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OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2016

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Direction needed to shape farming future

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive
It's still too early to have expected our Government ministers and those with responsibilities in the devolved nations to have said anything very concrete about Brexit plans, but this is a frustrating time. There is real energy from farming bodies to want to start planning, yet we don't know the direction of travel.



Ironically, since the referendum, the lamb trade has been strong. This is welcome indeed, but while the vote undoubtedly influenced currency conditions, making exports easier and imports harder, we can't rely on it lasting and there will be much more ahead that will affect our success. Post EU-exit, trade relationships with our current partners both inside and outside the EU is going to affect our industry massively, as will trade development with potential new partners.

We will soon need some political direction, particularly around the trade-offs we might accept over access to the single market balanced against the free movement of people. However, it is already clear we are limited in what can be negotiated with new trade agreements until we are a lot further down this road.

Trade partners

It is encouraging to see discussions with trade partners are taking place. These will prepare the ground for more rapid completion when the day comes – but it has been worrying our officials have had to be reminded food and agriculture needs to be included in discussions, and worrying too that if we are not careful agriculture may be the sacrificial lamb that is offered for the benefit of other industries.

A free trade agreement with Australia, for example, may well be beneficial for our finance and service industries, and it may even look good for the trade balance in total – but if it crushes our lamb market by allowing open volumes of tariff-free lamb to hit our shelves then it cannot be allowed to happen. Historically agriculture has had to be dealt with outside of more general trade agreements and, although it may not be popular politically, I suspect we will have to make that case again.

Since the referendum, NSA has been keen to start fleshing out thoughts for the future and all our regions have had the opportunity for a structured consultation discussion covering headings of trade, farm support, regulation and 'other', to collect views and priorities. It has been encouraging to see this feedback coming

in, and at this early stage, to get a sense of relative unity and acceptance of change. Getting our positions and ideas identified is essential, but the first battle will be maintaining the budget beyond 2020 to support farming and food, and ensuring some level of equality and collegiate approach across the UK.

Getting a successful exit from the EU is a seismic challenge, although it possibly offers opportunities on the same scale. To get it right I believe we are better placed if we draw on the strength and expertise of others. NSA has therefore joined forces with a collaboration of 13 UK livestock-related bodies. It is not the intention of this group to agree on everything or to come out with one position, but to share expertise and offer help and assistance to ministers and civil servants.

Post-EU priorities

The foundation for trade with our current EU partners will be the first priority and progress with our negotiating position is expected by the close of this year, probably in advance of officially triggering our exit. Further down the road is the future of farm support and we will come back to this in future editions of this magazine.

The future of regulations will relate closely to trade and any hopes of mass deregulation are, in my view, vastly unlikely. If we want trade we will have to provide assurances adequate to satisfy our customers' demands. But there will be no more blaming Brussels and we will have to work hard and be creative to ensure a secure regulatory platform with simplified enforcement, and to use our various farm assurance/certification schemes more to provide confidence and trust.

More on lamb trade and promotions on page 12. More on Brexit on page 19.

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Front page

The front page picture is by professional photographer Wayne Hutchinson and features Rough Fell ewes farmed near Sedbergh, Cumbria. As a native breed to Cumbria, these particular Rough Fells were pictured on the Howgill Fells between the Lake District and Yorkshire Dales.

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 Tel: 01684 899255

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National Sheep Association

NSA Head Office

NSA, The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH. Call 01684 892661 (Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm) or go directly to one of the team below.

Phil Stocker

NSA Chief Executive
pstocker@nationalsheep.org.uk

Julie Jennings

Association Secretary/PA to Chief Executive
julie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Helen Breakwell

Bookkeeper/PA to Chief Executive
hbreakwell@nationalsheep.org.uk

Joanne Briggs

Communications Manager
Sheep Farmer Editor
joanne@nationalsheep.org.uk

Hannah Park

Communications Officer
hannah@nationalsheep.org.uk

Laura Williams

NSA Technical Support Officer
laura@nationalsheep.org.uk

Gill Callow

Membership Secretary
gill@nationalsheep.org.uk

Situation vacant

Membership Recruitment Officer

Helen Davies

Corporate Relations
Sheep Farmer Advertising Sales
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Find us at www.nationalsheep.org.uk. Follow us on [Twitter @natsheep](#) and like us on [Facebook /natsheep](#)

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NSA Office Holders

His Grace the Duke of Montrose
Honorary President

David Gregory
Honorary Treasurer

Samuel Wharry
National Chairman
07803 270020
samuelwharry@tiscali.co.uk

Bryan Griffiths
English Committee Chairman
07779 465729
bryan.southcott@btconnect.com

NSA Project Partners

Bob Kennard
Make More of Mutton Manager
07415 855530
mutton@nationalsheep.org.uk
www.makemoreofmutton.org.uk

Edwin Harris
Welsh Commons Forum Chairman
01684 892661 (via NSA HQ)
hbreakwell@nationalsheep.org.uk
www.nationalsheep.org.uk/
welshcommonsforum

NSA Regions

Central

Alastair Sneddon
Regional Chairman
01629 812777
alastair.sneddon@bagshaws.com

Anne Payne
Regional Manager
01142 883241
bobandanne@handbanktextels.wanadoo.co.uk

Cymru Wales

Llew Thomas
Regional Chairman
01267 253374
07974 386394
llewthomas@btinternet.com

Helen Davies
Regional Development Officer
01691 654712
07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Eastern

Dan Phipps
Regional Chairman
07836 590996
07836 287281
dphipp@darley.co.uk

Jonathan Barber
Regional Manager
01953 607860
07712 659262
jonathan@ceresolutions.co.uk

Marches

Kevin Harrison
Regional Chairman
01179 323441
07900 056562
jtbaylisfarming@gmail.com

Hannah Park
Regional Secretary
01684 892661 (via NSA HQ)
marches@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern

Greg Dalton
Regional Chairman
01388 537415
07546328241
ggregdalton@aol.com

Heather Stoney-Grayshon
Regional Manager
01423 712820
079666 99930
heather@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern Ireland

Campbell Tweed
Regional Chairman
07802 835355
campbelltweed@aol.com

Edward Adamson
Regional Development Officer
02893 366225
07711 071290
edward.adamson1@gmail.com

Scottish

Sybil Macpherson
Regional Chairman
01838 200218
07796 018528
brackleyfarm@gmail.com

George Milne
Regional Development Officer
01334 472403
07831 511330
george.nsa@btconnect.com

South East

Andrew Barr
Regional Chairman
01273 858563
07768 867124
a.baabaa@hotmail.co.uk

Bob Blanden
Regional Manager
01666 860308
07860 689391
bob@nationalsheep.org.uk

South West

Alan Derryman
Regional Chairman
01395 597836
ahderryman@hotmail.com

Kate White
Regional Secretary
01823 672341
07736 371640
kate@nationalsheep.org.uk

News Update

Unsung hero

Having been named as the recipient of the Bob Payne Memorial Award for NSA Unsung Hero back in July, Sue Martyn of Launceston, Cornwall, has been presenting with a cut glass vase to mark the accolade.

Sue joins a very short list of NSA volunteers and office holders who have been singled out over the years for their tireless work behind the scenes. She was selected for her previous roles as NSA South West Regional Manager and NSA Sheep South West Organiser. She remains involved in the event and is NSA South West Region Ram Sale Secretary. Sue is pictured with Dave Gregory, NSA Honorary Treasurer, at North Devon Show.



NSA job opportunity

Would you like to join the NSA Head Office team based at Malvern, Worcestershire? We are looking for a new NSA Membership Recruitment Officer, which is a fulltime role focusing on the design and delivery of innovative and engaging activities to recruit new NSA members.

We are looking for someone with strong sales skills or closely related experience. They will be enthusiastic and outgoing with the ability to design and deliver campaigns, create eye-catching literature and displays, and record and analyse membership trends. UK-wide travel will be involved.

Download a job description and application on the NSA website or contact NSA Head Office. Applications close on Wednesday 19th October 2016.

Annual Regional Members Meetings

There are three NSA Annual Regional Members Meetings coming up. The business at each will include: election/reapproval of the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer; nomination/reapproval of the regional Trustee Director; election of new committee members and endorsement of current members; a chairman's report; and a treasurer's report relating to the region's finances.

Members residing in a region are eligible to appoint a proxy vote on their behalf if they cannot attend the meeting, but this must be done in advance with NSA Head Office. Download a proxy notice at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or contact NSA Head Office.

Notice is hereby given that:-

- The Annual Members Meeting of NSA Eastern Region will be held at the Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 8DY, 6pm on Wednesday 12th October.
- The Annual Members Meeting of NSA Northern Ireland Region will be held at AFBI, Large Park, Hillsborough, County Down, BT26 6DR, 8pm on Monday 21st November.
- The Annual Members Meeting of NSA Marches Region will be held at Ludlow Food Centre, Ludlow, Shropshire, SY8 2JR, 7.30pm on Thursday 24th November.

NSA Lambing List

The 2016/17 NSA Lambing List is now open for members looking for a student to help on the farm this lambing time. Application is online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list but if you do not have internet access you can contact NSA Head Office.

The list will be published on the NSA Next Generation website once NSA members have started to apply, so students can use

Sad loss of NSA VP



NSA lost a strong supporter last month with the passing of Keith McDougall, a former NSA Chairman (1986-1988) and current Vice President. Keith was a Norfolk farmer and pioneering livestock breeder, conservation enthusiast, artist and passionate advocate for wildlife. He inherited Catfield Hall, a farm and special wildlife wilderness of reed beds, dykes and birds, and was a farming partner at Chalk Hill on the Holkham Estate with the former Earl of Leicester for many years. He received the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award in 1999 for advocating balanced farming techniques in the sheep sector.

In addition to his NSA roles, Keith was involved with the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, Heather Trust, Songbird Survival and the British Association for Shooting and Conservation, to list just a few. While he enjoyed shooting and playing the piano, he was a hugely accomplished artist and published two collections of paintings in his lifetime. An example is pictured here, featuring the Holkham Nature Reserve near his home.

Passing at the age of 82, Keith leaves his widow Jane, his son, four daughters and six grandchildren.

Clear potential shown at Countryfile Live



Having only been invited to participate in the event at the 11th hour, NSA was taken aback by the incredible number of visitors to the first ever Countryfile Live. The event inspired by the BBC programme took over Belheim Palace, Oxfordshire, for four days.

