as they could be. We have therefore undergone a further review of the articles, and a number of points, mainly of a clarifying nature, are now proposed by the Trustees.

Proposed changes

You will find a clean set of proposed articles and a comparison document against our existing articles on our website (available alongside the details of the AGM at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events) to show the changes proposed. Copies of this document are also available in hard copy on request by contacting NSA Head Office – contact details as above.

While there are a number of changes, there are only two fundamental ones:-

The old articles provided for four categories of membership. No specific details were given about what rights each membership category had, and we want to remove any uncertainty about this. While carrying out this exercise, we have realised that three out of the four categories are all but in name identical, with just a slight variation for breed societies. We therefore propose to streamline the membership categories into just two classes – ‘full

members’ and ‘breed society members’ (being NSA-affiliated breed societies). The difference between the two categories being that a breed society that is a member may attend all regional meetings, albeit they are only ever entitled to one vote at any meeting, whether at national level or regional level.

The second fundamental proposal is that clarity is added about how each region is run and appoints a Trustee. The articles currently have an abstract reference to the NSA regions, but with no real explanation of how they should be organised or tie together. It is therefore proposed that some skeleton detail is added into the articles to clarify the link between the regional committees and the national NSA.

There a number of other proposed changes and these are shown in the marked up document available on request and on the website. Some of these are simply formatting changes, and some whereby terms such as ‘Association’, ‘Charity’ and ‘Company’ have been

NSA AGMs

The NSA AGM is a regular feature in August, with a familiar format in recent years of the meeting in the morning and a farm walk in the afternoon.

Last year we were hosted by the Westmorland Agricultural Society and enjoyed a farm walk with John Geldard, recently retired NSA Chairman, and his family. In a bid to move the event around the UK and give members from different regions every opportunity of being able to attend, both Moredun at Edinburgh and the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester, have also hosted in recent years.

Viewing the sheep flocks at the Rhug Estate in North Wales will be a fascinating part of the farm walk that will follow this year’s AGM. The Swaledales (pictured here) are just one part of the extensive farm enterprise.



standardised to simply say ‘the Charity’.

With previous experience of having enough members present for a quorate meeting, it is also proposed that we lower the number of members required for a national meeting to be quorate from 40 to 30.

We are happy to take any enquiries members might have about these changes, and hope you will join us for the AGM and farm walk on Wednesday 12th August.

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Join NSA as award-winning Rhug Estate opens gates for farm tour

By Maisie Jepson, contributor

This year's NSA AGM - to be held on Wednesday 12th August - is being kindly hosted by Lord Newborough at the Rhug Estate in Corwen, Denbighshire, and will be followed by an exclusive farm tour for NSA members and associates.

The estate is 5,060ha (12,500 acres), with an in-hand organic farm at its geographical core and the remainder formed of let farms, forestry, let cottages and commercial premises, as well as traditional and modern sporting interests. An additional 525ha (1,300 acres) is farmed at Ty Mawr, Caernarfon, on the Gwynedd coast.

The farm produces organic Welsh lamb, Welsh Salt Marsh lamb, Aberdeen-Angus beef, bison, chicken, geese and turkeys. Back in 2002 the estate started retailing from the farm gate, selling takeaway burgers, hotpot and fresh meat from a butchers counter. This has now developed into a thriving, award-winning farm shop, bistro and takeaway on the main A5 road.

Supply and export

It doesn't end there however; the estate also retails meat wholesale to high profile restaurants, baby food companies and Waitrose, and provides a source of organic halal lamb and chicken for schools in Tower Hamlets, London. Demand for high quality organic meat in Asia has provided another market, with meat from the Rhug Estate now exported to Singapore, Hong Kong, Dubai and Croatia.

Gareth Jones is Farm Manager for the estate. He describes the sheep enterprise: "We run in two parts according to the product marketed - Welsh lamb or Welsh Salt Marsh lamb. We run 3,400 ewes on the estate, split into one outdoor and one indoor-lambing flock to spread them out. The main farm at Rhug rises from 500 to 1,500ft and the pastures have been sown with a selection of herbs and grasses including chicory, cocksfoot, Timothy and both red and white clover. The outdoor lambing flock, which runs higher up the hill, produce lambs later so enables the estate to produce lamb all year round, with the end product benefitting from PGI Welsh Lamb status.



Stock grazed on the coastal farm produce Salt Marsh Lamb from May to December.

"The Rhug Salt Marsh lamb comes from the coastal farm near Caernarfon, where we run another 1,300 ewes. The fields there are washed by the sea in the winter, which creates a pasture with herbs such as sea lavender, samphire, sorrel and thrift, and a mixture of saltmarsh grasses. This variety creates a product with a unique, distinctive flavour which is keenly sought after. The product is seasonal, available from May to December, as once the plants die back the flavour in the lamb diminishes."

Homebred replacements

In 2012 the business moved away from Romneys in favour of North of England Mules. Swaledale ewes, to provide homebred replacements, are run on 2,000 acre of mountain grazing, which was previously let to a tenant but has been brought back in hand to enable the business to maximise the advantages of farming within the Glastir Advanced scheme.

The Mules are crossed to Texel, Charollais and Beltex tups, and Mr Jones says that now the Mules have the right size and frame for what he requires, some cross-bred females are being retained for breeding to add some conformation. There are some pedigree



One of the Mule flocks lambs inside and the other outdoors, later in the year, to ensure year round supply of prime lamb.

Charollais on the farm, so a few homebred males are used, with additional tups bought in from local breeders or NSA ram sales.

Mr Jones says: "We like to keep about 100 tups in total, and once we find a breeder we like we try to use them again. The length and frame is in the ewes, so the tups need to be well-muscled, commercial and capable of siring two lambs. At scanning in January, a flock of 750 ewes achieved 203%, with just 18 needing to be re-scanned or barren.

"Feeding the ewes pre-lambing is a fine balance when we are out at grass. The ewes need to be producing enough milk but over-feeding risks increasing the size of the lambs and incurring

problems at lambing. Ewes with twins are fed an 18% protein organic compound feed, and the amount varies depending on ewe condition and the quality of the silage. Singles may not get any concentrates if the silage is of a high quality.

"Being organic the estate puts a lot of emphasis on red and white clover. Arable silage (peas and vetches) is also harvested in August for lambs to be finished on through the autumn. They are then over-wintered on stubble turnips, which is also a useful crop to ensure good rotation and that there are always young grass leys to be grazed."

Mr Jones says a substantial amount of monitoring is routinely carried out within the sheep flocks. Blood samples are taken to determine any trace-element deficiencies and faecal egg counts carried out to establish worm burdens. Monitoring is considered an important part of the organic ethos - allowing for a system of prevention rather than cure or needless treatments.

Closed flock

Around 250 ewe lambs a year are retained for replacement, while lambs for slaughter go to a local family-run abattoir on the edge of the estate. They are hung in the estate's own maturation plant for seven days and then butchered on-site.

"The move away from Romneys has meant that a lot of Mules have had to be bought in," says Mr Jones. "The aim now for the sheep enterprise is to get to a point where we can run a completely closed flock, this being beneficial from a disease point of view, but it is also in-line with one of the leading principles of the estate: to be self-sufficient."

For details of the NSA AGM please turn to page 16. If you plan to attend the meeting and farm walk, please help us with catering requirements by booking a place. Call NSA Head Office on 01684 892661 or enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Anglesey option for NSA AGM goers

If you're planning to attend the NSA AGM why not combine it with a trip to Anglesey County Show?

NSA regrets that those directly involved in the show - held on Tuesday 11th and Wednesday 12th August - will be unable to attend the AGM, but encourages members to consider both if they have an interest.

Anglesey County Show is the biggest two-day agricultural show in Wales, attracting approximately 58,000 visitors, 1,000 horses and a wide array of sheep and cattle. This year it is celebrating its 128th annual show.

Aled Hughes, Company Secretary and Show Administrator, says: "There are 10 different breeds of cattle on display, as well as over 24 different breeds of

sheep. There's always a lot to see and do - we have the horticultural marquee with flowers, cookery and crafts, and a country life activity area which hosts the international gun dog competition as well as dog scurry competitions and clay target shooting. With over 300 various trade stands, including homemade and home-grown produce and a fairground it's a great day out for all the family. Entertaining the crowds in the main ring on both days this year will be the Royal Signals Motorcycle Display Team - 'The White Helmets'. On the first day only, there will be a special pageant by the Anglesey Vintage Equipment Society - 'Harvest over the Century' - both attractions are definitely not to be missed!"



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Numerous factors behind lamb price dip forces some positivity

By Phil Stocker, NSA

Although there was some sign of improvement as Sheep Farmer went to press, the depressed lamb price in recent weeks has been the main topic of conversation for producers throughout the UK.

It is hard to be positive at times like this, but the number of factors contributing to the situation means it is important to take a step back, look at the whole picture, and consider that a change to any of the contributing forces could mean some relief as we head towards peak lamb finishing season.

Those contributing forces include: the strength of the pound; the economic situation on the continent; an increased New Zealand offering on our supermarket shelves; farmers in some regions lambing earlier in 2015, assisted by dry weather allowing them to sell new season lamb sooner; and a larger carry-over of old season lambs from 2014.

Perfect storm

While this has created an unfortunate 'perfect storm' it does mean the sheep sector should not lose heart – and there are lessons we can take from it.

We saw the situation this spring where



A large carry-over of hogs is just one of many reasons for the depressed lamb price.

there were a lot of old season lambs still to come forward when many lamb producers were gearing up to supply new season lamb. As in other years, NSA has been urging producers not to hang onto older stock unnecessarily.

A carry-over of hogs not only holds back the market for new season lamb coming through, but often means overweight and out-of-spec lambs are being traded, undoubtedly depressing trade. Old season lambs need to go into the food

chain as soon as they are ready and meet market specifications – get them fit (not fat) and get them away.

This lacklustre trade is particularly hard to swallow when the price 12 months ago was particularly good, but the strong trade last year was presumably fresh in the minds of supermarket buyers when they stocked up on cheaper New Zealand lamb around Easter and the weeks beyond.

They will have found that New Zealand lamb even more readily available than normal, as the NZ drought has caused lambs to be sold earlier. While this has created immediate problems for us, looking at it positively, it will have shifted a lot of their product within a small window – and is likely to result in another reduction of the NZ ewe flock.

That said, I still do not feel it is appropriate for UK retailers to take large volumes of NZ lamb at a time of year when domestic production is gearing up. It is shortsighted of them to try and avoid paying for premium UK product, as supermarkets should recognise they have a self interest in stocking and promoting UK lab, or risk irreversibly damaging their supply base.

This has been an incredibly frustrating time for sheep farmers, but I do believe the sector should remain positive. We are seeing a small increase in the national flock, and I believe expanding export markets mean we can afford to encourage more production and not be put off by what had happened this spring. And one thing that is always within farmers' control is on-farm efficiencies. Producing lamb in as cost-effective a manner as possible is crucial, regardless of what happens beyond the farm gate.

Views from the sector

Kevin Brown, Randall Parker Foods: "It is not just one thing at the moment and it's unfair to throw it all at New Zealand product and the retailers. NZ lamb is a key offering every year from mid-January to mid-June (because it offers retailers a consistent product and price) but we didn't hear about NZ last year because exports were stronger. Easter was earlier this year, which did not suit NZ lamb, and stock supplied subsequently would have been agreed months and months ago.

Exports are critical at this time of year. We have sold 16,000 (23.5%) fewer whole carcasses fewer carcasses to Europe year-on-year, which equates to us buying 26,000 less hogs to get the right spec. There is more NZ lamb on the continent because the Chinese economy is a little bit depressed, and there is more competition from other proteins because European pork and chicken can't go to Russia. I know it's frustrating for farmers but there are so many things at play here."

Mike Credland, May Hill Lamb Group: "Nobody foresaw the price drop to be as quick or as big as it has been, but the main thing is for producers to concentrate on producing what the retail and export markets want and to avoid selling overweight, over-fat, out-of-spec lambs. It's not actually the number of lambs on the ground. The sector can take an expansion of numbers, but only if we produce what the market wants us to produce, not what we want to produce."

Hamish Waugh, sheep farmer and livestock haulier: "Wearing two hats, I see an added perspective. My message to lamb finishers is to make plans and stick to them, as any deviation is likely to have more of a negative impact on your profits (and maybe fellow producers) than hanging on for a better price. We all need to know how much it costs to get lambs to a certain level of finish and how much it costs per week to hold out for a better price which may not come."

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Potential for 'bigger bang' from levy, says new sector chairman

By Stuart Roberts, AHDB Beef and Lamb Chairman



There has been a lot of talk asking if sector boards will continue at AHDB following the rebrand and what will their role be. I believe they are critically important.

The value of the beef and lamb sector board is as important in the future, if not more important, than it has been in the past. It's the board that sets the priorities and strategy for how we spend the levy, and they ensure money from sheep levy is spent on sheep activity. Sheep for sheep, and beef for beef. The proportion of money spent on sheep is in proportion to the sheep levy collected. If I cannot demonstrate that, my existence as chairman will not be very long.

I do not need to point out that most of my background is firmly in the arable and beef sectors. That is why it is so important to work closely with levy payers and organisations like the NSA. I want you to make sure you are holding me to account if you think I am going 'a bit beefy'.

The rebrand towards AHDB Beef and Lamb is progressing towards a launch in June. It is really important and it's an important message. It is about one organisation that gets a bigger bang for

the levy payer buck, and avoids duplication of effort.

In terms of levy investment priorities, research and development (R&D) and knowledge transfer (KT) are up there. These should not be seen as separate things. We do some fantastic work, but if we do not do even better work on the knowledge transfer element, our competitors overseas will pinch what we have done on R&D and use it to benefit their industry. If we are not communicating the messages effectively, we might as well not do the R&D in the first place.

The second important area is market intelligence (MI). There should be nowhere else in the industry that anyone is going to for better intelligence on the sheep market. Lots of people can collect data; the important part is how you then analyse that, interpret it and add intelligence to it.

Then there is market access work, which we cannot underplay. I would love to be able to say at the end of my term that we have displaced other countries' lamb in China. English lamb on the shelves to capitalise when New Zealand product is out of season. Once we get market access it is relatively easy, in my opinion, to exploit these opportunities. We have the quality product that can beat lamb from competing countries hands down. We need to keep working on that market access though, because it will not be easy or quick.

Marketing

Promotion will always remain an important area of work for us – but it means different things to different people. To some people, what I have just said about China is promotion – getting that access and displacing other countries' products. To others, promotion is simply a big TV campaign. To others, it's the work we do to counter negative health claims about red meat.

The myths put out about our proteins are incredible. People talk about the carbon footprint of the animals all the time. The reality is what we are doing is feeding a rumen. This biological miracle which no human has yet developed is something we need to shout more about. Until humans have evolved to have a rumen (way beyond my AHDB tenure!) sheep and cattle are the most fantastically efficient animals at turning cellulose into a high-quality protein digestible by humans. We cannot do enough work in this area to promote this story about our English

Collaborative approach

Stuart Roberts took over from John Cross as Chairman of Eblex on 1st April. With a background in arable farming and beef processing, he is keen to engage fully with the sheep sector and has already met and spoken to many NSA office holders, saying a collaborative approach to steering the levy body will bring better fortunes for all.

With a rebranding exercise currently taking place, where Eblex will become AHDB Beef and Lamb, Stuart knows there are significant challenges ahead. Here he shares his views on these issues, his priorities for AHDB Beef and Lamb, and the fortunes for the long-term prosperity of the industry.

production systems.

One of things I want to do is start looking at our strategy with a blank piece of paper and look at where our priorities should be today. I want to listen to what levy payers are telling me, and then see where we should be focusing our efforts.

I also believe that we need to be better at showing the value for money we are giving and that we are being efficient. We cannot expect others to become more efficient if we are not doing it ourselves. The number of live-to-dead days and other KT events we do is important – but what is really important is what comes out of these events and what people do with what they have learned.

Positivity

We should be proud of the things we do. The work we do on market access. The work on research. The work on trade development and promotion. We need to be more bullish about what we do and what we achieve. That is not something that is going to happen overnight, but if we are not positive about the industry, how can we expect anyone else to be?

What we are ultimately about is providing farmers with the tools that allow them to make the most of the opportunities available to them. We need to come up with ways of getting our messages out that are digestible to farmers. We can learn from others and work more closely with organisations like the NSA, vet practices, breed societies and others in the supply chain to get those key messages out there to help deliver maximum returns for levy payers.

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NSA continues work on tagging rules and movement databases

There has been an unforeseen twist around tagging rules for the historic flock in Wales, which has yet to be resolved, reports NSA Chief Executive Mr Stocker.

Since 1st January 2015 older animals (those tagged before 1st January 2010) can no longer be moved as a batch, unless going direct to slaughter. The requirement to individually record these animals on movement documents has seen them retagged with full EID in many situations, meaning the slaughter exemption has been very important to avoid added costs.

Mr Stocker says: "NSA and others have understood the 'direct to slaughter' move to include both sales to an abattoir and also cull ewes going to slaughter via a mart. There are some markets requiring older animals to be EID double tagged, and indeed in Scotland the agreement with all auctioneers is that they be tagged, but unless stated by the market the old forms of ID are acceptable."

However, it has recently transpired that the Welsh Government has been applying the exemption for moves directly to an abattoir only, not to a mart.

Mr Stocker continues: "That we are many months into 2015 without this situation coming to light goes to show the poor communication around this topic. NSA and other stakeholder groups were completely aware of it and have immediately taken it up with the Welsh Government."

NSA and the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA) met with the Welsh Government at NSA Welsh Sheep in mid-May to



Ewes from the historic flock are now implicated in EID rules.

continue discussions about this inconsistency on either side of the England-Wales border.

"The Welsh Government has acknowledged the situation and the confusion around it and we are hopeful they will act promptly to resolve it," says Mr Stocker. "However, as it currently stands, cull ewes from the Welsh historic flock sent to slaughter via a mart cannot be sent as a batch movement."

Clarifying the situation on older animals still fit for breeding, Mr Stocker says: "It is not illegal for older stock being sold for breeding not to have full EID, but producers in all parts of the UK are now required to individually list these animals on movement documents, so it is how you do that if they are carrying old tags."

Movement databases

Away from the historic flock, the bulk of work on sheep identification is still around the English movements database, as NSA is still pushing for ARAMS to provide a user-friendly online service. Much of this is being able to offer a completely paper-free movements service, and there is some ongoing activity around this.

In the meantime, NSA is aware of more members choosing to buy EID equipment to make movement reporting (and flock management) easier. With this in mind, we asked Richard Webber of Shearwell Data to provide some advice on where to start if purchasing equipment.

Mr Webber says: "You should look at all the options out there, because we are seeing some handheld readers that do not hold enough management information and farmers are running out of space. You also need to think about how you might progress to the next level, whenever that might be. There is a plethora of mobile phone apps, handheld readers, race readers and stick readers out there, but how will they talk to other software you and others have?"

"It is not necessarily the most expensive kit with all the bells and whistles that you need, rather what is practical for you and your farm. And given what is happening with cattle EID, take into account if equipment you buy will be compatible with other species you might have on your farm."

Think outside box to get more from electronic identification

Industry consultant and sheep producer Jim Turvill believes sheep farmers can benefit from EID, by seeing it as a chance to build data to help flock management, rather than as a legally imposed inconvenience.

Mr Turvill, who has worked with Eblex on assessing the implementation of EID, believes sheep EID has been one of the most contentious issues to face the industry recently, generally perceived negatively and as an expense the industry can ill afford. He says this is ironic given the main reason for compulsory EID was to allow individual sheep traceability.

"Rather than being seen as an administrative burden, EID can be considered an opportunity to gather individual ewe management data quickly and simply, which can be used to increase productivity and profitability," he says. "For example, if we have to record every incidence of a disease, surely it makes sense to use the data for management purposes?"

"EID readers should give sheep producers a powerful management tool, but they need to be seen in this way. For example, how useful would it be pre-tupping to be able to identify ewes that had more than three cases on footrot in the last year, allowing them to be sorted as 'do not breed'?"

"What needs to happen is for producers to embrace the opportunity, and for manufacturers to develop readers that allow the collection and interpretation of data."

Mr Turvill's preference is for robust stick readers as a practical way of gathering information, but adds they must be able to hold significant information for the whole flock and allow meaningful data entry and analysis. They also need a clear display and be easy to use.

Meaningful data

"Continuing the footrot example, it is of little value just being able to enter 'yes' or 'no' against an ewe," he says. "This tells us nothing about the problem. We need to be able to enter a number so we know it is the first, second or whatever occurrence. This allows us to interpret whether it is a chronic problem and also how effective our treatments have been. It might also highlight other issues, such as all chronic footrot ewes were purchased from a particular source."

Before he started recording, Mr Turvill spent time deciding what he wanted to record and how he wanted the data organised. Starting at scanning he recorded the scan results for every ewe. When ewes lambed he was able to compare actual lambs born with the scan result. He then recorded lambs born alive and dead, and how many lambs subsequently died.

Data was also collected about the ewe herself, including whether the lambing was assisted or the ewe prolapsed. He also recorded whether the milk supply was good and how well lambs were mothered.

"I can review lambing performance easily by various criteria," he says. "By the time I come round to select ewes for tupping later in the year I would have forgotten this information, but now I will have it on the reader and immediately to hand I can make sure problem ewes are not bred again, saving me costs later in the year."

During the year he will record disease incidence, as required



Mr Turvill (left) has been using a Gallagher stick reader to understand the potential for EID in his flock of North Country Mules.

by farm assurance, but in such a way that the data helps manage the flock. "If I see a ewe with footrot I can't tell how many times she has had it before, but the reader gives me the information," he says. "My management decision will be different if it is, for example, the third case as opposed to the first."

"The reader can also help make worming more cost effective and reduce wormer use. Like a lot of people, I don't blanket worm anymore. I will record which ewes are wormed and when. If I see ewes scouring I can quickly check if they have been wormed. If they haven't, I can worm them for the first time. If they have been wormed previously, I can worm them again but possibly change the wormer used."

Mr Turvill will also be using the reader to store lamb weights, allowing him to keep a close eye on growth rates and better predict when lambs will be fit to sell.

"Every bit of information has a management value," he says. "I am confident EID will help the industry realise this value and increase flock productivity. However, sheep producers must be prepared to embrace the technology and change their perception of EID."

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Good husbandry and local knowhow drives upland farming enterprise

By Neil Ryder, contributor
 With much time lately taken up by NSA North Sheep (which around 90 school children attended), his wife employed as a teacher, three small children, and a vested interest in the future of upland farming, Greg Dalton has a keen eye on how the next generation is encouraged into agriculture.

While the economics of hill farming will remain heavily dependent on environmental and support payments for the foreseeable future, Greg sees a real problem where land is bought or held primarily for these payments rather than commercial farming. It does nothing to attract new entrants into the industry, he says, as it reduces the amount of land available generally and, where this land is offered for rental, the owner may retain all or part of the payments attached to it.

Safeguarding

"Hill farming needs young people to safeguard its future, but it is increasingly difficult for them to get a foothold in the industry," says Greg, the recently elected chairman of NSA Northern Region, who farms with his father, Dick, at South Wellhope, Upper Weardale, County Durham.

"Unless this problem is tackled there will be real problems both within livestock farming and in the rural economy in upland areas. It is not just a farming problem, but one that impacts on the wider rural population where jobs and



South Wellhope Farm is home to Swaledale and Texdale sheep and crossbred suckler cows.

Left: Greg Dalton.



businesses are directly or indirectly related to upland sheep and cattle

support or environmental payments only serves to compound these difficulties."

Greg and his father are both in agreement that support payments should be made only to the people who are actually farming the land, and that rents should then be negotiated on this basis. Young people could also be offered tenancies with relatively low starting rents that could gradually increase, and offered relatively long-term tenancies with reviews built in.

production.

"Obviously situations vary from farm to farm and individual circumstances, but on most upland farms support and environmental payments account for as much as 50 to 60% of total income. Like most hill farmers, we would prefer to be able to make enough profit that we did not rely on these payments, or at very least, a little less reliant on them. There are keen young people ready to come into hill farming but the big hurdle is often the capital needed to move from employment or contract farming, to farming on their own account.