The NSA presence was small this year and only possible due to the hard work of a small team of volunteers. But the overall impact of the sheep area was very positive and NSA will be working with industry partners to investigate options to exploit this further in future years.

Our thanks go to everyone who volunteered at this year's event, some of whom are pictured here with NSA staff member Hannah Park (inside right).

the details provided to contact farms directly and discuss a placement. An improvement to the service this year is the option for NSA members to indicate if they do not want under 18 years olds to apply, and also guidelines that students have to read before they can access the list.

NSA AGM held

The NSA Annual General Meeting went as planned in August, with Dave Gregory continuing as Honorary Treasurer and all NSA Vice Presidents re-elected.

The venue this year was Bristol Vet School and, as well as an update on current activity by NSA staff members, guests were able to tour the university facilities and learn about current research work on welfare indicators, antimicrobial resistance and internal parasites.

SHAWG conference

Following two successful SHAWG conferences organised by NSA, we are pleased to once again be involved in plans for the biennial event. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker is one of the speakers at the conference on Wednesday 16th November, 9.30am-4pm at Sixways Stadium, Warriors Way, Worcester, WR3 8ZE. Topics throughout the day will look at boosting flock performance, improving health and welfare through monitoring and making the most from investment in medicines. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

Please note NSA is not doing the bookings this year; contact SHAWG direct on 01768 877100 or shawgconference@ebvc.eu instead.

Moredun roadshow

NSA encourages members to attend the Moredun roadshow again this year. Meetings start on Thursday 20th October in Perth and take in a number of UK venues through to Wednesday 9th November in Dumfries. More at www.moredun.org.uk/events.

NSA reports – devolved nations

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Davies, Development Officer



Love Lamb Week took place in early September and it was great to see Jacob Anthony, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador from NSA Cymru/Wales Region, get involved. He farms with his family at Cwmrisca, Bridgend, and joined up with a supermarket tour organised by Hybu Cig Cymru when it visited his local retailer.

On getting involved in Love Lamb Week, Jacob wouldn't be alone in learning there is a commonly-held belief among consumers that spring is the best time to eat lamb. This level of misunderstanding shows why the timing of Love Lamb Week is so crucial, supported by other HCC activities to promote new season Welsh Lamb, including Llamb's Day in early August.

People seem keen to source quality, locally-produced produce so it is essential we engage with them and spread the message that our outstanding lamb is most widely available in summer and autumn. If people know when to look out for it, their buying preferences can influence the decisions of the retailers. *More on lamb promotion and Love Lamb week on page 12-17.*

NSA Cymru/Wales is working hard to gather Brexit views from members and share them with Welsh Government and others. We have been attending Welsh Government workshops and will keep you informed of the outcomes of discussions and the detail of our own position as we continue to work in this area.

Welsh inquiry

The Welsh Climate Change, Environment and Rural Affairs committee, established in June this year, has been quick off the mark in launching an inquiry into the future of agricultural and rural development policies in Wales. You can put forward ideas at <https://senedd.dialogue-app.com/eich-syniadau-your-ideas>.

The next NSA Cymru/Wales meeting will be on Thursday 17th November at the Royal Welsh Showground, when EID Cymru has been invited to provide an update to the committee. Soon after will be the Welsh Winter Fair (Monday 28th and Tuesday 29th November), also held on the showground. Please come and see us at the fair, as there will be plenty going on around the NSA stand and new and existing members will be made very welcome.

Plans are well in hand for NSA Welsh Sheep on Tuesday 16th May 2017 at Llwynbedw, Talybont-on-Usk. A new website is under development at www.welshsheep.org.uk meaning that, as for NSA Sheep 2016, exhibitors will be able to apply online for stand space. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any queries – *contact details on page 2.*



NSA Next Generation Ambassador Jacob Anthony getting involved in lamb promotion during Love Lamb Week.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



Sheep farmers here have had an unexpected windfall with the weakening of the value of sterling against the euro leading to slaughter lamb prices about £15 ahead of last year.

So some good has come out of Brexit for the time being – but it is the uncertainty of exactly what is ahead of us that leaves cause for concern. In Northern Ireland our biggest worry is what is going to happen at the border between north and south. No one has an appetite for a hard border with controls on the movement of product and people.

At the end of August the European Federation of Animal Science held its annual meeting in Belfast for the first time, attracting around 1,500 people. Through my involvement with AgriSearch, I got the opportunity to attend this week-long event of lectures, farm visits and networking with the theme of 'livestock's key role in sustainable food production'. We heard many times that genetics, nutrition and health could take production forward, but that without any one of the three the other two cannot be fulfilled to their optimum level.

One of the main talking points among the international visitors was a display of farm livestock and traditional and novel Ulster food and drink. Hosted in the historic St George's Market, opposite the conference venue, it had a special feature of cattle and sheep used on Northern Ireland farms.

EU aid package

The recent difficulties across farm sectors resulted in EU Commissioner Phil Hogan announcing a €500m package of proposals in July. While €150m of this financial aid is for an EU-wide voluntary milk production scheme, the remaining €350m relates to 'exceptional adjustment aid' and provides €30.2m to the UK. At the time of writing the exact allocation for NI was still to be decided, though DAERA clearly expects a significant share. NSA Northern Ireland Region will be one of the stakeholders involved in talks with the Government about the best use and distribution of this aid.

More than three years on from the Agri-Food Strategy Board's 'Going for Growth' report, which suggested our Government should invest £250m in the agri-food industry, we hear we may soon have the beginnings of a farm business improvement scheme. This is long overdue, as figures show the total value of livestock and livestock products has fallen by £235m in the meantime. But agriculture has always been able to comeback and maybe it's time for that to happen now.



Edward (right) at the European Federation of Animal Science event with NSA NI Region Committee Member Crosby Cleland (left) and AgriSearch Chairman Michael Bell.

NSA Scottish Region

By George Milne, Development Officer



A full agenda at our recent NSA Scottish Region committee meeting including plans for NSA Highland Sheep next year and

open winter meetings to take place this November, December and January.

Once dates are finalised we look forward to welcoming members to these events. We will not be short of policy items to discuss, as our last agenda at the committee meeting covered as many as a dozen policy issues.

I am pleased to see the long awaited consultation begin on Scotland applying for EU BSE negligible risk status. If successful this will save the red meat sector a small fortune, while also hopefully allowing Scotland access to markets the UK cannot currently sell into. The sheep industry may also benefit from not having to deal with the current rules on carcase splitting.

NSA Scottish Region Chairman Sybil Macpherson and I attended a workshop day to view different scenarios for the implementation of new ANC proposals in 2018 to replace the current LFA support scheme. We are told this will go ahead regardless of Brexit and so a small working group has been set up from committee representatives; they are due to meet with the Government very soon.

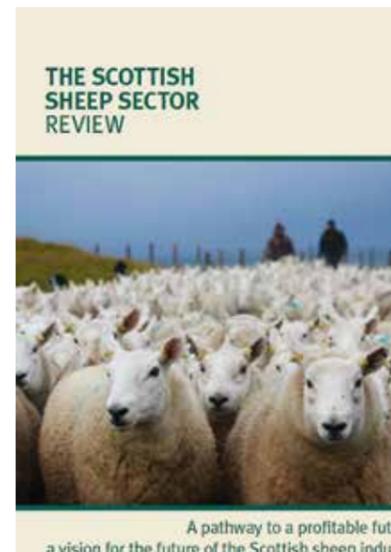
Lynx opposition

The NSA meeting to bring together groups and individuals who share our concerns about reintroducing lynx to the UK attracted 30+ attendees. We met in St Boswells, within the proposed trial site in the Kielder Forest area, with the support of the British Deer Society. Progress will continue to absolutely object to the whole application process.

The recently completed Scottish Sheep Sector Review (pictured) has been presented to Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing. A group of representatives from the entire supply chain worked on the paper, which contains 24 recommendations to improve profitability and efficiency. It is now up to the industry to continue to put pressure on all sectors and the Government to ensure these recommendations are delivered.

NSA has supported an SRUC funding application to investigate the problems relating to 'black loss'. With some hill areas and farms experiencing very high levels of black loss, we believe the research findings could help all parts of the UK and Europe.

Late CAP payments continue to be a problem for many farmers in Scotland, including with LFA and Scottish Upland Sheep Support schemes. We will continue to raise the issue until the final outstanding payments are made, as well as put on pressure for this year's payments to begin as early as possible.



George had been involved in writing this new report, which makes 24 recommendation to improve the Scottish sheep supply chain.



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NSA reports – English regions

Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

NSA Central Region once again sponsored the interbreed hill championship at Hope Show, Derbyshire (pictured).

The day boasted an impressive display of nearly 600 sheep across 19 different breeds. We also had a presence at Cheshire Show for the first time, to encourage members in different areas of the region to get more involved.

Despite a slow start to the season in terms of lamb finishing, prices have held up better than predicted and there are signs of some confidence building in the sheep trade generally. Prices of females have been up by £10-£15 since July.

Post-Brexit, members are being encouraged to ensure their voice is heard, especially since there is some nervousness the sheep sector could be more adversely affected than others in final negotiations. At present New Zealand and Australia are taking a keen interest in their future ability to access UK and European markets.

A regional member has reported being subject to a 'rapid fire inspection' initiated by Natural England. The outside agent reported them to the National Trust for over-grazing and over-stocking. He did not go onto their land but assessed with binoculars from across the valley and not only failed to recognise the difference between ewes and lambs when counting but was also unable to read the map to accurately identify fields. Nevertheless, the onus is on the tenant to prove they were not over-stocking. So be warned – detailed flock records are essential.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

We lost our good friend Keith McDougall in August, a Norfolk farmer, environmentalist and staunch supporter of NSA. He was a past NSA Eastern Region Secretary and Chairman, past NSA Chairman and current NSA Vice President.

Keith played a large part in encouraging my involvement with NSA personally and I shall miss him, his enthusiasm and his great contribution to the countryside and this organisation.

Many thanks to everyone who has been involved in our two regional ram sales – full reports on page 8-9. Our Annual Regional Members Meeting will be held at the Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket, 6pm on Wednesday 12th October. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker will give an update



Rams: Fit for Purpose



Nerys Wright of AHDB Beef & Lamb talked about healthcare, feeding, ram MOTs, ram selection and using EBVs at the NSA South East Region meetings.

on NSA's numerous activities and ideas on a post-Brexit sheep farming scene. We look forward to seeing you there.

Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman

Big congratulations to everyone who got involved in Love Lamb Week. It's had great exposure this year and it was good to see so many regional members getting involved in promoting lamb on farm and on social media.

We have had some really positive meetings within NSA recently, with Brexit dominating the agenda as you can imagine. Some great ideas are coming forward and a vision in terms of where we see the UK sheep industry post-Brexit is beginning to form. Get in touch to keep sharing your ideas.

At our recent regional committee meeting we heard from retired vet Nick Hart on the threat of bluetongue, resulting in mixed views around the table on whether we should be vaccinating. We also had an update from our two regional NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, Ernie Richards and Ellen Helliwell. Both Ambassadors are a great example of how the programme allows youngsters to shine within the industry and, with the application date fast approaching for next year's intake, I encourage young sheep farmers to look at getting involved in this worthwhile project – more on page 40.

Our Annual Regional Members Meeting will be held on Thursday 24th November at Ludlow Food Centre, Shropshire, and will be a great social evening. A lamb butchery demonstration from butcher John Brereton and an update on developments and influences in the marketplace will follow formal proceedings. We are looking to appoint new officeholders this year and always welcome new committee members so, if you are keen to get involved, please come along.



Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

Brexit was the dominating topic at our committee meeting in August, creating much discussion. Thoughts were collected for our reps to take to the NSA English Committee, which met the week after.

The committee also noted the work done on the NSA's *Complementary Role of Sheep in Upland and Hill Areas* report and agreed it is a great asset. Anyone who sees a good place to place this booklet is encouraged to do so, as it was strongly felt as many people as possible outside of farming need to read it. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work.

The intention of Lynx UK Trust to obtain a licence for a trial release in Kielder Forest has created much worry for local farmers, especially following a meeting organised by Lynx UK which did nothing to reduce fears. Several NSA Northern Regional representatives attended the NSA meeting the following week in Scotland, held alongside the British Deer Society. It is asked that anyone who has strong feelings on this issue makes themselves heard.

As part of Love Lamb Week, NSA Northern Region Chairman Greg Dalton hosted a lamb tasting session at Wolsingham Show, Country Durham, with the help of Andrew Cuthbertson from the local NFU and Laura Ryan of AHDB. Thank you to local butcher Joe Simpson for kindly supplied the lamb and to everyone else for their help and support.

The first organising committee meeting for NSA North Sheep 2017 has been held and anyone who's had a stand at the event in recent years will be contacted automatically in late autumn. Those interested in looking at a sponsorship package should contact myself – contact details on page two.

South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

Congratulations to Will Hinton and Alex Olphert from our region on their successes at the NSA Young Shepherd of the Year final at NSA Sheep 2016.

Will was second overall and was part of the winning English team in the European final, while Alex came fourth overall.

For the third year running, the region has held 'Rams: Fit for Purpose' meetings jointly with AHDB Beef & Lamb. More than 30 people attended the first one



at Lackham College, Wiltshire, highlighting the acceptance of how important this subject is. Nerys Wright of AHDB and Steve Shiles from Hale Vet Practice provided excellent content at the first meeting, and the second meeting will have taken place by the time you read this, at James Barker's Farm in Harrold, Bedfordshire. We are very grateful to our hosts and AHDB for helping to organise these events.

We have had a presence at Thame, Wilton and Dolphin sheep fairs, where it is always good to catch up with members and have a chance to chew the fat – and there is plenty to chew on lately! We'll also have a small presence at the South Eastern Prime Stock Winter Fayre on Thursday 17th November at Ardingly, Sussex, where the region is sponsoring wool on the hoof classes.

Martyn Fletcher, NSA South Sheep Event Chairman, and myself attended a BBQ hosted by David Bright Seeds at the trial plots at Pythouse Farms. The various crops certainly all looked very different than back in June at NSA South Sheep.

South West

By Kate White, Secretary

This season seems thus far to be continuing well with strong lamb prices and a steady trade for breeding ewes, despite the dry weather. The NSA South West Region Ram Sale in August had good clearance, with prices up on last year for most breeds, showing cautious optimism within the industry – see page 8.

Many of you will have received information about the CPH changes to be made with regard to linking holdings and sheep movements. Hopefully that will make life a little easier for some of you and cut down on paperwork.

NSA South West Region committee has recently discussed new Red Tractor Assurance proposals and intends to invite Red Tractor



NSA Hope Show champion



Robert Jordan, NSA South West Region Committee Member, travelled from Devon to Derbyshire to win the Hope Show interbreed hill title, sponsored by NSA Central Region.

to hold a question and answer session for farmers in the region in the coming months. Keep an eye out for updates.

By the time this reaches you we'll also have hosted a farm walk, alongside AHDB Beef & Lamb, on Matt and Pip Smith's farm at St Clether, Launceston. Here's hoping those who attended had an enjoyable and informative afternoon.

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New Built record set

A record price of 18,000gns for a Texel meant smiles all round at a brisk NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale at Built Wells in late September. Turnover was up on last year at £2.2 million, with 85% of entries sold and averages similar or increased across all breeds.

The top price was achieved by Llion Jones of Tywyn, Gwynedd, and paid by Charlie Boden of Stockport, Lancashire. Mr Jones had bought Pant Wolf's mother, a Sportsman ewe, for 2,800gns in Carlisle from Mr Boden in 2011, after beginning his flock with foundation stock bought at the NSA Wales & Border sale in 2001.

The 18,000gns eclipsed the previous 17,000gns record for a Bluefaced Leicester in 2008 and was also well ahead of other headline prices this year. Next top was a Bluefaced Leicester ram lamb bred by M. and N. Gray of Morpeth,

Northumberland, and sold to G. Smith and Sons, Alnwick, Northumberland, for 7,800gns. There was also another Texel sold by Danny Creer from the Isle of Man, bought for 5,500gns by Barbara Smith of Slapton, Northamptonshire.



The new Built record holder.

More online

Detailed reports and more pictures at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports.

In only his second year of breeding Welsh rams, Stuart Davies of Bucknell, Shropshire, had a fantastic day when his brother Rob Davies had to run to 5,200gns to get his hands on a Talybont Welsh Mountain yearling.

Vendors travelled from as far as the Orkneys and the Isle of Man, with Dutch buyer Harry deVliegher making a 48-hour trip to buy Arwyn Thomas's Charollais ram lamb, this year's Royal Welsh winner, for 1,700gns. It was the eighth annual trip for Mr deVliegher and his father Cor.

Chairman John Owen reports: "People were prepared to pay for quality and the current sheep trade was reflected in overall prices and clearance rates."

Selective bids for large Exeter entry

With an increase in entries for the NSA South West Region Ram Sale at Exeter Market in late-August, purchasers this year were more selective than sometimes but still prepared to pay for the right animal.

Texels were much in demand with nine more rams sold than in 2015 to an increased average. The overall show champion, an aged ram from F.H. Chave and Son, was first in the ring and set the trade alight at 1,200gns. This set the tone for the sale and the top price of the day across all breeds of 1,250gns was for a shearling from Graham Hill. E.W. Quick and Sons won the best pen of rams and sold to a top of 1,050gns.

There was also an increased number of Beltex through the ring and first-time vendor Andrew Bishop saw his journey from Gloucestershire rewarded with the

top price of 1,200gns for a shearling ram. He topped ram lamb prices at 1,000gns and also sold a shearling ewe for 950gns.

Setting the standard in the Charollais ring was a shearling ram from Carol Irwin making 1,000gns. She also profited from Charollais females being much in demand, with her shearlings leading the way and topping at 800gns.

With only 49 forward (less than catalogued) Suffolks saw a 100% clearance with an improved average. Top price was a smart ram lamb from Robin Irwin at 980gns.

Other highlights included Malcolm Yeo selling Berrichons to a top of 920gns and two crossbred rams selling for 550gns each, one a Beltex cross from Andrew Reed and the other a New Zealand Suffolk cross from Angus Howie. In addition: Robert and Sophie Whitcombe of



Graham Hill shows off his 1,250gns Texel.

Petersfield, Hampshire, attracted 500gns for their best of four Border Leicesters; Les French sold Dorsets to 400gns; Hampshire Downs went to 380gns for Henry Derryman and family; there was a Lleyn top price of 370gns for Richard Turner; and Brian Dallyn got 350gns for a Bluefaced Leicester in the non-MV ring.

Quality Texel shearlings at Melton

A Texel shearling ram from Barbara Smith of Slapton, Northamptonshire, topped the trade at the 31st annual NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale, held at Melton Mowbray Market, Leicestershire, in mid-September.

Her strong, well-fleshed tup was knocked down for 1,000gns to K.A. Gill from Burton Lazars, Leicestershire. Other rams from the same pen sold for 800gns, 760gns twice and, for a Charollais cross Texel shearling, for 820gns.

The quality of the Texel shearlings forward was excellent with the top 30 animals selling for more than £600.



Barbara Smith with her top-priced Texel.

Demand was also strong for well-fleshed Charollais and second top across the

Good clearance at Rugby NSA sale

The clearance rate at the NSA Eastern Region Shearling Ram Sale in late August was just under 90% and, with a stronger entry than previous years, means this annual event at Rugby Farmers' Mart has established itself as a firm calendar fixture.

Auctioneer Scott Ruck says: "All breeds found strong demand, particularly for power in the Charollais and Texels with only an occasional lapse in the Suffolks. Whether you lamb early or not, it's

never too soon to crack on and get your tups back home and in the paddock ready for the season ahead, and this proved to be the mentality around the ring."

Brian Whitfield of Cockermouth, Cumbria, was assisted by Geoff Walker in judging rams ahead of the sale. He named a group of three Charollais shearlings as his winning pen. The trio from G. and C. Watson, Kettering, Northamptonshire, went on to sell for a combined price of 660gns. Best in the Texel lines was a

pen from R. and B. Smith of Slapton, Northamptonshire, which sold for a total of 520gns.

In the sale ring, C.W. Thomas saw Charollais shearlings sell to 580gns with A.J. and M.J. Gregory to 500gns and P.C. Hawes to 460gns. A Beltex cross Texel from V.F. Roots sold to 510gns and C.J. Millers' Beltex to 460gns. Ram lambs topped at 420gns for a Charollais from A.D. and R.M. Thomas, with 380gns for a Suffolk from J.B. and R.L. Cook.

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Recommend NSA membership to be in with the chance to win

With the fifth and penultimate NSA prize giveaway draw completed, there is only one chance left to get your name in the hat and be in with the chance of joining the list of £200 voucher winners.