"Except where they are able to come into an existing business, some of that enthusiasm is inevitably curbed by the realities of little money and long hours. The situation where land is let without

Greg is the fourth generation of his family to farm South Wellhope, an isolated farm of 400ha (1,000 acres) running at 425m-6540m (1,400ft to 2,100ft) above sea level. The family rent a further 285ha (700 acres), and almost all the land is rough hill grazing and covered by ELS and HLS environmental agreements.

Sheep are a hefted flock of around 600 pure Swaledale ewes and 60 Texdale ewes. The Swaledales are all bred pure while the Texdales go to Texel tups. There are also 30-40 crossbred, mainly spring calving suckler cows.

High scanning

"All our ewes are pregnancy scanned," Greg says. "They typically return an average of about 140% lambs over ewes tupp. This is higher than many similar farms, but we believe the key is good husbandry and knowing our own farm.

"This year scanning showed one of our best ever lambing years at

Right: A homebred Texdale ewe rearing a single lamb.

153%, but then we had some problems with abortions, something we have never had before. We have no idea where it came from, as we are an isolated farm and the only sheep we buy in are a few rams.

"All bought-in animals and our show sheep are kept apart from the rest of the flock until we are certain they are clear of any health problems. As far as we can tell the problem is now under control, but we are vaccinating all gimmers and draft ewes that we expect to sell as breeding stock. This has cost about £1,500 but means we can sell our stock with confidence and provide what buyers need."

Lambing is from 10th April with enough shed space for 180-200 ewes to be brought inside.

"The rest have to be left out in the elements though we do hope to provide



more shed space," Greg says. "There is an old stone barn on the farm that is currently without a roof. One possibility could be to restore and reroof that to provide extra sheep housing."

His father Dick adds: "Stock management is very important in lambing. You must do the preparation and look after the sheep before lambing as well

Farm facts

- Family enterprise on an isolated 'top of the hill' farm.
- Greg farms with his father Dick, supported by wife Natalie and children Jack (6), Poppy (4) and Maisie (1).
- 600 pure Swaledale ewes complemented by 60 Texdale ewes (Texel cross Swaledale) to offer 'something a bit different' to the farm.
- 400ha (1,000 acres) owned plus 285ha (700 acres) rented; all rough hill grazing with late/limited spring growth.
- Appetite for more in-bye land to offset cost of buying and transporting feed and bedding.

as during lambing time. For instance, giving the stock plenty of feed makes a big difference here. Because we are in the environmental schemes we are very restricted to the amount and type of fertiliser we can use. This means there is very little winter grass here.

"With feeding silage the sheep are not eating the rushes, which are taking over in some areas, however we need some rushes which give shelter for the lambs after they are born. The elements can be very unforgiving up here.

"Many would not survive without this protection, but in due course we will probably need to control heavily rush-infested areas. What will help is that restrictions under our environmental agreements have eased to allow us to use a little more lime, which will help in rush control."

The first lambs are sold off their mothers from August, with others going after weaning. Most go through local auction marts, as Greg and Dick feel this offers them more control than when selling deadweight. A lot of wether lambs are sold for the lightweight finished trade,

continued on page 28



Swaledale tup hogs, which will be sold as breeding shearlings in October.

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or as stores through Barnard Castle. "We also sell pure Swaledale tups, shearing and gimmer females and draft ewes through our local auction at St John's Chapel," says Greg. "Recently we have also been sending some tups through Kirkby Stephen, with one selling for £13,500 in 2010. Our three-crop draft ewes have averaged £140-£150 each. We also use Middleton-in-Teesdale mart to sell suckler calves.

"We show sheep, mostly at shows within our area of the Swaledale Sheep Breeders' Association. Showing is the cheapest form of advertising for us. A highlight was winning the Swaledale male championship at the Royal Highland Show."

Farm mix

Greg and Dick add that the farm's suckler cow herd is a vital part of the overall farm mix in providing essential farmyard manure to maintain sheep grazings. It also encourages the various insects and invertebrates supporting birds and other wildlife. They feel that the current balance between cattle and sheep is about right and see no reason to change.

Both Greg and Dick believe strongly that it is important to promote the sheep industry to the general public, with Greg adamant that schoolchildren should be able to visit working farms and follow

animals as they grow, relating them to food on the plate. But with wife Natalie being the Deputy Head in a local rural primary school, he appreciates the behind-the-scenes risk assessments and paperwork that have to be carried out by



The Daltons get a good number of twin lambs from their purebred Swaledale flock.

Left: Greg Dalton with his father Dick.

teachers organising such visits. Natalie shares Greg's belief that children should be educated as early as possible, and her school prides itself in using the outdoors in its lessons, situated as it is in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Natalie says: "The local farming community and the children's knowledge of 'field to fork' is tremendous, so they are involved in educating less rural schools about the origins of food. The children are fully aware of how important it is to sustain

farming communities in remote areas."

Greg continues: "I know some people had reservations about having parties from four primary schools totalling about 90 children coming to NSA North Sheep, but I believe that it is vitally important for children to see and learn about sheep on 'bread and butter' farms not just on open farms with a few pet lambs.

"The NSA has an important role here, and while it has already done some good work, I believe that there is more that could and should be done in the future."



Taking action on trespassing

By Helen Naylor, Polysafe Barriers & Blocks

Do you ever have a problem with people driving or parking their vehicles on your land? People often suffer in silence in these situations because they're unsure where they stand legally.

Section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 states that it is an offence to drive a

'mechanically propelled vehicle without lawful authority on common land, moorland or land not forming part of a road, or on any road which is a footpath, bridleway or restricted byway' – but rather than confronting intruders, people will often just leave it and hope the problem goes away in time.

However, this could in fact exacerbate things. If the perpetrators are left unchallenged they will eventually be able to claim easement (the non-possessory right to use or enter your property), which will allow them to legally continue to access your property whether you give permission or not.

If they have been using the land for 10 years or more unopposed they could even claim adverse possession, which means that they could actually take legal possession of the property. If they give notification of their intention to become the registered owner and the current owner does not contest this within two years the title will be transferred. This is more common than you would think and can include people parking on part of their neighbour's driveway, people driving across a piece of land to access a neighbouring area, or even people parking on farmland.

Serious consequences

Leaving trespassers unchallenged could have serious consequences and you could end up losing part of your property due to inaction. The key to avoiding these situations is to nip it in the bud. Erecting a fence, placing a barrier or blocking an entrance can help to stop trespassers driving their vehicles onto your land in the first place. However, it is also important to make sure people on your property know it is private land and that they are not supposed to be there.

A person cannot claim adverse possession of land that they acknowledge to be someone else's, no matter how long they use it for. So if you are happy for people to use your land but don't want to risk facing a claim, it is important to let them know that the arrangement is with your consent only and they must acknowledge the property remains yours. Charging a fee to use your land can be a good way to cement this acknowledgement.

This article has only skimmed the surface of this complicated subject but has hopefully demonstrated how important it is to understand your rights when it comes to your property and to make sure you stand by those rights if people attempt to use your land without your permission or without your knowledge.

It is always best to seek legal advice if you are having an issue with people using your land, but if you need help understanding your situation and what your next steps should be, www.gov.uk/squatting-law is a good place to start.



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Keeping yourself legal when on the road this show season

We are once again in the thick of the show season, and with plenty of trailers and lorries on the road travelling to events, it is timely to remind members about various transport regulations that may affect them.

The key one this year is for lorries, as 'grandfather rights' for Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (Driver CPC) expired for many people in September last year.

Driver CPC is a requirement if you drive a lorry professionally or for commercial gain. Transporting livestock for sale or slaughter clearly comes into this, and has been noted by those who drive a lorry on a regular basis, but it is a grey area for shows.

'Non-commercial'

Joanne Briggs, NSA Communications Officer, says: "We took a number of enquiries about this from members last year, as there are exemptions from Driver CPC for people driving lorries for 'non-commercial carriage of goods for personal use', which could be taken to include the transport of animals to a show. While the lucky few might take home some prize money, it can easily be argued that for many people, showing is a non-commercial activity.

"NSA has sought legal advice on this and been informed it is open to interpretation by a DVSA inspector if they pull over a lorry on its way to or from a show. Until someone tries to overturn a prosecution in court there is no 'test case' to use as a legal defence.

"For the majority of people who drive

a lorry to a show, they will be using it for commercial reasons too and will require their Driver CPC anyway – but if you are in any doubt, please check that you are still legal." – see panel.

The other legal issue that has caught drivers out during past show seasons has been tachographs and the rules around drivers hours. This affects many more people as it also applies to vehicles towing trailers (where the permitted combined weight of both is more than 3.5 tonnes).

Mrs Briggs continues: "We had a lot of reports from members during last year's show season about being pulled over and asked to produce evidence of their driving hours. Again, there is an exemption for 'non-commercial' journeys, but the situation regarding shows is not clear-cut and could quite possibly depend on where you are pulled over and by whom.

"There is also an exemption for journeys under 50km (31 miles), which is why this becomes an issue during the show season when trips are often longer than to a local market or abattoir."

Regardless of the reason for the trip, longer journeys in certain vehicles do carry a legal requirement to use a tachograph to record hours spent driving. The added complexity for farmers is that the hours that count include

those where you are working alongside the vehicle (e.g. loading) and other working hours (i.e. general farm work).

"These are referred to as 'out of scope' hours and all count towards your working week," explains Mrs Briggs, adding that the regulations surrounding driving hours state a working day must not exceed 15 hours, with a maximum of nine hours driving within that.

There are complicated rules for extending your driving hours and rest periods after six days' of work, and as frustrating as it is for agricultural workers to be pulled into the same rules as professional drivers, there is a requirement to stay within the law.

Returning to the issue of permitted towing weights, this is a third area of regulation to be aware of.

"Knowing the towing capacity of your vehicle is vital if you get stopped by the authorities – or worse still if you have an accident and suddenly find yourself uninsured," she says.

There will be a plate attached to your vehicle showing the mass of the vehicle and the maximum permitted mass of the vehicle and (loaded) trailer combined. This has implications for the legal amount you vehicle can tow, and dictates if your vehicle comes into the tachograph rules when it is towing a trailer – two different legal

requirements inspectors can look for if they pull you over.

Mrs Briggs concludes: "All these different rules around towing trailers and driving lorries are very complex and off-putting for people. NSA has pulled together a number of fact sheets to try and help members, and there is always the NSA Legal Helpline for enquiries and situations that go above and beyond the information provided there."

Fact sheets can be found in the members-only area of the NSA website. If you do not have your log-in details, contact NSA Head Office.

Driver CPC Fact File

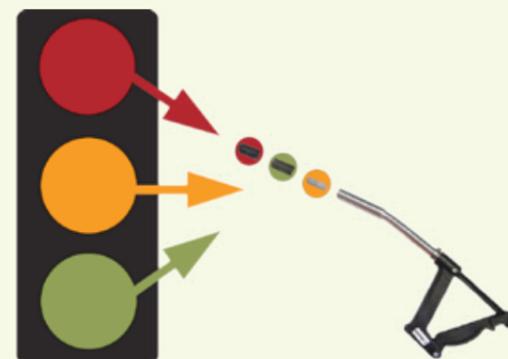
- If you obtained your vocational licence for lorry driving before 10th September 2009, you achieved your Driver CPC through 'acquired rights' and were not required to take a test. But unless you did 35 hours of recognised training between 10th September 2009 and 9th September 2014, your Driver CPC has expired and you are not legally qualified to drive a lorry professionally.
- If you did complete your 35 hours training, you have until 9th September 2019 to do another 35 hours, and so on every five years.
- Qualified drivers are required to carry their Driver Qualification Card at all time or face a £50 spot fine.
- The fine for driving without a Driver CPC is £1,000.
- More detail provided on the NSA fact sheet.



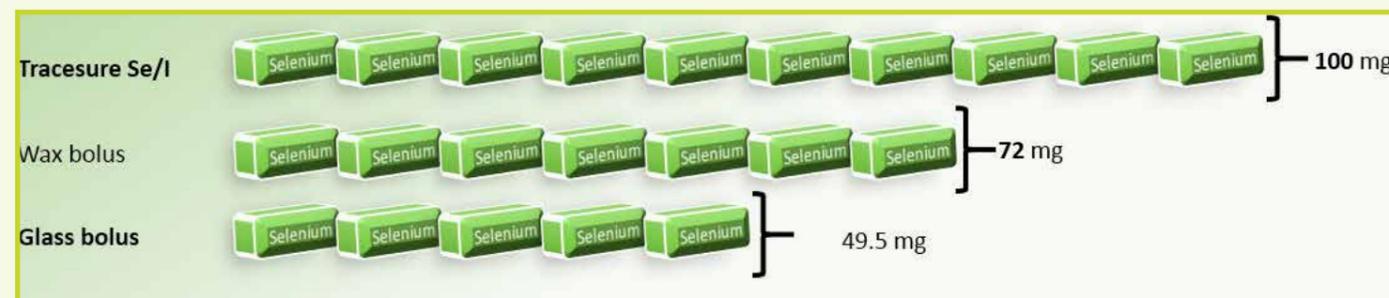
Several different sets of legislation affect lorries and towed trailers, and keeping yourself legal can be a challenge if driving longer distances.

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Texel phenotyping farms set up

The Texel Sheep Society has established an innovative network of phenotyping farms to assist in the collection of data for the development of novel EBVs and genomic indices.

The network covering more than 2,500 pedigree Texels has been organised to allow the collection of data for the society's mastitis research project, which is being undertaken in partnership with SRUC. It is the largest network of its kind operating in the UK and is a subgroup of the Performance Recording Texel (PRT) breeders, which totals 10,000 breeding ewes.

John Yates, Texel Sheep Society Chief Executive, explains more: "While the development of a genomic index for mastitis is the focus of this early-stage work by the society and SRUC researchers, the project is also acting as a catalyst for the development of an essential network of farms that are contributing to additional valuable data measurements that would otherwise not be collected by breeders. The longer-term aim is to use these and other farms to accurately collect a wide-range of data on novel traits, largely focusing on disease type traits that have historically been difficult to measure."

The Texel society hopes to refine scoring systems and combine new traits within the existing breeding tool box currently provided by Signet, seeing the new network as a useful addition to the PRT initiative, which has created in the 1990s and is currently collecting data from around 16,000 lambs each year. This data is primarily weight and ultrasound

measurements, with the society also providing support with CT scanning to complement meat production EBVs.

Mr Yates continues: "Looking to the future, this exciting new initiative will lead to the development of a number of key genomic indices of economic importance for commercial farmers for health, welfare and productivity traits."

He identifies mastitis and footrot as the two diseases where gains can be made initially, both in terms of addressing loss of production and reducing antibiotic use in the future.

Resistance

"Using genomics, and furthering work undertaken on footrot by the society nearly a decade ago, we hope to be able to introduce genomic breeding values (GBVs) for both conditions to help Texel breeders and the wider sheep industry breed sheep with inherent resistance to both mastitis and footrot."

SRUC geneticist Joanne Conington says research done by the Texel Sheep Society and SRUC between 2005 and 2008 identified a number of gene variants responsible for resistance to footrot.



Data is being collected from a network of farms with more than 2,500 pedigree Texels.

She says: "We know there is a genetic basis to footrot, with a heritability of 20%, and we also know how it is linked to a number of traits of economic importance. The challenge now is to expand our knowledge of the link between resistance to footrot with that for mastitis, and their interactions with other traits, to develop a genomic breeding value for the breed."

"Collecting phenotypes across genetically well-connected flocks to fuel these genomic evaluations offers major benefits and will enhance the accuracy of genomic breeding values. Combining footrot and mastitis makes the Texel society work unique and pioneering at an international level."

Mr Yates suggested the potential of this work is huge, as the latest GB Sheep Breeds Survey shows nearly one-third of flocks use a Texel ram and 12% of crossbred ewes are sired by a Texel.

RamCompare project begins

A considerable step towards commercial data being included in genetic evaluations has been taken with a new RamCompare project, which is attracting joint industry funding and support.

The two-year scheme, which started in May, will work along the supply chain to get lamb performance data from farms and abattoirs included in genetic evaluation. The project is a pilot to trial strategies for data capture and will be similar to central progeny tests that are taking place in Australia, New Zealand and Ireland.

The first stage of the project will develop a network of six commercial farms to use AI and single-sire mating to produce more than 500 lambs per farm per year from 67 rams from five breeds – Texel,



Suffolk, Charollais, Hampshire Down and Meatline. The rams will be representative of the top 20% of their breed based on EBVs, and the AI sires have good linkage with other pedigree flocks.

Evaluation

Data from their lambs will be collected through to slaughter and evaluated to see whether its inclusion in the rams' genetic evaluations identifies differences between sires and improves their accuracy. A ranking of the tested rams, based on

commercially important traits, will be generated at the end of 2017.

Sam Boon, Eblex Breeding Specialist, says: "This will be the first time a commercial progeny test has been established in the UK on this scale. It will enable the performance of progeny by different rams to be compared under commercial conditions; therefore it will be an important step in allowing animals to be compared irrespective of breed. The ambition is that, in time, one genetic analysis will be produced that will encompass data for all terminal sire breeds."

RamCompare is financed by Eblex, HCC, QMS and Agrisearch, with support from Sainsbury's, Randall Parker Foods, Dunbia and SRUC. More information at www.ramcompare.com.

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Sheep lameness strategy a key aspect of flock health planning

Lameness is a significant problem for sheep flocks and can affect lamb production, growth rates and ultimately profitability. However, having a lameness strategy in the farm flock health plan can help farmers tackle the challenge.

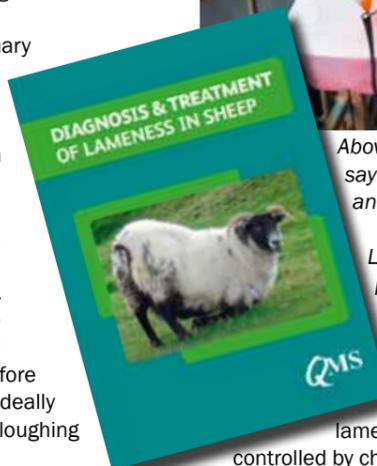


Above: Ian Gill advises against trimming feet, saying footrot is better controlled by isolation and antibiotic sprays/injections

That is the message from vet Ian Gill of Thrums Veterinary Practice, Kirriemuir, Angus, QMS launches a new publication on the topic. He has first-hand experience of farms with lameness issues and has helped many farmers address problems by providing advice on good practice and promoting lameness strategies within flock health plans.

Mr Gill, a past president of the Sheep Veterinary Society, says: "Nationally the most worrying cause of lameness is contagious ovine digital dermatitis, also known as CODD, but in our area, footrot, scald and shelly hoof are the main problems."

CODD is often introduced to farms via bought-in sheep and Mr Gill's advice is to check where sheep are coming from and, if possible, avoid buying from places with a known problem. Acknowledging that is easier said than done, he advises that all bought-in sheep be quarantined for at least four weeks and foot bathed twice before being turned out with others. He also says that ideally quarantine fields should be those targeted for ploughing and reseeded.



Left: QMS has released a new lameness publication for Scottish producers.

Importing disease

He says: "CODD is a very contagious condition which can be brought onto upland farms when hogs have been away-wintered on dairy grass where cows have suffered from digital dermatitis. Farmers should ask about this when they are negotiating winter grazing lets."

Another source of footrot or CODD is bought-in tups and infection can quickly spread when they are turned out with ewes.

However, these are just two causes of lameness that should be considered, and Mr Gill thoroughly recommends doing this through a flock health plan, saying farmers with a plan in place and in regular contact with their vet are more likely to prevent lameness problems.

"We have found that, on average, lame ewes are a condition

score less and more likely to be barren," he says. "We believe that if there is 10% lameness due to CODD in a flock then antibiotic injections are worthwhile. Over 2% lameness requires some treatment but can often be controlled by changes in husbandry, footbathing or (in the case of footrot) vaccination."

Footrot is probably the most recognisable of sheep lameness problems, and it is now believed that scald is an early stage of footrot. The advice is not to routinely trim – in fact the old treatment method of trimming, purple spray and turning back into field will only cause the condition to spread.

Sheep with footrot should be isolated and treated with antibiotic sprays and, if necessary, injections. If trimming is necessary then shears should be disinfected after each foot and sheep pens also swept and disinfected to avoid further contamination.

Mr Gill says: "My advice would be to avoid routinely paring feet, even if they are a bit overgrown. Leaving them untrimmed does not usually do any harm and if they can be turned out onto a bit of rough ground or hill, the natural wear usually solves the problem."

One of the best times to check for lameness is at scanning, and Mr Gill says that in his experience it is often the lame ewes which are barren or carrying singles. If they are to be housed for lambing, then he says it is best to try to keep lame ones separate and treat. Other good times to check over the flock and carry out treatments are at weaning and pre-tupping, when there are least feet on the ground with only the ewes and tups to check.

One of the problems with lameness, he says, is that unless the farm has a health plan where annual discussions with a vet highlights problems, few farmers ask a vet's advice regarding lameness. Correct diagnosis is important as the many products available from agricultural stores are not always the most appropriate for certain conditions.

The new QMS lameness publication is available in a handy packet size on hard wearing plastic from QMS on 01314 724040, or can be downloaded from the website at www.qmscotland.co.uk. It offers practical advice on both prevention and treatment, as well as general foot care.

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Some major changes on a farm in the Scottish Highlands have brought some very real advantages to Jason and Victoria Ballantyne in terms of input and labour costs, but an added benefit has been becoming more environmentally friendly too.

The couple are one of three farms in the Highland Farm Efficiency Network and are participating in the Scottish Government-funded Farming for a Better Climate initiative.

Jenny McCallum of SAC Consulting explains: "There's no single good system which will fit every farm, but Jason and Victoria are always looking for areas of improvement, particularly in terms of labour and time savings. Admittedly when it comes to environmental impacts and carbon savings, these can be viewed with scepticism by some. However if these measures are accompanied by financial and/or labour savings, it's something every business, plus the wider environment, could benefit from."

System change

Back in 2006, the Ballantynes at Clynelish, Brora, were faced with increasing feed and fuel costs and labour concerns. With 120ha (300 acres) of grass and hill supporting around 500 ewes, a Sheep Stock Club (common grazing) of 235 ewes, and 75 suckler cows, Jason and Victoria thought it was time to reassess their system.

Instead of lambing indoors in mid-April over six weeks, they moved to four-week outdoor lambing in May 2007. This was reduced to three weeks in 2009. Most lambs at Clynelish have been finished since 2007, though they now plan to sell the majority store, as it was found they

were going off with grass that could have been used to boost ewe condition and needed more work once brought inside.

Since implementing this change the labour requirement at lambing has reduced from three people to 1.5 and ewe numbers have increased by 250. Benefits from the change in system include:-

- Lambing at grass
 - Ewes not fed concentrates
 - Less time spent feeding ewes
 - Potentially fewer health risks lambing outdoors
 - Reduced risk of bad weather in May
 - Half the labour required for lambing
- Ms McCallum continues: "There has been a hard culling policy since 2007, selecting ewes that were fit and lambed without help. Jason and Victoria have reported that this seems to be paying dividends, as this lambing season notably saw the gimmers as the best scanning group. There have been fewer lambing difficulties this year too, and those that were handled were fairly straight forward with fewer big lambs.

"Although the rigorous selection has resulted in some of the older, fit ewes staying on to maintain numbers, this will be changed to selling all casts at five years old, with the hope this will improve the quality of lambs reared. As discussed at a recent Farming for a Better Climate focus farm discussion group meeting held at Clynelish, some of the older ewes struggle to rear a good set of

Right: Jason and Victoria Ballantyne.



twins."

The wind, rain and cold weather made lambing difficult this year, particularly for crossbred lambs that were a bit barer. These were housed but then led to problems of ewes not wanting the lambs back, again adding additional work.

It was not all bad news though. In previous years, ewes carrying triplets would still get a bit of feed, but this year a decision had been made to put them on the best grass and remove the third lamb immediately, followed by the thinner ewes being culled at weaning. All but one out of these 30+ ewes lambed unaided with three healthy, viable lambs. Hoggs were lambed to the Shetland, with some producing a good pairs of twins, a welcome bonus to make up for some of the losses.

Ms McCallum says the Ballantynes have had to look at the quality of their grass with the new system: "The main changes have been making sure everything was limed and the purchase of a dung spreader. This has boosted early growth and bought-in fertiliser has been cut drastically over the last six years. They would be the first to admit this system

does not always work perfectly and an early or late spring can affect ewe condition. However the decision to lamb later and not feed concentrates, whilst investing in the grass, has led to a decent financial saving.