NSA has teamed up with Fecpak⁶², Cox Agri/Ritchey and JG Animal Health to offer three vouchers per draw every other month during 2016.

While new members are automatically entered into the draw, all you need to do as an existing member is recommend a family member, friend or neighbour to sign up to NSA. Get your name in the hat by putting your details on the form opposite and passing it to a non-NSA member to fill in. With no limit to the number of entries for existing members, the more people you recommend the more chances you have to win.

Winners in this most recent prize draw include Simon Righton, who farms in Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire. He wins £200 to spend with JG Animal Health. There is also Cathryn Jones from Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, who will spend her voucher with Cox Agri/Ritchey. Due to an administration issue, the third winner in this draw is yet to be confirmed.



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Simon Righton, Gloucestershire

An impromptu decision to invest in an NSA membership at NSA Sheep 2016 in July has certainly provided a quick return for Gloucestershire farmer Simon Righton. Having gained free entry to the event on the day, news of a £200 voucher win came within a matter of weeks.

Simon says the voucher could not have come at a better time as he's already planning to buy this year's pre-tupping minerals and vitamins for the 300-acre mixed farm he runs with his family at Dorn, Moreton-in-Marsh. Around 150 acre of the farmland is made up of permanent pasture, a proportion of which is used to host the annual Moreton Show, and the enterprise also incorporates a farm shop and B&B.



Mixed farm

Explaining the farms enterprises, Mr Righton says: "Around 300 Welsh Mules are put to Berrichon and Charollais tups. We also have 12 Gloucester Old Spot sows and 24 single suckler cows that run with a Hereford bull. Most of the pigs and cattle are sold directly through the farm shop, alongside around a third of the lambs.

"We're planning to expand the sheep enterprise in the next few years, hopefully getting the flock up to 400 breeding ewes before too long. With the flock expansion in mind, it's a good idea to keep up with the latest news and ideas, which is one of the main reasons I decided to join NSA."

Cathryn Jones, Carmarthenshire

About to embark on a new venture within her flock, young shepherd Cathryn Jones could not have been happier at receiving the news she was a winner in NSA's penultimate prize draw this year.

Shepherding is a real passion for Cathryn, having built up her current flock of Torwen's after receiving a ewe as a gift when she was younger. Now planning to add a more commercial side to the flock, she recently purchased a number of Welsh Mountain ewes that she'll lamb this coming season. She says: "I lamb all the ewes outside at the moment, but tend to bring them in for a few days after to keep a close eye on them. Once they're settled, I'll tag and record on paper details of the ewe, number of lambs and their sex."



Closed flock

Cathryn keeps a number of ewe lambs back each year to use as replacements. The main of the ram lambs are sold at breeding sales, including NSA Wales & Border Ram sales, and the occasional one will be kept for home use.

With stock management at the forefront of her mind, Cathryn says she is looking forward to putting her £200 Cox Agri/Ritchey voucher towards various everyday essentials to improve this.

NSA membership

Existing members can pass on this form to be in with the chance of winning a £200 voucher



NSA's 2016 membership recruitment campaign is supported by JG Animal Health, Cox Agri/Ritchey Ltd and Fecpak⁶² who are donating £200 vouchers for six draws in 2016. 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 to NSA. The earlier in the year you enter the draw, the more chances you have of winning.

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Domestic market needs to be nurtured in good times and bad

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Trade and overseas access is crucial to the success of our sector, hence NSA's position that it should be the priority as the UK plans its exit from the EU.

But let's not forget that currency volatility, political manoeuvrings and potential disease mean our home market, already accounting for more than 60% of sales, is crucial too and needs nurturing.

This year's Love Lamb Week had more of an impact in terms of social media coverage, and there have been some great events organised, but with farm gate prices strong this summer it was more difficult to engage farmers. The initiative was born out of desperation when prices were low in 2015, but we cannot rely on a fire brigade approach in times of trouble. Marketing has to be sustained and, while the need may appear less, it makes sense to invest when times are good.

Premium product

I often talk about the incredible diversity we have in sheep farming and what strengths that brings. But we haven't really started to use this diversity in our marketplace even though we know lamb (like mutton and wool products) is a high value, premium product where 'stack it high and sell it cheap' does not apply. You don't treat a premium product like a commodity; you differentiate, offer plenty of choice and assurances, and cater for peoples interests.

This is why NSA is planning to pull together a number of organisations to discuss how we could use provenance more and add more to our markets by using, for example, breed

Sheep Farmer Special Feature

Five-page special on domestic lamb marketing



Love Lamb Week and other initiatives need to work when the lamb price is high, not just in times of desperation.

differentiation, locality and age – details on page 17.

Some in the sheep industry are already doing it very well, but I believe there is room for more. It won't be for everyone, or intended to be used throughout the marketplace, but if the interest exists and demand is there we would be stupid not to investigate more and cater for it.

NSA gets involved in Love Lamb Week

There were some fantastic examples of NSA members getting involved during Love Lamb Week in September, ranging from YFC club outings to lamb tasting events.

Greg Dalton, NSA Northern Region Chairman, was involved in lamb tastings at Wolsingham Show in County Durham, with AHDB Beef & Lamb and NFU. He is pictured under the umbrellas (centre) with Andrew Cuthbertson from the local NFU and Laura Ryan of AHDB. Free samples of lamb were also offered in Belfast city centre, with members in NSA Northern Ireland Region getting involved alongside LMC and the Ulster Farmers Union.

Regional activity

In NSA Marches Region, NSA Next Generation Ambassador Ernie Richards and fellow members of Teme Valley YFC, Herefordshire, visited Weobley Ash Farm Shop to find out more about mutton and, for some of them, try it for the first time. They are pictured at the farm shop with Love Lamb Week resources.

Ellen Helliwell, also an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, made the most of the opportunity to engage with the public at Cotswold Farm Park, where she works in Gloucestershire. There were

educational sessions and recipe cards and other materials were handed out. She and the farm park team are pictured in NSA #LoveLamb tshirts.

Hannah Park, NSA Communications Officer, reports: "With AHDB Beef & Lamb getting behind the campaign this year, there were many more resources available than when things kicked off in 2015. Details of the resources and directions to the AHDB content were provided on the NSA website, as well as links to region-specific resources for Wales (HCC) and Scotland (QMS).

"The NSA social media content alone achieved 55,000 Twitter impressions and a Facebook reach of 32,000. Once you combine that with everything else that went online during the week, from the official Love Lamb Week accounts through to individuals adding their own content, the impact of this year's campaign was remarkable."

NSA hopes to work with partners to build on Love Lamb Week again for 2017. The dates will be the same (1st-7th September) and there will be opportunities for even more NSA members to get involved.

Resources can still be viewed at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lovelamb.



Promotions in England use lamb mince and mini roasts as basis

By Nick White, AHDB Beef & Lamb



Encouraging consumers to make quality assured lamb a regular fixture on their weekly menus is a major focus for AHDB Beef & Lamb – but getting our message out to consumers has become increasingly complex in recent years.

We live in a multimedia world where people can choose from hundreds of TV channels as well as consuming media online, on mobile devices and through gaming and social media. A one size fits all approach is no longer effective and we have to use a diverse range of channels to communicate with our target audiences.

While we have activity taking place all year round, our lamb marketing campaigns are focused on the autumn season, to fit with the beginning of the peak production period for home-produced lamb.

For the first time this year we supported Love Lamb Week (1st-7th September), working alongside NSA and the week's original founder, Cumbrian sheep farmer Rachel Lumley. We put a significant amount of staff resource into pulling together the campaign, in recognition of how important this initiative is to the industry.

#LoveLamb

At the time of writing, it's too early to evaluate how successful Love Lamb week has been, but the initial signs have been really encouraging with farmers, the supply chain and consumers really getting behind it. There have been plenty of events taking place, some really positive media coverage and lots of engagement with #LoveLambWeek on social media.

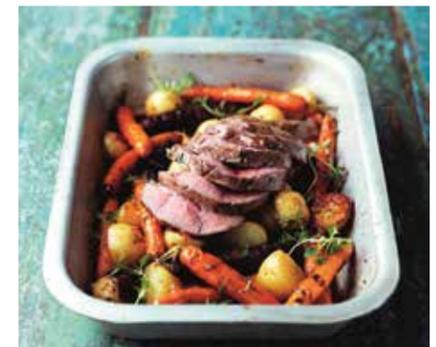
Love Lamb Week also marked the start of our large-scale lamb keema campaign, which aimed to encourage consumers to include lamb mince on their shopping list through a simple, multi-purpose keema recipe. Keema is a spiced lamb mince dish that can be eaten with pasta, rice or potatoes, stuffed in a pitta or even sprinkled on salads. With endless options, it's the perfect way to drive consumer interest and understanding of lamb, with the scope to then encourage them to try alternative cuts.

Keema Nans

The campaign targeted parents during the back-to-school period, offering them sage advice from our 'Keema Nans', women who have raised families on keema and are successful cooks themselves. Working with Pervin Todiwala, the wife and business partner of chef Cyrus Todiwala and an eminent chef in her own right, and Mamta Gupta, a blogger and author, AHDB organised an ambassador radio day, shared keema recipe videos on social media and via media partners, and engaged with the national and regional press. During the first week of



Keema is a spicy and versatile lamb mince dish, identified by AHDB as a good stepping stone to more expensive cuts.



The mini roast campaign will begin on again this month.

the campaign it was covered by 165 radio stations, reached a total of 43 million people and featured on a number of popular food and lifestyle blogs.

Following on from the keema activity, our popular mini roast campaign will be returning to television screens for a third year on 24th October. The results of our 2015 campaign, which ran last November, were very positive, showing that the short-term impact of the campaign directly delivered £526,000 worth of mini-roast sales. The 'halo effect' – namely people seeing the adverts and purchasing other beef or lamb joints – added up to a total of £11 million, or £12.7 million for the whole red meat roasting category.

Younger target

Last year's campaign was most successful with older shoppers, so for 2016 we are targeting young couples in the 25-34 age bracket. This will be through online activity run alongside the television adverts. Our focus will be on promoting the mini roast as a perfect date-night meal due to its versatility and ease of cooking, and also emphasising the protein content of a mini roast dinner to those

with an interest in health and wellbeing. These messages will be communicated through bloggers, using impactful, easy-to-share video content.

Our trade development team will be working with multiple food retailers and processors to support the campaign, which will continue throughout the autumn.