"More intensive pasture management and the implementation of a cell grazing system is planned to maximise growth potential through the season, get lambs off early with a proportion finished off grass, and get ewes back in condition."

The cattle system has also been assessed with feeding of byproducts seen as more

environmentally sound, especially as Clynelish is right on the distillery doorstep, and a more forage-based winter diet planned this year. As with the sheep, the cost and impact on livestock condition will be monitored to judge the success of the change.

More information on the www.farmingforabetterclimate.org website.



Lambs have been sold finished, but will go as stores now to save grass for the ewes.

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Shoppers even more confused about use of animal medicines

In a sign that the horsemeat scandal continues to affect consumer sentiment around food quality and safety, new consumer research published by the National Office of Animal Health (NOAH) suggests shoppers are more confused than ever about animal medicines and how they are used to protect the health and welfare of sheep and other livestock on farms.

The research, conducted by IGD ShopperVista on behalf of NOAH, found that most shoppers believe growth hormones are still used in food production. There is widespread confusion about whether antibiotics used to treat sick animals will make them less effective for people. And many shoppers think vaccines could get into their food and cause harm.

Dawn Howard, NOAH Chief Executive,

NOAH recommendation for sheep farmers

- Sign up to Open Farm Sunday next year and engage with the public. The more they can see and understand farming, the better they will support the whole food chain. Or get involved with local schools through FACE and LEAF. See www.visitmyfarm.org.
- Speak to your retail customers and check their knowledge of your own biosecurity and flock health plans, in case they get questions from shoppers or other stakeholders further up the chain.
- Use social media to engage with the public about how you keep your sheep healthy, use animal medicines as little as possible but as often as necessary, and stay in touch with your vet to look after the wellbeing of your flock.

Survey findings

- 83% of shoppers either agree or 'neither agree or disagree' that growth hormones are used to make animals grow faster – up from 71% in 2012.
- 81% believe the use of antibiotics in livestock makes them less effective for people – up from 76% in 2012.
- 81% believe it is possible that livestock vaccines could cause harm to people..

Myths	2014			2015		
	Agree	Neither/ don't know	Disagree	Agree	Neither/ don't know	Disagree
Growth hormones are used in British farming to make animals grow faster	54%	29%	17%	37%	34%	29%
Use of antibiotics in animals makes them less effective for people	35%	46%	17%	28%	48%	24%
Medicines including vaccinations cause harm to people by getting into the food we eat	38%	43%	19%	29%	43%	28%
Animal medicines are more necessary in intensive farming than in extensive farming	61%	32%	7%	57%	33%	10%

says: "The findings are very worrying because basically shoppers seem to believe things that are not true. Firstly, growth hormones were banned across the EU back in 1988, so it's a real concern that eight out of 10 shoppers believe they might still be used.

"With antibiotic resistance so prevalent in the media, it is perhaps less surprising to see so much concern about this among the public. But even so, the science is very clear – the use of antibiotics in British livestock is not the main driver of resistance developing among people.

"There is also a lack of public

understanding about how vaccines work – and again, this misunderstanding seems to be getting worse."

IGD ShopperVista also held focus groups to test consumer-facing messages that could help bust the myths that many shoppers hold. NOAH believes everyone involved in rearing livestock, producing or selling animal products has a role to play in helping to educate shoppers.

Mrs Howard continues: "This research has shown us that price and quality remain top of most shoppers' priorities, although there is clear evidence that they also want to see good welfare, which, of course, animal medicines support.

"However, it is important that consumers who are interested or concerned about the health and welfare of animals in the food chain

have access to information that's easy to understand and helpful.

"The 2013 horsemeat scandal put the food industry under the microscope. Clear and accurate information about the use of animal medicines in producing our food is a very important part of a transparent and trusted food chain."

For more information, including a myth-busting video, see www.youtube.com/user/TheUKNOAH. or www.noah.co.uk.



Shoppers say they want good animal welfare, but do not understand the role of animal medicines within that. Picture credit: Ian13, Wikimedia.

Antimicrobial resistance and responsible use of medicines

By John FitzGerald, RUMA Secretary General

Antimicrobial resistance is a highly emotive, politicised and topical issue that the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture alliance (RUMA) spends a great deal of time on.

Antibiotics are becoming less effective in animals and man so, unless we all take steps now to minimise resistance, the problems we have with our ability to treat bacterial infections in, mainly humans, but also veterinary medicine, will get worse.

It is now becoming more widely accepted in scientific circles that antibiotic resistance in humans is caused primarily by antibiotic use in humans, so why should you bother to use antibiotics (and other medicines) responsibly in your animals?

Vets and farmers have a direct influence on how antibiotics are used on farm and need to work together to reduce the potential development of antibiotic resistant bacteria, which could ultimately affect people. Taking our responsibilities seriously in this way will not only minimise any risk from transfer of resistant bacteria, it will also help keep the antibiotics your vet needs working effectively, and means you will not be wasting money paying for treatments that may not work.

Defence

Equally important, it will provide fewer reasons for others to challenge antibiotic use on farms, which remains an easy scapegoat for the cause of antibiotic resistance in humans. The proposed changes to European legislation currently being debated can be seen as an example of this – see *panel*.

RUMA was set up in 1997 to promote the responsible use of medicines in agriculture and does this by providing best practice advice on the use of medicine to farmers and veterinary surgeons by publishing species-specific guidelines and providing advice/comment on specific



What sheep farmers need to know about antimicrobials

- The increasing resistance to antimicrobials in farmed livestock (and humans) is recognised as a global challenge.
- Science suggests resistance in humans is caused primarily by use in humans, but resistance in animals is still a very real problem that farmers need to act on.
- Don't get confused between antimicrobials and antibiotics. Antibiotics are a type of antimicrobial and, because antibiotic resistance is the main problem in human health, likely future EU controls will be on antibiotic use in animals. Other antimicrobials include anti-bacterials, anti-virals, anti-fungals and anti-protozoals.
- Medicine use in the UK and other member states is governed by EU legislation. Antimicrobial resistance is a key driver in the current review of the Veterinary Medicines Directive 2001/82. Changes proposed include the possibility of banning or restricting the use in animals of some 'critically important antibiotics' such as fluoroquinolones and third and fourth generation cephalosporins, which may be reserved solely for human use.

issues. Responsible use can be summed up in the phrase 'as little as possible and as much as necessary'.

'As little as possible' means managing farms to minimise the risk of disease challenge and so reduce the need to use medicines. Disease can be prevented by ensuring good hygiene, appropriate ventilation for housed animals, access to fresh water, good biosecurity (including quarantine protocols when introducing new stock to your flock), active health planning (which is prepared and regularly reviewed alongside a vet or animal health adviser) and vaccination programmes (where vaccines are available for infectious diseases). Medicines should never be used as a substitute for good farm management.

'As much as necessary' recognises that, like humans, animals will get ill and when they do they should be treated appropriately in accordance with professional advice. Medicines should be used to treat, control or prevent disease in

Responsible medicine use is 'as little as possible and as much as necessary', says RUMA.

accordance with the farm health plan or following diagnosis by a vet. All medicines for your animals should be purchased from an authorised supplier, be it your vet, a pharmacist or Suitably Qualified Person (SQP).

If you wish to buy medicine over the internet you should ensure you use a website accredited under the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) Accredited Internet Retailer Scheme. The VMD Accredited Internet Retailer logo acts as a guarantee that the website meets the requirements of the scheme and the law.

This scheme allows you to buy medicines on the internet with more confidence, knowing that you are buying from reputable, accredited retailers with less risk of buying unauthorised, inappropriate or ineffective medicines. These could be illegal, harmful to your animals and a waste of money.

Always use the medicine you buy from an authorised supplier in accordance with the instructions on the label and any directions from your vet. It is important to use the right dose for the weight of animal and to follow the full course of treatment to get the best results from the medicine.

Finally, you must always comply with the withdrawal period to ensure that the level of any residues from the medicine will be safe for the consumer.

RUMA is a unique and diverse group of 24 farm-to-fork organisations, including NSA. See www.ruma.org.uk for a full list of members and to download free copies of responsible use guidelines.

Independent study shows SCOPS guidelines work well in practice

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS, and Jane Learmount, APHA



Farms following SCOPS guidelines wormed ewes and lambs far less frequently, without any loss of production or adverse pasture contamination, the study shows.

Sheep farmers can adopt sustainable worm control practices based on SCOPS guidelines without fear of reducing their lamb performance, according to interim results from a detailed study.

It is 11 years since the SCOPS guidelines, designed to slow selection for anthelmintic resistance, were first produced. These were based on the best scientific and practical advice available but how well have they worked in practice? A study was set up in 2012 to try to answer this question.

The research was funded by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and carried out over three years by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) in conjunction with farmers and vets on 16 commercial farms around England. The objective was to compare farms that used conventional worming practices (e.g. regular worming of ewes and lambs without the use of faecal egg counts) with a similar number and type of farms that were implementing the SCOPS guidelines.

Measurements were taken to make comparisons between these two groups of farms, and the four measurements chosen were those thought to be the most important to producers, that could be measured in a robust and scientific way, and that had an influence on the development of resistance.

1. Lamb Performance: One of the main concerns that has deterred farmers from trying new approaches, such as using faecal egg counts, is that their lambs will not do as well using SCOPS guidelines. In the study a group of lambs was monitored from birth to finishing on each of the study farms, showing no significant difference in daily liveweight gain between the SCOPS and control farms – see *graph 1*. Neither was there any difference in the time to finishing or finished lamb weights.

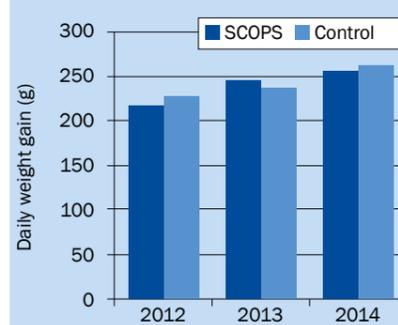
2. Worm numbers (infection levels): Pasture contamination by eggs dropped in dung are a major source of new infection for lambs and this can be carried across seasons. The study therefore looked at the number of worms on the pastures when

the amount of wormer used was reduced – see *graph 2*. The results clearly show that, contrary to what many people might think, infection levels tended to be lower on the SCOPS farms.

3. Amount of wormer used: One of the most important ways we can reduce the speed at which resistance develops is by reducing the amount of anthelmintic wormer used. This is a key SCOPS principle. The SCOPS farms used significantly less wormer than the conventional farms (six times less) with nearly half of their ewes not receiving any treatment at all during a year, compared to the conventional flocks where ewes were treated on average three times a year – see *graph 3*.

This is very important because research has suggested treatment of ewes is highly selective for resistance in the worm population. Contrast this with the infection levels of pasture seen in the study, and the convention that ewes always have to be treated to reduce the challenge for lambs

Graph 1: Daily liveweight gain in lambs on the SCOPS and control farms



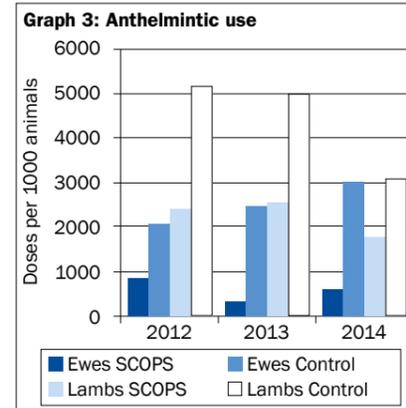
must be in question.

There was also a significant reduction in the number of lamb doses required in SCOPS flocks. This varied from year to year depending on the worm challenge in a particular season and may be particularly influenced by the different weather patterns that were seen over the three study years.

Overall, these results suggest that, not only did the lambs from the SCOPS farms do as well as the control lambs, but the farmers also saved a lot of money on unnecessary wormer use and the labour involved in gathering and drenching their animals.

4. Anthelmintic resistance: We also need to know if the farms that have implemented SCOPS guidelines have managed to reduce the rate at which resistance develops on their farm compared to the others. The answer to this is more complex, because we need much longer-term measurements. However, early indications suggest the rate of increase may have slowed on the SCOPS farms.

Graph 2: Pasture infection levels



Although this study is not yet complete, the interim data suggests farms that implement SCOPS worm control principles can significantly reduce their use of anthelmintics in both ewes and lambs without adversely affecting the performance of their sheep. This has the potential to slow the development of anthelmintic resistance, and a new study funded by VMD will explore whether this is the case.

This is great news for the UK sheep industry because it means farmers following the SCOPS guidelines can look forward to being able to control worms effectively and sustainably for many years to come without having to sacrifice performance.

Action required now

The results of this study are very encouraging, but we also know that the sooner we adopt SCOPS guidelines and make changes to management practices, the more impact they will have on slowing the development of resistance.

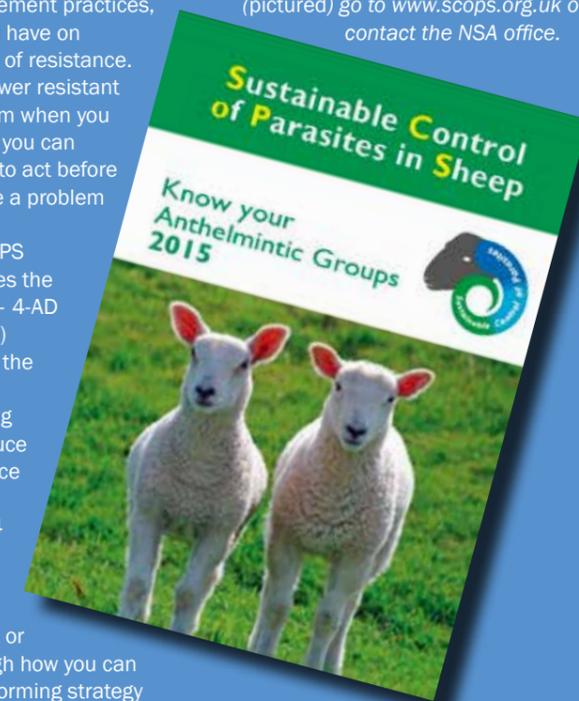
This is because the fewer resistant worms there are on a farm when you start, the more influence you can have – so it is important to act before resistance is known to be a problem on your farm.

One of the newer SCOPS recommendations involves the two new wormer groups – 4-AD (orange) and 5-SI (purple) drenches. Using these in the mid/late grazing season as a substitute for existing wormers can help to reduce the selection for resistance to these older groups.

Using the new group 4 and 5 wormers now, not waiting until the others have stopped working, is critical, so ask your vet or adviser to talk you through how you can integrate one into your worming strategy

this summer.

For a SCOPS guide to all the different products in the five wormer groups (pictured) go to www.scops.org.uk or contact the NSA office.



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Control ticks to boost production and reduce tick-borne disease risk

By Moredun staff



Ticks are blood sucking obligate ectoparasites with at least 20 species indigenous to the UK, the most common species being *Ixodes ricinus*, the sheep tick, which is distributed widely over the country.

It is the vector for tick-borne diseases including louping ill, tickborne fever, redwater fever and tick pyaemia. In addition to the spread of these diseases, tick infestations in livestock can cause irritation, anaemia and loss of production. This is of particular economic significance in hill and upland sheep due to dense, upland grazing being the preferred habitat of the sheep tick, and the generally wetter conditions, which supports the free living stages of the tick life cycle.

There are three stages to the life cycle of the tick, each stage lasting for about a year, during which time the tick must have a blood meal, allowing the spread of tick-borne disease between hosts.

Tick spread

Recently ticks and the diseases they transmit have become of increasing public concern amidst reports of ticks spreading geographically and increasing in numbers. Factors which may be contributing to this are: climate change, in particular relatively wet summers; sheep farming economics and a reduction in sheep dipping; environmental biodiversity management strategies in relation to habitat; and the marked increase in deer numbers acting as tick maintenance hosts.

Louping ill, a disease of the nervous

system principally found in sheep, is caused by a virus transmitted in the saliva of an infected tick and is the tick-transmitted disease with the greatest economic impact in the UK. However, both tickborne fever (caused by bacteria transmitted via infected ticks) and lamb pyaemia (crippled lambs) can cause serious losses in hill flocks.

Tick control, including optimal products to use and timing of application, is best planned for individual farms as part of your animal health plan in consultation with your vet. Generally, for most sheep flocks in high risk areas, acaricides are the main form of control – see table 1. There are relative advantages and disadvantages of the different treatment types – see table 2. Additional points for effective tick and tickborne disease control include:-

- Any tick control programme implemented should be at least three years in duration, due to the long life of the tick.
- Be aware that other mammals and birds may act as tick reservoirs; include cattle in treatment programmes.
- The importance of maternal antibody for protection against louping ill in lambs illustrates the value of hefted sheep.



Increased deer numbers are one of the factors in the increase and spread of ticks.

- There is an effective vaccine for louping ill, so this disease is best controlled through the strategic use of vaccination plus acaricidal treatment.
- Maternal antibodies offer no protection against tickborne fever in lambs and there is no vaccine, therefore tick control programmes are important in disease control.
- Expose ewes to areas where ticks are present before pregnancy to prevent abortion due to tickborne fever, and tups at least one month before tupping as temporary infertility may result from tickborne fever in naive tups.
- A molecular test is now available at Moredun for the diagnosis of acute cases of tickborne fever and can be accessed by contacting SRUC, APHA or Moredun.
- Redwater fever in cattle is transmitted by infected sheep ticks but clinical signs are not seen in cattle less than nine months old, which develop solid immunity for later life. This illustrates the importance of introducing young cattle to problem tick areas.
- Lyme disease is caused by bacteria transmitted by an infected tick bite and can cause serious illness in humans if not diagnosed and treated promptly. Any person working in areas where ticks are present or using the countryside for recreation should be aware of Lyme disease – see www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease.

All NSA members are associate members of Moredun too; you can support Moredun's work further by becoming a full member. More details on 01314 455111 or www.moredun.org.

Table 1: Products licensed for use in tick control in UK sheep flocks

Product	Active ingredient	Application method	Duration of protection	Meat withdrawal
Coopers Ectoforce	Diazinon*	Plunge dip	3-6 weeks	35 days
Osmonds Gold Fleece	Diazinon*	Plunge dip	3-6 weeks	35 days
Paracide Plus	Diazinon*	Plunge dip	3-6 weeks	35 days
Coopers Spot-On	Delta-methrin	Pour-on	Up to 6 weeks	35 days
Crovect	High-cis cypermethrin	Pour-on	6-8 weeks	8 days
Dysect	Alpha cypermethrin	Pour-on	8-12 weeks	28 days

Table reproduced with the permission of Neil Sargison, Edinburgh University Vet School.

* Organophosphate dips and the anthelmintics levamisole and morantel should not be used within 14 days of each other.

Table 2: Advantages and disadvantages of treatments

Product type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Plunge dips	Immediate and effective treatment. Protects against sheep scab, blowfly strike, lice and keds.	Operator safety, environmental toxicity and legal controls on use and disposal.
Pour-on treatments	Longer protection* and easier to administer.	No immediate tick kill.

* Duration of protection in table 1 refers to longer fleece areas only. Shorter hair (often predilection sites for ticks) may have shorter protection times.

Oh well, he could always retrain as a **guard dog.**



A sheepdog with no future on the land.

It sounds unthinkable, yet if you continually use wormers on your sheep with the same active ingredient, resistance builds and they become less effective. Eventually they will fail completely. And one day the sheep will be gone.

Have you checked if your sheep wormers are working properly? Finding out is simple and straightforward. Specially qualified staff at your nearest AHDA animal medicines stockist will ask a few questions to establish an effective and comprehensive worming programme. Act now, because inefficient wormers cost money.

Talking to your local qualified AHDA staff will allow you, and your dog, to face the future with confidence.



Free advice from qualified animal health specialists

To find your nearest AHDA (Animal Health Distributors Association) member go to www.ahda.co.uk

Supplementing weaned lambs to complement grass, not replace it

Supplementing lambs at grass to help balance variable grazing quality can pay, but care must be taken to ensure the full benefits are achieved while controlling costs, says Crystalax Regional Manager David Parker.

“Getting lambs to specification quicker can provide a timely boost to cash flow and release more grazing back to the ewes,” Mr Parker comments. “In addition, supplementing lambs can help improve killing out percentage, increasing carcass values. However, it is vital that



Effective supplementation increases growth at grass, says David Parker.

supplements are used cost effectively, complementing rather than displacing grazing in the diet.”

Mr Parker says many lambs are currently on fast growing, good quality grazing that can support excellent growth, especially pre-weaning – but grazing quantity and quality can vary markedly from week to week, affecting intakes and nutrient supply, especially immediately post-weaning.

“Provided they are on a good clean pasture with grass around 4-6cm high, lambs will eat 1kg of grass dry matter per day and grow quickly while grass quality is maintained. But when grazing quality falls so growth can suffer, leading to increased days to sale.

“Consistent growth can be optimised by feeding a supplement that achieves two main things. First it will complement the nutrients in grass and balance any deficiencies. Second it will stimulate the rumen, which will encourage increased intakes and better feed utilisation.”

Mr Parker recommends a high energy, high sugar block, adding that high level of sugars have been shown to stimulate fermentation rates in the rumen, increasing forage intakes by up to 15%

and forage digestibility by up to 22%.

“In a trial at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute of Northern Ireland, newly-weaned March-born lambs finished on average four days sooner off grass when offered free access to dehydrated molasses-based blocks. Carcass conformation and fat class assessment showed the supplemented lambs were significantly leaner than grass-only-fed counterparts.

“The blocks help lambs derive maximum value from grazing, while also supplying the trace minerals and vitamins necessary to correct deficiencies commonly found in grazed grass. Placing blocks regularly across the grazing area also encourages more even grazing, which helps maintain sward quality.”

Mr Parker suggests that while sheep farmers typically look to finish lambs with minimal supplementation, the benefits of pushing lambs can be considerable.

“By keeping a close eye on levels of supplementation it will be possible to achieve good margins per lamb,” he says. “At the same time, moving lambs off the farm sooner will reduce grazing pressure and leave more grass for the ewes in the pre-tupping period.”

Know your marketing plan when planning weaning and nutrition

Weaning time varies hugely across UK sheep flocks, but the deciding factor should be the end market, says Alison Metcalfe of Dugdale Nutrition.

“The starting point for weaning decisions is market planning,” she says. “You need to consider who will buy your lambs, how will they be marketed, when they need to be ready by, and what type of lamb is required. When these questions are answered a plan to achieve the target growth rates can be put into place to meet these needs.”

Milk supply

Miss Metcalfe goes on to explain the dynamics behind ewe lactation, saying milk production peaks three to four weeks after lambing with milk yield slowly reducing to around half as much by week 10. The first eight weeks are when about 74% of milk production is done.

“The lamb’s rumen is developing by three weeks of age, making it efficient at converting feed. Creep feeding lambs early on with 0.5kg of concentrates can relieve pressure on ewes, reduce mastitis and allow grass time to grow,” she says.

“When lambs reach eight weeks their energy consumption from grass is

Finishing store lambs

	Weight to gain to slaughter	Approx starting weight	Nutrition		Target finishing time	Target liveweight gain/week
			Quality grass + minimal concentrates	Fodder crops		
Short-term keep	5-7kg	35kg	✓	✓	Sep-Oct	1kg
Medium-term keep	7-12kg	30-35kg	✓	✓	Nov-Feb	0.7kg
Long-term keep	10-18kg	< 30kg	✓		Feb-Apr	0.5-0.7kg

greater than from milk, resulting in ewes and lambs competing for grass. Target lamb growth weights up to eight weeks should be more than 250g per day, so by assessing ewes and lambs at this stage you should get a good indication of ewe milk yield, health, worm burdens, forage availability, condition scores and lamb weights, so a weaning date can be decided.”

Miss Metcalfe says weaning at 12-16 weeks (and no later unless lambs are close to finishing) allows for effective management, as lambs can be grouped by weight with a finish target date for marketing. Consider guidelines for store lambs at this stage - see table - to help set these targets.

Lambs can be given better grazing, avoiding high risk pastures for worms, and ewes prepared for next season. She recommends marking 10-20% of lambs in

a group for reweighing every two weeks to monitor progress.