Find details of AHDB campaigns at www.beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/marketing, and recipes and resources at www.simplybeefandlamb.co.uk.

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Welsh supermarket tour finds misconceptions on seasonality

Consumers are keen to buy seasonal, local food, but many are looking to source home-produced lamb at the wrong time of year. That's the conclusion of research undertaken by HCC in Wales.



At a supermarket tour, where customers got to sample Welsh Lamb dishes and pick up recipe ideas, shoppers were asked about their buying habits and their perceptions of home-produced lamb. The tour began in Carmarthen on 1st August and took in several town and city locations including Swansea, Cardiff, Chester and Bangor.

The results showed that quality and country of origin were the main things shoppers looked for when buying red meat. Nearly 80% of consumers looked to source Welsh produce where possible, but 57.8% thought spring was the best time to buy new season PGI Welsh Lamb.

Sheep Farmer Special Feature

Five-page special on domestic lamb marketing



Butcher Martin Fowles is using the 2016 PGI Welsh Lamb point-of-sale recipe material in his shop in Aberdyfi, Gwynedd.

Campaign work

Addressing these misconceptions is one of the key aims of HCC's 2016 marketing drive in the UK market. This year's campaign is running across a wide range of different media and features chefs and food writers as 'lambassadors', online competitions, and point-of-sale marketing in supermarkets and independent retailers.

It also saw the inauguration of 1st August as Welsh Lamb Day, or 'Llamb's Day' to use the distinctive 'double l' linguistic branding tool first used last year,

Northern Ireland activity

As with the other UK levy bodies, LMC in Northern Ireland was asked to contribute to this Sheep Farmer special feature.

Unfortunately the organisation is still recovering from an extensive fire in its offices in June where a great deal of resources were lost.

Despite the ordeal, promotional activity in Northern Ireland is continuing with a new 'Flavour Your Life' campaign. Adverts have been running on a variety of media channels and you can view videos at www.beefandlambni.com/why/flavour-your-life.

to celebrate the arrival of new season PGI Welsh Lamb.

Prys Morgan, HCC Head of Operations, says: "Celebrating Welsh Lamb at the beginning of August builds on old feasting traditions across Europe that commemorate the first harvest festival - known as Calan Awst in Welsh, or Lammas Day."

Welsh tour

Many producers attended the August supermarket tour, which was also supported by NSA and both Welsh farming unions, providing opportunities for farmers and consumers to share their passion for Welsh Lamb.

Jacob Anthony, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador who farms with his family at Cwmisca, Bridgend, joined the tour when it came to his local town. He says: "It came as a surprise to me that so many consumers thought spring was the best time to buy Welsh Lamb, but it's positive that people are really keen to source quality locally-produced food.

"Meeting shoppers face-to-face on HCC's cooking trailer, and marketing drives such as Llamb's Day and Love Lamb Week, offer a great opportunity to engage with consumers and spread the message. If people know to look for Welsh Lamb in summer and autumn their buying preferences could influence the decisions of the retailers."

The summer and autumn Welsh Lamb

campaign is also being promoted through independent butchers. More than 250 are now members of HCC's Welsh Butchers' Club and dedicated to sourcing and preparing certified PGI Welsh Lamb and Welsh Beef.

Butchers' Club

Drawing on inspiration from chefs such as Luke Thomas and Francesco Mazzei, promotional posters and recipe booklets that emphasise lamb's potential as a summer food have been provided for Butchers' Club members.

"A lot of visitors come here and they don't have a local butcher at home," says Martin Fowles of Cigydd Aberdyfi Butchers on the west coast of Gwynedd. "They collect the recipes from the counter and they help sway 95% of them to purchase meat and come back again for more. They are something extra to take home with them and remind them of our special products."

Engagement

Mr Morgan continues: "There's always more that can be done to educate and promote eating locally-produced food but I'm pleased with the 2016 PGI Welsh Lamb campaign so far. The engagement among consumers with Llamb's Day and the wider campaign has been good, and it's a very useful way to emphasise the key message of the seasonality of the product."

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Scottish trip for celebrity chef launches autumn lamb campaign

Award-winning celebrity chef Jean-Christophe Novelli used Love Lamb



Week at the beginning of September to urge consumers to make the most of the versatility and simplicity of cooking PGI Scotch Lamb.

As part of a nationwide push to raise the profile of the versatility, speed and simplicity of making meals with lamb, Mr Novelli said it was one of his favourite ingredients to cook with. He went on to spend the day with QMS to learn about the care and commitment that goes into the production of Scotch Lamb.

He visited Wester Coull Farm, Kirriemuir, Angus, to spend time with sheep farmers Andrew Scott and Julie Hermitage. They run 600 Scotch Mule and Blackface breeding ewes over 650 acres. Lambs from the farm are sold both prime and store, through the auction markets in Stirling and Forfar.

Mr Novelli also visited nearby Yorkes of Dundee butchers. The business, established in 1985, is a member of the QMS Scotch Butchers' Club. The Yorkes family prides itself on providing a traditional quality service and seizing new opportunities, including developing a range of innovative products. The team showcased how many really affordable cuts of lamb are available, like lamb top-side steaks that take just minutes to grill and serve.

Mr Novelli's visit coincided with



Chef Jean-Christophe Novelli meets Kirriemuir farmers Andrew Scott and Julie Hermitage.

Scottish Food Fortnight and a high-impact advertising campaign behind Scotch Lamb PGI, targeting 3.7 million consumers and 88% of Scottish adults. It builds on last year's activity, which boosted retail sales of fresh lamb in Scotland by 8%. The two-month long campaign will harness a range of marketing activities to drive Scotch Lamb sales.

The marketing push will include billboard, press and radio advertising, as well as online and in-store activity by Scotch 'lambassadors' in Tesco and Asda. There are also a range of new recipe videos for online and social media use, created in simple steps using short, fast-

motion videos optimised for Facebook to ensure they appeal to today's social media savvy consumers. Recipe leaflets and other point of sale materials have also been distributed to QMS Scotch Butchers' Club members.

Mid-week meals

The target audience for the campaign is young professionals and busy working parents, with the message that lamb is not just for roasting at the weekend – it can also make a quick, nutritious mid-week meal for all ages to enjoy.

Find more information and recipe ideas at www.whambamlamb.com and www.scotchbeefandlamb.com. Follow Enjoy Quality Meat on Facebook and @scotchkitchen on Twitter.

Sheep Farmer Special Feature

Five-page special on domestic lamb marketing

Exploiting heritage breeds and tradition to market sheep meat

By Bob Kennard, NSA Building on its work supporting quality mutton supply chains, NSA is proposing



the development of a wider strategy for adding value to non-standard sheep supply chains and enhancing landscapes and the environment. A meeting is being arranged with interested parties to take forward this idea.

Most promotional activity involving sheep meat revolves around standard lamb. While this is an obvious and essential strategy, it need not be the only one. By celebrating and highlighting our local environments, landscapes and native sheep breeds, and by marketing differing ages of sheep meat, we can:-

- Enhance farm incomes, particularly in upland areas, and support existing farmer-retailers.
- Support and encourage local supply chains, and other local businesses such as catering and tourism, thereby keeping more of the wealth within the local community.
- Help ensure the financial viability of our traditional UK heritage breeds.
- Help maintain traditional farming systems that have developed in harmony with the environment and created our iconic British landscapes.

We can help achieve these aims by actively promoting the diversity of our sheep industry. The UK is blessed with a priceless national resource in our unique variety of traditional sheep breeds.



NSA intends to investigate the potential to use the link between landscape, environment and farming to promote sheep meat products.

There is a danger that modern market demands for conformity of standard lamb as the primary sheep meat product is endangering the genetic viability of many of these heritage breeds.

In addition, the UK is well placed to produce hogget and mutton alongside traditional lamb. Historically these were equally as popular as lamb, if not more so. In the Victorian period we ate more mutton than beef.

Diversity

Other great assets are our diversity of farming systems and local environments and landscapes, particularly those of the uplands. These are all inextricably linked and if we want to keep our upland landscapes as places for the UK population to enjoy, our farming systems need to be sympathetic to that aim.

Traditional farming systems have

created these landscapes as a result of the way in which upland and lowland sheep farming have been integrated, each making the most of the local environments. Stratification is a traditional method of maintaining a sustainable system of farming that optimises sheep production within each type of environment and location.

NSA is proposing that the sheep sector looks at ways of promoting and celebrating these diverse sheep meat products to the public, raises awareness of the differences and benefits, and offers greater consumer choice. We are therefore calling a meeting of interested parties to discuss the need for such an approach and the means of achieving it.

Watch this space for more information on this new area of work, and find out more about mutton activity at www.makemoreofmutton.org.uk.

Farmers are key to get shoppers to spot Red Tractor logo

By Charlotte Johnston, Red Tractor Assurance

The Red Tractor logo is the most trusted logo UK shoppers see when making the decision of what to feed themselves and their families, with £12bn worth of Red Tractor food now consumed by the British public annually.



This is down to a collaborative industry effort behind promotion of the brand, with Red Tractor Assurance working closely with the NSA, AHDB, NFU and NFYFC, to name a few. No one is a better ambassador of the brand than Red Tractor farmers themselves.

As we know consumers want to engage directly with food producers, we launched our marketing toolkit earlier this year. All scheme members can now access branded consumer postcards, shopping pads, key rings, banners and other merchandise to give to the public to improve their understanding and recognition of Red Tractor.

Events

In line with this, we have built further on our relationship with Massey Ferguson, which has been incredibly supportive in providing a Red Tractor-branded Massey tractor to more 60 public and industry facing events since February.

In May 2016 our eight-week barbeque promotional campaign saw recipe videos, cooking advice and lamb imagery promoted across Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram, as well as being emailed directly to more than 60,000 consumers. The videos were viewed in excess of 345,000 times, while on-pack stickering supported by Asda, Aldi, Lidl, Co-op, Morrisons and various product brands was linked to a competition to win a £500 barbeque every day.

Our 10-week autumn campaign was launched at the start of Red Tractor Week on 12th September. This was the fifth Red Tractor week and saw a record of 18 events take place with more than 100

farmers visiting supermarkets in the UK to remind shoppers to look for the Red Tractor logo.

Promotions

For the duration of the campaign, on-pack promotions will provide shoppers with the opportunity to win a £300 UK minibreak every day. We are also working with AHDB Beef & Lamb to mention the promotion at the end of their mini roast TV adverts later in the year, with the aim of driving an increase in sales. This will be supported by online, radio and print advertising.

It is difficult to quantify what impact these promotions have on the amount of Red Tractor lamb sold, but having the logo

on packs and raising awareness of what it means is hugely important to growing the brand and increasing sales. It is not just for one person to promote but for the whole industry to unite behind to educate consumers on where their food comes from and how it is produced.

Red Tractor thanks all NSA members who've got involved so far in helping with promotional work.

Right: There were 18 events held at supermarkets during Red Tractor Week to promote the farm assurance logo.



Demand for certified produce grows as organic acreage falls

By Tim Bevan, Soil Association
Earlier this year Defra released figures suggesting organic farms had reduced in number and acreage, despite a small increase in land in conversion.

Yet the demand for organic meat and dairy products continues to grow. It is expected to reach a peak only seen before the recession in 2008, with total sales forecast to surpass £2bn later this year. The organic red meat sector has experienced some growth over the past 12 months too. Sales increased by 4.1% according to independent data in the 12 weeks to 18th June.

Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned about where their meat comes from and how it is produced. Market research has shown consumers who care about the provenance of the meat products consistently chose to buy organic, partly because they consider it to have high standards of animal welfare. The Soil Association organic symbol is one of the most widely recognised accreditation marks in the UK.

Lamb demand

Recent data collated from supermarkets and independent retailers has shown growing demand for organic lamb from a wide range of consumers. The Soil Association is working closely with supermarkets, advisors and policy makers to support this positive growth across the organic red meat sector.

There are viable market opportunities for producing organic lamb, either selling lambs live to a processor or as meat through direct customer sales. There are also farm support payments available for all organic farmers. In England, for example, these are currently worth about £40/ha for converted improved permanent pasture.

Farmer view: On-farm practices

Soil Association licensees Andrew and Claire Head from Cedar Organics in Dorset sell their organic lamb direct from the farm to local customers, as well as to a larger commercial abattoir nearby. They run 300 Lleyn ewes and various other livestock enterprises.

Andrew says: "Organic farming is not so much about what you can or can't do, but about finding a farming system that is right for the farm and good for the land. If I went to another farm I would apply the same techniques, as I know the benefits.

"It varies year to year though. Last year we hardly had to worm the lambs at all whereas this year we did more than usual – but it's about trying things out and working out a husbandry system where our livestock and land both profit."



Good sheep management, such as utilising clover leys, dovetails with organic production.

While organic lamb is usually a smaller part of an abattoir's business than non-organic, there are some processors looking for new organic lamb suppliers, provided animals meet their specification requirements. It's certainly worth making enquiries with abattoirs if you're considering organic lamb production.

Direct sales of organic lamb have also seen positive growth, but this admittedly is only of interest to a smaller number of sheep producers who have access to an organic certified abattoir and butcher. Some organic sheep farmers find linking up with local smaller-scale abattoirs and butchers suits their businesses well.

Some farming systems do not have to undergo many changes when transitioning to organic production. Stocking rates may need to be lowered when entering conversion, especially if artificial fertilisers have historically been used to boost grass yields, but many practices are not far

removed from good sheep management.

The conversion period for land is normally two years. Once conversion begins, the land must be managed to full organic standards. Lambs can only be sold as organic once the conversion process has been completed, and they must be born to a dam which has been managed to full organic standards since tugging. Organic certification includes a physical inspection every year to look at land, crops, livestock and records to verify production rules have been met.

Market research

It's recommended you identify a potential market before making any decisions and plan your business model and conversion accordingly. The Soil Association publishes details of average organic prices and routes to market on its website and can help put producers in contact with potential buyers.

Farmer view: Selling options

Pete Douglas lambs 350 ewes each year, grazing up to 700 acres of organic land in Wiltshire through partnerships with other farmers. He sells direct to local customers and to an abattoir through a cooperative marketing group.

He says: "Demand from the abattoir, which supplies one of the bigger supermarkets, and the price they pay seems to indicate a healthy market for organic lamb. Much of my lamb also meets their premium brand, which is sold as non-organic – a backhanded compliment that grass-fed organic lambs are what they are looking for.

"About 10% of my lamb sales are direct sales. These are fit lambs that are ready for slaughter but may be slightly underweight or overfat for the commercial abattoir spec."

Brexit at the top, but is not the sole policy topic on NSA agenda

A major milestone on the road to finalising our Brexit position was a recent NSA UK Policy and Technical Committee meeting, where England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland could feed in information from regional committees and individual members.

This has enabled NSA to start to agree priorities and thinking going forward. As covered elsewhere in this magazine, trade is considered to be the initial priority with NSA taking the view that we should seek to maintain trade routes into existing EU nations and avoid barriers and tariffs without been sacrificed to gain trade agreements with any new countries.

There seems to be suggestions of a new country each day that wants a free trade agreement with the UK and NSA has issued press releases and spoken to Defra about the damage such a deal with Australia and/or New Zealand would have.

The second priority is future farm support payments and, while we are adamant a similar level of investment into farming must be maintained, and that a reasonable transition period be provided, the feedback from members so far is in favour of investigating change. The potential wish list currently includes encouraging on-farm investment, rewarding a wider range of public goods,

promoting efficient farming and ensuring succession.

It's not too late to share your Brexit views. Find NSA Head Office and regional contacts on page 2.

Lynx release update

Linked to an NSA and British Deer Society meeting in St Boswells, held within the Kielder Forest area proposed by Lynx UK Trust for a trial release, NSA has continued efforts to highlight the wider consequences of introducing the big cat. This has included formal communication to Scottish Natural Heritage and Natural England to state the Lynx UK Trust consultation is not independent and cannot be used as official representation of the situation, and that we expect licence applications to be required in England and Scotland, as Kielder spans the border.

Lamb Watch figures

AHDB Beef & Lamb published its Lamb Watch in mid-September, showing the percentage share of domestic versus imported lamb on supermarket shelves in August during UK peak supply.

The majority of retailers were achieving 100% but, once again, Asda and Tesco lagged behind at 70% and 75%

respectively. Both retailers have been lower in previous years but will have found exports more expensive in recent months, due to the exchange rate.

NSA issued a statement to the press saying: "The

higher percentage of UK product on some supermarket shelves is a reflection of difficult import conditions rather than any change in sourcing policy. NSA praises the hard work being done by many retailers to stock 100% British, particularly those who have transparent policies that support the UK sheep sector all year round. There is no excuse for those who don't."

Upland and hill report

NSA is delighted to have been successful in gaining permission to run a week-long exhibition in the Houses of Parliament in December to promote the new NSA *Complementary role of sheep in hill and uplands areas* report. As well as being able to present information to MPs, Farming Minister George Eustice has agreed to host an NSA reception for a wider audience of key opinion formers.



Carcase splitting

Perhaps not surprisingly since Brexit, the UK petition to the EU to change the way we implement carcass splitting rules has made little progress. NSA remains in close contact with NFU, Defra and FSA on this topic and hopes to have an update soon.

Bluetongue latest

Despite more cases of disease within the protection zone, the free zone of Northern France has not seen any bluetongue yet. The UK is now officially in the highest risk period for clinical disease to be seen here and NSA encourages members to be vigilant and consult their vet and APHA if they suspect symptoms.



The sheep sector cannot be the sacrificial lamb in trade deals.

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Modesty, hard-work and dedication at the heart of Bakewell Market

By Hannah Park, NSA

Anyone who has had the pleasure of a relatively informal meeting with Alastair Sneddon will have already anticipated what an interesting and entertaining afternoon he hosted when I visited him at Bakewell Market, Derbyshire.

With more than 35 years' experience in auctioneering and rural professional work, Alastair became senior partner at Bagshaws in 2011, yet just minutes into conversation he modestly describes himself as 'the original holiday work experience chap' who has been working his way up the ranks ever since.

His involvement with NSA dates back almost as far, incorporating varying degrees of involvement with the organisation

and meaning his recent appointment as NSA Central Region Chairman is not completely new territory. It is a role he now juggles alongside commitments to several other groups and organisations.

Alastair fondly remembers the beginnings of his involvement with Bagshaws when working on the farm at the nearby Chatsworth Estate. He then undertook a number of holiday placements with the firm while at college, before starting fulltime when he was 21.

Local marts

"I was dispatched to deal with two small markets north of here, near Hope and Penistone, in the mid-80s," he says. "Although a very interesting time, neither of those markets were capable of surviving the new regulations after the 2001 foot-and-mouth outbreak so we rationalised and brought as many of those customers as we could here to Bakewell, as the regional centre of Bagshaws operations."

"At about that time several older partners took the decision to retire, which left me the opportunity to take responsibility for Bakewell."

"I suppose as you get older you get a little more freedom to pick your jobs, so I've chosen to do more on the auctioneering side of the business and less on the professional services side as times gone on. It's interesting and exciting and I've always appreciated that the agricultural community has accepted me. Despite being from a background which was greatly different, I don't think it was



Alastair in full flow at a seasonal store lamb sale (left), which he does alongside selling cattle every week at the market (pictured above), plus on-farm dispersals.



an obstacle that ever got in my way too much."

Weekly Monday markets at Bakewell see Alastair sell the store and breeding cattle, as well as store and breeding sheep at Thursday

sales during the autumn. Bagshaws is also well known for the large number of on-farm dispersal sales it conducts and Alastair will be present at most of those. With Bakewell situated where it is in the Peak District, Alastair says the market is able to appeal to many types of farmers running different systems. It is not unusual for a sale to include stock from all kinds of topography, with everything from hill breeds to lowland crosses being entered.

Typical day

"Like many in my sector, being a jack-of-all-trades comes in useful," Alastair jokes as he considers a typical day in the job. "The first thing is to make sure you've got enough stock in the market. The second is to make sure you've got enough buyers to buy and a sufficiently good trade to go at."

"The third is to make sure you've got arrangements in place to cart stock away, especially if you've got another sale coming up cheek-by-jowl and you've got to get the place meticulously cleaned. The fourth, and most important, is to make sure the people who bought them paid for them. I'm proud to say that we pay on the day and, despite the occasional groan we get about the modest commission rates, I'd ask farmers to consider that we

still need to chase our own paycheque, which can sometimes prove challenging in the meat trade. We've all heard the horror stories to the detriment of livestock markets in the past."

New challenges

With his career in the livestock industry spanning more than three decades, Alastair has seen a fair amount of growth and development along the line, foremost in the mind at the current time being the EU referendum decision.