The nutritional transition period at weaning needs to be thought about, Miss Metcalfe says: “It can take up to three weeks for a rumen to adjust to a new feed, so care is needed to avoid a weaning check. Introduce new feed gradually, especially starchy diets, to avoid acidosis.

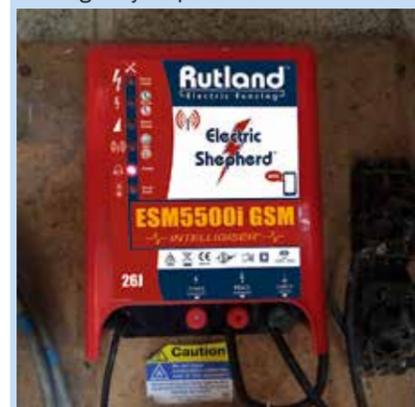
“The immune system is not fully developed yet, so routine treatments such as vaccination or worming should be given before weaning to ensure lambs are not stressed and left susceptible to disease. Keeping them on pasture they know can also reduce stress, and they are less likely to go off feed because they will know where the feeders, minerals, and water are. It is also generally recommended that lambs are far enough apart from ewes so they can’t hear or see each other.”

New product update

Fencing control

Now you can control your electric fencing with mobile phone technology, as the result of a new product launch from Rutland Fencing.

The Rutland GSM Smart Phone Control Energiser, which is available as a battery-operated or mains version, will send a message to your phone as soon as there



is little or no voltage in an electric fence. It also allows users to turn off the power on request, so the fence line can be worked on without having to return to the power source to switch it off.

The company says the service provides total peace of mind and could help make electric fencing as reliable as more permanent options.

New bucket

A nutritional bucket that also supports farmers’ worm control programme was launched by Rumenco at NSA Welsh Sheep.



The company says the CleanSweep bucket has a unique formulation containing natural ingredients suitable for supplementing lambs on forage-based diets within a worm control programme. David Thornton from Rumenco says: “CleanSweep is designed to complement existing, strategic parasite control programmes in cattle and sheep over the summer grazing season. I’d recommend offering the buckets ad lib at a ratio of one bucket per 10-15 cattle or 35 sheep.”

Lamb bolus

Testing of trace elements in lambs in the weeks post-weaning shows the efficacy of a new mini rumen bolus, says Agrimin.

The company says best practice advice to manage trace element issues in flocks through from conception to weaning continues to offer the best start for lambs via maternal transfer and colostrum. However they can be left vulnerable by the nutritional stress of weaning, as well as limited iodine absorption in in-lamb ewes grazing winter fodder crops, and leaching of trace elements from soils by changing



weather patterns.

The results of blood tests on these young lambs reveals a role for 24.7 Smartrace Lamb Bolus, Agrimin says. It says the bolus offers sustained release of selenium, iodine and cobalt for 180 days, with the 6g bolus suitable for use once lambs reach 25kg.

Grass varieties

The Recommended Grass and Clover List (which only includes grasses and clovers that have undergone at least four years of independent testing, and is therefore recommended to members by NSA) contains 10 new ryegrass varieties this year.

Three of the varieties are from Barenbrug:-

- Glenarm: A late diploid perennial with high early spring grazing and cutting yield, plus good crown rust resistance.
- Caledon: An intermediate tetraploid perennial with high total grazing and conservation yield.
- Ramore: An intermediate tetraploid perennial with consistent first and third year conservation yield, so a good choice for silage production.

All three were developed by AFB in Northern Ireland and tested by Barenbrug on three UK sites. They have taken more than 15 years of development to reach the market and represent a long-term investment by the company.

Bedding shavings

Also launched at NSA Welsh Sheep was the diversification of Bedmax’s branded shavings.

Being well-established in the equine market, Bedmax now has a dust-free pine timber shavings ‘Stockmax’ range for livestock. Stockmax is dried at temperatures that sterilise the shavings,



providing warm, dry, absorbent bedding. The company says the antibacterial properties of pine, which help reduce infection (primarily e.coli), make it ideal for sheep during lambing.

NSA Next Generation project opens the doors for young people

As momentum increases within the NSA Next Generation project, we are hearing of more opportunities for young people in the sheep sector – see panel.

Joanne Briggs, NSA Communications Manager, says: “There is a real appetite among sheep farmers to give the next generation a leg up and this, coupled with opportunities in the arable sector, is enabling NSA to create a useful network.”

Doors are also being opened for the 12 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors selected for 2015, with NSA delivery sessions providing them with business and sheep farming skills.

The latest two-day session saw the Ambassadors scrutinise their business costings and benchmark their strengths and weaknesses against each other. There were also units on accountancy and VAT management, rental agreements and succession planning, and at a more hands-on sheep level, a practical element on management of sheep worms.

All this was hosted by Andy Wear and Jen Hunter of Fernhill Farm, Bristol, who also provided an insight into their sheep flock and farm diversification projects. Sheep breeder Tim White was the guest speaker, explaining how he monitors and pushes his business.

Three more sessions are planned for the year, with the final one in the autumn to be opened up for all young people in the sheep sector to get involved in. More information will be provided soon.

Opportunity available: You supply the sheep

Following NSA's work on promoting the value of grass breaks and sheep within arable rotations, and the opportunities for new business set-ups, we have been made aware of a chance for someone to start their own sheep flock within a large-scale and diverse farming operation in Essex. Presently 200-300 acres of grass is available, easily increasing to 500 acres for the right person. There would be the opportunity for additional paid work within the farming operation at certain times of the year and particularly at the start of any agreement.

As with other opportunities promoted by NSA, we are initially inviting expressions of interest to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk marked 'Sheep on arable unit'.

Opportunity available: You supply the land

An NSA member is offering an opportunity for a young person 'to cut their teeth on' by taking over the management of 60 ewes with ewe lambs at foot.

This person is pursuing interests that will take him away from day-to-day sheep farming, but wants to retain and grow the asset of his sheep flock, which he has taken many years to develop. He has already had one person take on 100

ewes and is looking to set up a similar agreement with another 60+.

The sheep are bought and paid for, but the right person would provide land (preferably, but not necessarily, in England) and all other inputs in return for retaining 75% of the annual lamb crop. The remaining 25% would be the better ewe lambs selected for breeding and retaining in the flock as replacements. A two to three-year agreement would be offered initially.

NSA will collect expressions of interest on behalf of this member, who will consider them and contact people accordingly. Please email details of your suitability and reasons for being interested to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk marked 'Sheep lease'.

Update on Cumbria sheep farm tenancy

Readers may remember in the last edition of Sheep Farmer that a member in the Lake District was offering a tenancy opportunity specifically for a new entrant or young farmer.

The initial invitation for express of interest resulted in seven serious applications for the farmer to consider and shortlist. Discussions are now ongoing with a small number of people and we hope to be able to share more with members in due course.

On My Farm – The Next Generation

The 12 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors are regularly providing updates on their year for the NSA website. A taster from some of them is provided here; read more in the 'Case Studies' area at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

Ewan Cumming (22)

Denton, Norfolk

Lambing started off reasonably well with strong lambs hitting the ground running, but I lost a few lambs due to watery mouth, leaving me with more singles than I would like. But they are strong lambs that are left and are growing well.



Grass growth has been slow, meaning I was left feeding concentrates for longer than I would have wanted, but its kept milk production up in the ewes so hopefully should pay. Having sent eight cull ewes in April to the local market and making good money really shows that I can afford to cull harder.

On 7th May I put 20 Poll Dorset ewe lambs to the ram. Hopefully things will go well and we will see some lambs on the ground in the autumn.

With news of the possible reintroduction of the lynx to our local countryside it has made for some interesting conversation with my pig and sheep farming peers. The idea that the lynx would be an effective control on the deer population in Thetford is plausible, but with many flocks of sheep and outdoor

pig herds in the area, I ask why a lynx would chase a wild animal when there are plenty of contained livestock that would be much easier to make dinner?!

Lamb sales have been steady, but with the BBQ season just arriving my remaining few wethers from last season will go for burgers and sausages.

Jonny Farmer (33)

Ballymena, County Antrim

Lambing generally went well for us, and also saw the launch of two new business ventures. 'Learn to Lamb' saw eight visitors come to the farm and get involved in the



full lambing experience. Feedback has been very positive and we hope this is the start of something we can build on next year.

As well as this my wife Gill launched 'Learn with Lambs'. This business is taking lambs to local primary schools and nurseries. Gill tailored a lesson as well as crafts and games, all specific to sheep and lambs, as well as a certificate for each child. The kids loved it and we already have bookings for next year. My wife and I are very passionate about the business and believe kids should know where their food and other products come from.

Having all lambs from my contract reared ewe lambs on the ground now, the attention has focused to grass management and medical treatments. The majority of land has received compound fertiliser and grass has responded. I am still feeding ewe lambs rearing twins and have just started creep feeding their lambs. All other groups are on grass only. The jury is out on whether to dose for coccidiosis and when to do it. My local veterinary practice has been very helpful and we are building a thorough health plan as the season progresses.

Early signs of lamb prices in NI have not been favourable so it will be very important to keep lambs growing as fast as possible off grass and keep costs down. I hope to go through the sheep farm budget in detail over the next few weeks and get a good feel for where savings and efficiencies can be achieved.

Clarke Hibberd (25)

Inverurie, Aberdeenshire

With the ewes and lambs settled in their summer pastures, looking back the lambing was a great success.

After a recent head count we are delighted to have ended up with a 192% lambing in the ewes and 120%

lambing in the hogs. On the whole, the weather throughout lambing the 600 sheep outdoors was brilliant with mainly dry, mild weather – however, a freak two days of snow at the end of April caused some unexpected losses.

Before moving the sheep onto their summer pastures was the task of preparing the lambs for the summer ahead. This included castration and tailing, vaccinations against clostridial diseases, worming and tagging. With great vigour in all the lambs it's a rewarding sight to see.

Ongoing soil and grassland



management has been high up in our priorities this spring, with soil sampling and GPS mapping of the fields resulting in a great early yield of grass. Lime, nitrogen, phosphate and potash have been added where required to bring the soil to its desired pH and nutrient content.

Having sheared some ewe and tup hogs, it's been a good warm-up for the shearing season ahead, and a good chance to practice for competing in the local summer shows and competitions.

George Gough (22)

Knighton, Powys

What a busy couple of months it has been! I spent March down in South Devon managing a busy lambing shed for Peregrine Aubrey, before my last lambing contract of the year up in Aberdeenshire with the Gordon family of Strathdon.

One thing which has struck me is the wide variation of weather that we have to deal with in Britain. I never thought I would be lambing ewes outside in the snow in May. But it's all a part of what makes the agricultural industry so exciting in Britain and keeps us all on our toes.

As much as we all like to study the forecast when we walk out the door in the morning we never fully know that the weather has in store for us. Yes, we get struck with some very wet times and some very dry times, but it always balances itself out.

As farmers we are renowned for either complaining about market prices or the weather, but it's our climate that allows us to produce some of the best livestock in the world – that's what makes our industry so strong, and something we can all take advantage of to make it stronger.

So as the days start getting longer, and the weather starts getting warmer, this only means one thing – it's time to get the shearing trailer out for another season!

Lewis Sayers (19)

Bingham, Nottingham

In the first week of April I was contacted by the smallholding I work at to attend a meeting.

I turned up not knowing what to expect, but it started off talking about how lambing had gone and onto a discussion of share farming. As I'm sure you're aware, there is no



real definition on share farming; I think it changes dependent upon the situation. The meeting went well and I came out full of optimism. I was sent away to come up with ideas on how it could work and what my objectives were, and the same happened for the people that own the smallholding. A few weeks later we met again to discuss what we had come up with. Surprisingly we had the same basic idea, so we then worked together to decide what we both want.

So I'm now in the early stages of share farming and it is going better than I thought. It has also caught the attention of a farmer up the road and I'm currently working with him to see if we could do a similar thing. With all this going on, I have managed to secure myself six days of work a week, as I've also taken on a job at a farm putting new fences up, putting water troughs in and generally helping to tidy things up. I also had a brilliant day in May taking pet lambs to a primary school to tell them all about lambing. All the children seemed to enjoy it too.

Georgie Radmore (23)

Yelverton, Devon/ Harper Adams University

I have finally handed in my dissertation.