"Talking to farmers in this part of the country I find it somewhat surprising to hear of the number who voted out," he



says. "The only conclusion I've been able to draw is there was a perception that being out would assist in terms of easing regulation, or that it was done as a protest vote, despite the fact the EU has driven Westminster to look after agriculture better than it might have done otherwise. Pressure from farmers in other European counties had done us a lot of good."

Regulation

"I fear we in the UK have the ability to cook up regulations far more draconian than those the EU has previously thrown at us and, what's more, we also appear to be more than capable of imposing them rigorously. As a consequence of the nation's decision in which, by definition, farmers can have only have played a small part, we have fundamentally damaged our currency, but not before giving a short-term boost to agricultural products, most notably sheep. I'm not stupid enough to predict what the future will hold, but I do suspect there are a few out there who think all their troubles are over at present."

Like many in the sector looking ahead, it is demand for sheep meat products that Alastair has grave concerns over. He says: "We know lamb is an expensive meat which isn't easy to present and

Below: Store lambs are sold every Thursday during the autumn.

NSA Central Region Event

Bakewell Market had hosted a number of NSA Central Region Winter Fairs over the years, part of NSA's biennial calendar of technical events.

Plans are in place for a similar event this January, but with more demonstrations and practical workshop sessions. With Bakewell once again providing a superb venue, put the date for this not-to-be-missed event in your diary now - Thursday 26th January 2017.



Its position in the Peak District means a huge variety of buyers and sellers can be found for breeding and finished stock.

is difficult to cook. If we're going to have a future, we've got to work harder as an industry to encourage consumers.

"We must also be very thankful for and look after the ethnic sector, as sheep farmers' fortunes would look considerably

worse without their custom both at home and abroad.

"There are a lot of potential customers out there. A prime opportunity for engaging with them is at agricultural shows, but they've probably been brushed aside as that prize winning

tup makes its way through to the judging ring.

Public engagement

"Don't get me wrong, there are increasing numbers of farmers who are diversifying or making the connection with consumers one way or another, but taking the time to put the facts to the public is important if we want them to buy a leg of lamb once in a blue moon. Although my ideas probably differ slightly from farming interests, I do think there is room for a bit more crossover between town and country folk, on a small, local level as a starting point anyway."

Despite his many years working in the livestock sector, Alastair does not have a farming background; he comes from a family of doctors. This certainly gives him a slightly different perspective and, I would argue, makes him an inspiration

to agriculture's next generation too. He shows you can come from any background and demonstrates there are more careers in livestock than just hands-on farming. And while he embodies this within his own career, he is also proud of changes within NSA and the wider industry to reflect this.

Next generation

"One of the greatest movements of this industry in recent years has been its drive to include young people. NSA has certainly achieved much in moulding itself into a sexy organisation that young people want to be a part of. I say to that next generation that you almost invariably succeed better doing things you enjoy. I think that if sheep and sheep farming is something you're passionate and enthusiastic about, the opportunity will eventually present itself, if you put in enough effort."

His own passion and enthusiasm will no doubt show through as Alastair starts to get his teeth into this two-year term as regional chairman - and he is clearly focused on widening the appeal of the organisation further still.

"I think NSA has made significant progress in the last few years in terms of reaching out and appealing to more commercial producers," he says. "We should do even more in the future to capture more medium-size everyday sheep farmers who are not involved in a breed society or regulars on the show scene. NSA represents the whole industry and, I believe, offers something to everyone."

"That is what we must build on, now more than ever, as the sheep sector needs a voice to negotiate the tricky waters ahead."

Why public liability insurance has become so important for farmers

By Tim Russ, Roythornes Solicitors
Sheep farmers will already be aware of the problems caused by dogs that enter their land in the company of members of the public.

But in addition to dog attacks on livestock, the escape of sheep is a serious financial risk to a farmer. Insurance rates paid by farmers and rural landowners for cover against public liability have been climbing for some time. There are many reasons for this, one of them being the decision of the House of Lords (as it was then called) in *Mirvahedy v Henley*.

That case says that owners of livestock (in *Mirvahedy* it was horses) are liable for escapes onto the highway even if they are not negligent. Countryside affinity groups including the NSA have campaigned to have this decision overturned by statute. Clearly it causes insurers to worry they will have to pay what might be large sums if stock escape, even if the owner has done all things reasonably possible to stop it and has thus not been negligent; they are pricing insurance accordingly.

Court case

A decision of the High Court in the case of *Gary Poll v Viscount and Viscountess Astor of Morley* also does not help to keep insurance premiums down. In this case Mr Poll was injured when he hit an ash tree that had been blown down across the road from the large country estate of the defendants. The cause of the fall was found to be an innate structural defect in the tree, high winds (more than 40 knots) and a fungal infection in the tree.

The evidence of both experts involved



The problems of dog attacks on sheep is well documented, but less so the risk of sheep escaping onto roads.

in the case was that a landowner in such a situation as this should adopt a strategy of inspecting the trees on his farm or estate close to the road frequently, using a qualified person but not necessary a fully qualified arboriculturalist. The contractor, who the judge said should have been used, was defined as a level two contractor.

What had been happening was that the estate were using a felling contractor who was hugely experienced in dealing with trees but presumably had no letters after his name to inspect the trees on a 'drive-by basis' i.e. he would drive round the estate slowly and look at the trees and then deal with any problems he saw. He was found to be not a level two contractor but instead a level one contractor. Given that both of the experts were specialist tree people, it is not surprising if one is being cynical that they found the arrangements in place on the estate unsatisfactory.

In this case the evidence also showed the fungal infection that had weakened the tree was just below ground level, but that if one saw the tree already was multi stemmed, and thus more likely to be weak, there was a trail of suspicion to follow. If it had been followed it would have led to the discovery of the infection and swift felling of the tree thereafter.

As a result of only using a level one contractor, the defendants were found liable for the fall of the tree and, subject to an argument yet to be heard as to whether Mr Poll did enough to avoid hitting the tree, they were found liable for his no doubt significant injuries.

I have a large degree of sympathy for

Mr Poll but even more for the defendants. From the judgement they appear to have taken their duties as farmers and landowners seriously. They engaged someone to inspect their roadside trees regularly. When he found things wrong, they got him to take remedial action.

What worries me is that this case will have three unpleasant effects for us all as citizens.

- It is inevitably going to cause insurance rate to increase for farmers and landowners.
- Some landowners, where they can, will simply chop down roadside trees either of their own doing or on advice from insurers.
- Trees may not be planted anywhere near roads or even anywhere the public might go.

At a time of public concern about CO₂ emissions, this is not the message to send out.

Insurance cover

I suspect one factor that weighed on the mind of the judge was that he had before him a badly injured claimant whose life would be transformed by compensation and who otherwise might have been a burden on the state or the NHS, and on the other side a landowner with insurance who could pay. Enough said?

Farmers are in a difficult position if the livestock escape, they are likely to be at fault and if damage is done to members of the public likewise. The secret it seems is to have the right level of public liability insurance and do what your insurers want to keep the cover in force.



Recent legal cases have highlighted trees near public highways as a risk, should they fall and cause human injury.

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On-farm application must be driving force behind research

The future of agricultural research once the UK has left the EU is one of many post-Brexit concerns. All farming sectors currently benefit from UK research associations collaborating closely with establishments in other EU countries and further afield, sharing knowledge, expertise and resources.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "If you speak to many of our research bodies they will tell you much of their funding has come from EU sources, albeit given that the UK contributes to the overall pot of money. This has allowed us to build a formidable team of world-leading researchers and scientists. Moredun at Edinburgh is just one good example of this."

"These institutes worry about the impact of the UK exiting the EU on their work and futures. Research will have to be considered strongly in formal and informal discussions relating to Brexit and I hope the relationships forged to date will continue into the future."

Given that the future in this area is somewhat unknown, it is important to take stock and consider ongoing research. We have pulled together just a tiny selection of examples on these two pages, with special consideration given to projects that NSA is involved in or supports.

Mr Stocker continues: "Agricultural research is part of a progression of learning that has been going on for centuries to support the ability of farming to respond to the needs of society. Over the years the vast majority of work was in the interest of feeding people securely and safely, but the pendulum swung in the 1990s and early 2000s heavily towards environmental research."

"Now, with more holistic thinking, we are seeing research focus



Practical application of on-farm findings includes good planning of the research and communication with farmers, such as this NSA visit to North Wyke.

on balancing efficient and sustainable food production with good environmental outcomes. I also hope we will continue to see evidence of a healthy move towards more applied and practical research that can actually be implemented by the industry."

The science of grass

As part of a five-year plan, current research at Rothamsted's North Wyke research platform in Devon is looking at grassland management in highly scientific detail, to gain an understanding of the science behind growing grass, protecting the environment, how plants use nutrients, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Bryan Griffiths, NSA English Committee Chairman, has been invited to stay abreast of progress. He explains: "My role in the group is to provide a farmer viewpoint and find ways to get the fantastic research done to relate practically to farmers. The project is worthy of NSA support for the sustainable future of the industry and, in return, NSA can feed practical thoughts into the project and disseminate its findings to members."

The objectives of the larger project North Wyke is feeding into include:-

- Reduce reliance on non-renewable sources.
- Improve the resilience of future farming.
- Deliver UK agriculture sustainably.

Exploiting individual identification

At the James Hutton Institute's Glensaugh Farm, Donald Barrie is focussing on the efficiency of the hill and lowground ewe flocks.

EID technology is being exploited to analyse lamb weights from birth, ewe weights and ewe condition scores to produce reports at animal and flock level. Mr Barrie says efficiency scores for individual females have provided evidence to cull ewes that in previous seasons might have been retained, and prompted the removal of younger ewes that have not reared well. Future analysis will be used to identify females at the other end of the performance spectrum, so they can be used to breed genetically superior tups.

NSA is in regular contact with Mr Barrie and hopes to be able

Understanding ram longevity

Having successfully applied for funding from the Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF), NSA is facilitating a group of experts to investigate the flock life of rams and reasons for deaths and culling in the UK.

Independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings is also involved. She says: "While there is plenty of opinion on how long rams should and do last in commercial flocks, there is no actual data available. Estimates of cost range from £1/lamb sired to more than £7." See table.

A survey will gather information from commercial producers while 10 focus groups around the UK will gain more detailed information on ram longevity, on-farm management and the main problems encountered. The long-term aim is to increase the number of lambs each ram sires in its lifetime and, therefore, reduce the cost.