I was looking at the effect of dietary digestible undegradable protein levels and body condition scores on faecal egg counts in pregnant and lactating ewes. Seven other students and I were involved in a trial on the Harper Adams University sheep flock, doing general husbandry of the sheep and lab work for 10 weeks. I also read more than 70 papers of research on the topic and then wrote 10,000 words after lots of statistical analysis of the data collected. Needless to say I am very relieved I have finally got it handed in!

Whilst I was writing my dissertation I got a phone call from my brother saying that he was off to Corsica in the Mediterranean to go and shear sheep for three weeks. I was pretty jealous, as I was sat in the library at the time, but can't wait to hear all about it.

Revising hard for my finals at the moment; just over a month and it will be all done. Then off to the world of work in the animal health department of CCF-agri.



What you need to know to get sheepskins from the abattoir

By Nicki Port, Organic Sheepskins

It had always been possible to get your sheepskins back for tanning, but then foot-and-mouth happened in 2001 and the Animal By-Products Regulations stated 'no animal skin will be returned to an agricultural holding'.

We couldn't have that, and after much toing and froing to Defra, including by myself, mountains of paperwork and hundreds of emails, the Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 came into being. This meant anyone in England could get their skins back with the production of a commercial document as a mini hide market; an intermediate plant.

Unfortunately it was an England-only situation – but then in 2009 there appeared 'Notification of registration for the generation, transportation, handling, processing, storage, placing on the market, distribution, use or disposal of animal by-products or derived products under the requirements of article 23 of regulation (EC) 1069/2009'. Or in other words, an ab117 form.

Unfortunately Defra did not contact any of its 800 consultees, including me, during the implementation process and the result was, if I may say, a right dogs breakfast – and not just for sheepskins. Among other things, it included hauliers of 'category three animal waste', which of course meant all couriers, right down to Parcel Force and similar companies. Naturally couriers were not going to fill in an ab117, so some simply refused to accept parcels of salted skins. You would be amazed at some of the descriptions of the contents on parcels which did reach us!

Most people just ignored the ab117. Who wants to fill in a five page form? That was until the horsemeat scandal, after which abattoirs wouldn't sneeze without a 'license'. The licence in this instance – the ab117 – had to be filled in and submitted to APHA and approved before the animals are booked in. Unfortunately nobody told livestock holders until they tried to get their skins back. Did you know you were also supposed to fill in an ab117 to take your wool clip to the collection centre? No? The British Wool



Nicki receives skins from all sorts of breeds for salting and tanning.

Marketing Board didn't know about that one either!

Again, we couldn't have that – but it took more than two years of battling to get any sort of sense. Eventually in October 2014 ab117 was revised. The new version (with 'Rev. 10/14' at the foot of the paperwork) is easier to complete and no longer includes hauliers, which is a big improvement.

The truth is that the only real advantage of an ab117 is that anyone in the UK can get their skins back. This is good news, especially now it is easier to complete. But not all skins are moved with an ab117, as some abattoirs do not like that much paperwork and just give them back. The problem then is no track back or traceability, as we had with a commercial document.

There are three companies that can tan sheep and goatskins for you – ourselves at Organic Sheepskins, Devonia and a few by Skye Skyns. Devonia need a commercial document, but is a big tannery in the process of expanding and its priority is not contract tanning. Our priority is tanning other peoples' skins for them, but we need all your contact details or we cannot get your skins back to you. This is acceptable to Defra, or a commercial document if that is easier.

Toxic chemicals

Defra has now also acknowledged DIY processing in the paperwork, but the problem with this is that either the chemicals used are extremely toxic or simply do not work. Many years ago the favoured process was salt petre and alum, but now aluminium sulphate (alum) is banned by the EU after large quantities were dumped into the Camelford water supply, causing serious human health problems.

If toxic chemicals are used then the residue, including washing water, must be removed by a licensed operator. This includes the residue from chrome tanning kits. At what cost? The potential for damage to human, animal health and the environment is huge. If you get caught then the fine is £20,000, so be warned.

You can download an ab117 at www.gov.uk/government/publications/approval-of-sites-using-animal-by-products-registration, or from the members-only area of the NSA website. There is more about Organic Sheepskins at www.organicssheepskins.com.

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DID YOU KNOW?! This summer will see NSA host its 122nd Annual General Meeting. All members are encouraged to join us at 10am on Wednesday 12th August, and to also join us for a farm walk afterwards around the Rhug Estate, North Wales, by kind permission of Lord Robert Newborough.
See page 16 for details, or www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events

Wool prices hold again with average holding above £1/kg

Sheep farmers marketing their wool through the British Wool Marketing Board can expect to see wool cheques increase again this year.



BWMB chairman Ian Buchanan says these further increases in prices come on the back of strong trading in the last 12 months and will see prices on average hold at above 100p/kg again.

"This is despite some challenging conditions in the world market and an economic slowdown in the major export market of China," he explains.

Mr Buchanan says the Board expects the average price for the 2015 clip to be 105p/kg, a rise from the 103p/kg average paid for the 2014 clip.

"This makes it the fourth time in five years that average returns have been above 100p/kg," he says.

Market requirements

Maintaining prices at these levels has been achieved thanks to extensive market research by BWMB and adjustments to the grading and quality control process in depots across the UK, says Mr Buchanan.

"Market requirements for British wool have changed in the last few years, with a larger proportion of the clip delivered direct from BWMB depots to customers," he says.

"Additionally, due to changing market requirements and manufacturing capabilities, BWMB has been able to revise the grading process to better reflect the increased uses now available for some wools.

"Many wools which would previously have been used in carpet making are now being used, particularly in China, in top making and it is important that the BWMB grading process reflects this to help maximise the value of producers' clips.

"These important developments have been incredibly useful in maximising the market appeal of wool at BWMB auctions and thus delivering the best prices possible."

Mr Buchanan says farmers can rest assured that BWMB is striving to maximise the value of their wool, and it is thanks to some careful planning and sale management by BWMB that prices have been maintained at comfortable levels, helping boost



Adjustments to the grading and quality control process have helped to sustain prices, says BWMB.

confidence and ensure the maximum price for producers.

"The BWMB's competitive auction system is a tried and tested method of delivering the best possible wool returns for producers and coupled with the extensive promotional work the board undertakes through its involvement in the Campaign for Wool, it continues to deliver increasing demand and improving returns for wool producers."

Looking at the coming sales season he says the outlook is positive, with just 500,000kg carried over from the 2014 clip.

"This represents about 2% of the national clip and will be a useful starting point for our auctions which kick off in July," he says. "Continuing firm market conditions throughout 2014 and increases in the auction price indicator in recent sales, bode well for the 2015 clip and we anticipate auction prices to be slightly higher again this coming year. "BWMB trades wool from more than 14m sheep, meaning buyers wanting quality British wool can source quality in quantity at every BWMB sale throughout the year. "Looking ahead the increasing demand for wool from consumers, points to a bright future for wool producers, with returns now more than three times the level they were at just seven years ago."

Average clip value (£/kg)*		
Breed/type	Actual 2014 Wool Clip Values	2015 Guide Wool Clip Values**
Suffolk	£1.11	£1.13
Romney/Kent	£1.27	£1.30
Texel/Lley	£1.19	£1.22
Mule/Cross	£1.14	£1.16
Cheviot	£1.30	£1.35
Radnor/Beulah	£1.04	£1.06
Welsh	£0.71	£0.74
Swaledale	£0.60	£0.62
Blackface	£0.89	£0.90

* Net value after all operating costs have been deducted and excluding VAT
** Based on last year's selling season

British Wool Marketing Board

Maximise The Value Of Your Wool

2015 Guide Wool Clip Values*

 Suffolk £1.13 / kg	 Romney £1.30 / kg	 Texel £1.22 / kg
 Mule £1.16 / kg	 Cheviot £1.35 / kg	 Beulah £1.06 / kg
 Welsh £0.74 / kg	 Swaledale £0.62 / kg	 Blackface £0.90 / kg

*Net value after all operating costs have been deducted and excluding VAT. Based on last year's selling season.

You can find out more about British wool and the work of the British Wool Marketing Board at:
Web: britishwool.org.uk Telephone: 01274 688 666

Italian project looks at turning raw wool waste into fertiliser

By Martina Simionati, Life+GreenWoolF, Italy

Wool is a resource with a thousand uses, but the current market for coarse wool is mostly confined to local handicraft niches, carpeting or insulation, which absorb about 20-30% of the annual clip across Europe as a whole.

Sheep in Europe are generally not graded for fine wool production, and when wool is heavily contaminated by dead fibres (kemps) textile uses are not possible. Thus, wool is often perceived as a by-product, and shearing, storage, transportation and disposal heavily weigh on the profit of sheep farming.

Poor quality wool produces large volumes of solid wastes, which are often disposed in landfill or illegally thrown away where they do not readily degrade, with ambient threat and infection risks. Waste from the scouring process is also a problem. Other important sources of wool waste are disposal from post-consumer carpets, butchery and industrial manufacturing. Landfill is considered the least desirable waste management option, but incineration is only possible where the necessary infrastructure is available – and environmental pressures make the future of both options uncertain.

Recycling

The Life+GreenWoolF project aims to demonstrate that wool waste or end-of-life wool can be successfully recycled into value-added organic nitrogen fertilisers via 'green hydrolysis' conversion with chemical-free superheated water. This process converts wool keratin (the wool protein) into simpler compounds (protein hydrolysates), tailoring the release speed of nitrogen and other nutrients to plants.

The UK context

The people involved in this European-funded project have been in touch with NSA for around two years now, and also visited us six months ago, as part of its ongoing outreach work with several EU member states.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "I view this a bit like work to add value to the fifth quarter carcasses. It is not suitable for the higher quality UK wool that the British Wool Marketing

Board finds a ready market for, but is a fascinating option for the lowest grade and very dirty wool, as well as end-of-life woollen products. Taking out the disposal costs for these would be a benefit for the whole industry.

"We understand that they are only at the prototype stage but wish them well with future development and, presumably, finding a commercial partner in time."

- Superheated water has the advantage of hydrolysing both wool wax and inactive pesticide residues.
- We have found that wool treated in this fashion offers a number of benefits:-
- Reduces soil run-off of contaminants such as pesticides.
 - Aids in water conservation by absorbing and retaining moisture.
 - Acts as a bio-stimulant, as the protein hydrolysates and amino acids increase soil microbe activity.
 - Displays chelating properties for trace elements such as iron, copper and zinc.
 - May reduce the need for chemical fertilisers.
 - Are suitable for use in agriculture and horticulture.

Life+GreenWoolF is currently working on the design and construction of a transportable demonstration plant for the controlled hydrolysis of greasy wool, used carpets and wool boards from houses renovation, industry wastes and every kind of wool waste. All material is transformed into fertiliser and there is no additional waste resulting from the process.

Hydrolysis of wool wastes can be carried out in different process conditions, tailoring the extent of the protein degradation to obtain different proportions of fast/slow release nutrients. This works because full degradation to amino acids offers fast release, while residual partially hydrolysed fibres offer slow release as the fibres decompose over time. The slower release also allows the fibres to retain



Above: Life+GreenWoolF works on the assumption that most wool produced across Europe is too coarse for textile production.



Left: The hydrolysis process reduces all the raw (unwashed) wool into fertiliser.

water and reduce run-off. Compared to other solutions, the development of a chemical-free

treatment of raw wool (unwashed) in an easy-to-manage plant reduces costs. There are also no associated costs from effluents produced from wool scouring.

We believe that conversion of useless wools into value-added commodities is a good exploitation of a natural and renewable resource, while developing recycling markets is a sustainable approach. We also plan for the closed-loop grass-wool-grass cycle to be solar powered.

Moreover, fertilisation of grassland with wool hydrolysates improves the quality of the pasturelands with a harmless, valuable and non-synthetic fertiliser. And it improves the soil with organic carbon content and a water retaining ability, reducing the main soil degradation processes of erosion, compaction, decline in organic matter, floods and landslides.

The long-term objectives of the project are to:-

- Reduce the amount of wool wastes disposed in landfills.
- Exploit renewable resources, recycling organic wastes into value added fertilisers.
- Increase management yield and extension of pasture.
- Increase rural employment and the profitability of sheep farming, even resulting in an increased EU sheep population and less dependency on imported meat.

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