All NSA members will be asked to complete the general survey. If you have 200+ breeding ewes and four years' of ram purchase information, email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk to join a focus group meeting.

Ram cost per lamb produced

Ewes served per ram per year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years
30 ewes	£10.00	£5.00	£3.34	£2.50
40 ewes	£7.50	£3.75	£2.50	£1.88
50 ewes	£6.00	£3.00	£2.00	£1.50
60 ewes	£5.00	£2.50	£1.67	£1.25

Based on a £450 shearling ram and 1.5 lambs sold per ewe tupped.

to showcase Glensaugh's use of data to demonstrate the value of flock recording to members, as well as showcase the farm's grassland management. Mr Barrie says: "Growing and utilising quality grass is fundamental to the earlier finishing of lambs in a system where finishing and breeding stock have often been in competition. Maintaining grass cover in the autumn ensures ewes go into winter in good condition, minimising concentrate feed costs and establishing the subsequent lamb crop."

Partnership approach

In Northern Ireland, NSA has many close links with research projects organised by Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), AgriSearch and the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE).

AFBI, funded by producer levy collected by Agrisearch, has several partner farms where they conduct research projects. Their results are then disseminated to the wider sheep industry through farm walks, which NSA promote and publicise. The biennial NSA

Weed wiper project for water quality

NSA was one of 10 organisations called to action when routine monitoring of water in Welsh rivers found increased detections of herbicides, particularly MCPA.

The levels detected were too low to pose a risk to the environment or people drinking the water, but did breach strict EU drinking water standards that require herbicide levels to be as low as the equivalent of a single blade of straw in 100,000 bales.

Welsh Water worked with the group between April and October 2015 to develop and deliver a solution to meet the practical needs of farmers and the environment. The partnership built trust and delivered successful uptake, leading to it being recognised at the 2016 Water Industry Achievement Awards. More than 60 farmers experimented with the use of weed wipers on more than 1,400 acres, avoiding the use of approximately 1,700 litres of MCPA.

The project is running again for 2016 with a hire scheme available in the River Teifi and the upper River Wye areas from the end of October 2016.

Find information at www.dwrcymru.com.

Sheep NI event always has a strong presence from CAFRE and AFBI, to promote their latest results and advice to sheep farmers.

Of the nine AFBI lowland and hill partner farms, six are NSA Northern Ireland Region committee members; five NSA committee members also sit on the Agrisearch sheep advisory committee. Samuel Wharry, NSA Chairman, is one of them.

He says: "NSA Northern Ireland Region feels that if we are to have a vibrant, profitable and sustainable sheep industry it is vital we embrace the latest technology and make full use of the available research to reduce production costs and improve efficiency."

More projects planned

Looking to future research, NSA has supported two new research applications for students to complete PhDs.

One is a potential Bristol University project on understanding medicine use in beef and sheep. It will consider the impact of the focus farm model on producers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices.

The other is to continue work being done

by Bangor University to assess the potential benefits of integrating trees into the agricultural landscape for livestock health and efficient forage use. It would extend the use of electronic sheep, replicas of hardy Welsh that were showcased at the NSA Sheep Event 2016, to the university's commercial sheep flock. Part of the multi-land research partnership, the aim would be to produce a practical tool kit for farmers, advising them on the best places to plant trees for effective shelter and shade.



Additional funding would enable current research to extend to include real life flocks.



Margaret Dalton, NSA Cymru/Wales Region committee member, and Helen Davies, NSA Cymru/Wales Development Officer (both to the far right of the picture) represent NSA's project support.

Project explores growth rates and cost of five lamb finishing systems

With many farmers struggling to get lambs away before the end of this year, a Farming Connect demonstration farm in Wales will be evaluating the output and profitability of several finishing options this autumn



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The wet summer has reduced grass quality and disrupted silage and hay cutting routines, which has made aftermath grazing difficult, interfering with weaning and lamb growth later in the season. Leading sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings says farmers must now carefully consider their options for lamb finishing, while ensuring they do not impact on next year's lamb crop.



Prioritise ewes

She says: "Farmers cannot afford to let lambs rob ewes of the grazing they need to get back in the right condition for tupping. This will not only affect the scanning percentage of the flock, but it will also have a knock-on effect on lamb growth next year.

"The best place to start is to weigh the lambs that are left, work out how much weight they need to gain and match this to what is available. The bottom line may be that to protect the ewe flock some lambs have to be sold as stores, rather than bringing them in and finishing on concentrates. As a rule of thumb by the autumn, assuming they are healthy, lambs need 7-8kg of feed to each kg of gain, so at £200 per tonne that will cost 150-160p/lamb/kg of gain."

On-farm trial

At Aberbranddu, Pumsaint, Carmarthenshire, Irwel Jones sells 800 lambs a year deadweight. They are usually finished on reseeded and silage aftermaths with some concentrate between September and the end of November. This year instead, five finishing systems (see panel) will be put to the test and evaluated on the basis of lamb performance and cost-effectiveness for the 850-acre hill farm ran by Mr



Irwell Jones (pictured above in a field of forage rape) is finishing 500 male lambs on five different systems as part of the trial.

Jones and his parents Eirwyn and Heulwen.

The project will compare 500 male lambs with an average weight of 25.5kg-32kg, split into even groups across the five systems. The project started in early September

and, after the initial three weeks, lambs will be weighed every fortnight until they are fattened by the end of November. The project will record the number of days to finishing, the kg of lamb sold per hectare, volume of concentrate used, any health issues, and all costs and return on investment.

Cost and efficiency

Mr Jones says: "Being at higher altitude, rising from 650 to 1,250 feet, makes the growing season here shorter than in many places. One of our targets is to reduce the number of days to finishing, in order to free up more land for the breeding flock during the winter and reduce reliance on bought-in feed. As we want to finish lambs faster and at heavier weights it will be interesting to compare the different options and see which help the lambs perform best."

Menna Williams, Farming Connect Red Meat Technical Officer, adds: "The cost of the different finishing method will also be considered. One of Mr Jones's main aims is to be less reliant on bought-in feed, so by doing this project he can put a value on different ways of finishing and have faith that they're using the best method in the future."

Five systems under comparison

- 1. Forage rape and Italian ryegrass mix.** To optimise the best return, yield will be measured and stocking densities calculated. The field will be strip grazed with a back fence to ensure effective utilisation, which should also enable the crop to regrow, allowing for a second grazing.
- 2. New reseed.** This will be a long-term ley that was sown in May 2015. Regular measuring with a plate meter will calculate kg DM/ha available and the guide area required to achieve target lamb growth rates.
- 3. Old ley only.** Dry matter will also be measured within this system and the daily demand of the lambs calculated in the same way as the reseed.
- 4. Old ley with concentrate supplements.** Creep will be fed in relation to grass growth and the number of lambs, not ad lib.
- 5. Concentrates indoors.** Housed lambs will be fed a concentrate with a crude protein of 14%-16% and straw.

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Assessing the role of antibiotics in the on-farm fight against abortion

By Louise Silk, vet

Infectious abortion causes considerable losses to the UK sheep industry. Despite the availability of effective vaccines and advice on disease prevention there are still large numbers of flocks where endemic disease grumbles on unnoticed, or flocks which remain highly susceptible to the introduction of new infections.

Diagnosis is key and an abortion or barren rate greater than 2% should always provoke further investigation. So too should a cluster of several abortions within a short period of time. Any ewe that aborts should be marked and isolate. Contaminated bedding and abortive material should be disposed of and contaminated pens or lambing areas thoroughly disinfected.



Sheep Farmer Special Series

This is the second article of three looking at appropriate antibiotic use on sheep farms. 'As little as possible as much as necessary'

While antibiotics can be used in the face of an abortion storm, their use should not be undertaken lightly.

Diagnostics

The most effective way to achieve a diagnosis during an abortion storm is through the examination of aborted material by a veterinary laboratory. Several freshly aborted fetuses and, more importantly, placentae should be submitted immediately. It is important to discuss this with your vet to maximise the chance of a successful outcome.

Free and/or subsidised testing services are often offered by commercial companies and laboratories so take advantage of these to check for the presence of enzootic abortion (EAE) and

toxoplasmosis in flocks that are not currently vaccinating. Your vet will take six to eight blood samples from ewes that have aborted or were barren.

Whole flock treatment with antibiotics (oxytetracycline) could be used pre-lambing during an abortion storm, to increase the number of viable lambs born to ewes known to be in contact with EAE or campylobacter. The use of antibiotics in this situation should only be done following careful discussions with a vet. The

antibiotic treatments should be targeted to ewes at a certain stage of gestation, depending on the organism causing disease, and timed appropriately in order to be most effective. A number of ewes may still go on to abort despite treatment and success rates vary from flock to flock. In the case of EAE, vaccination with the inactivated vaccine in the face of a disease outbreak may also be a consideration.

It is important to remember antibiotics will provide no protection against abortion in subsequent years. Vaccination of a ewe flock pre-tupping, in the autumn following an abortion storm, will reduce the number of abortions in subsequent years by preventing new infections in unexposed ewes and, in the case of EAE, reducing the number of abortions in ewes already infected.

Toxoplasmosis is a protozoal parasite, against which antibiotics have no effect. There are of course other much less common causes of infectious abortion in sheep. Treatment in the face of an outbreak may prove successful, depending on the organism involved and lambing management.

Reducing use

With ever increasing pressure to reduce the use of antibiotics on farm, any use of antibiotics in the control of infectious abortion, for which there are highly effective vaccines available, should certainly be questioned.

There are two main ways to protect your flock against infectious abortion. The first is by maintaining good biosecurity to prevent the entry of new diseases onto your farm. This involves sourcing replacement stock carefully, maintaining fence boundaries and applying a quarantine period to incoming stock. To protect against abortion, quarantine ideally means lambing bought-in ewes separately in their first year on your farm.

The second way is by vaccination. There are vaccines available for protection against all the major causes of infectious abortion in sheep (see table) and their use in the prevention of disease is very cost effective.

It is only by understanding the nature of a disease that it is possible to protect yourself effectively. It is therefore important to have a close working relationship with your vet, with whom you can discuss the risks to your flock and put in place the most effective and economically viable preventative measures.

Cost benefit analysis of vaccination

EAE is the most common cause of infectious abortion in sheep within the UK and one of the most significant causes of lamb mortality worldwide – yet the cost of an outbreak vastly outweighs how much it costs to vaccinate.

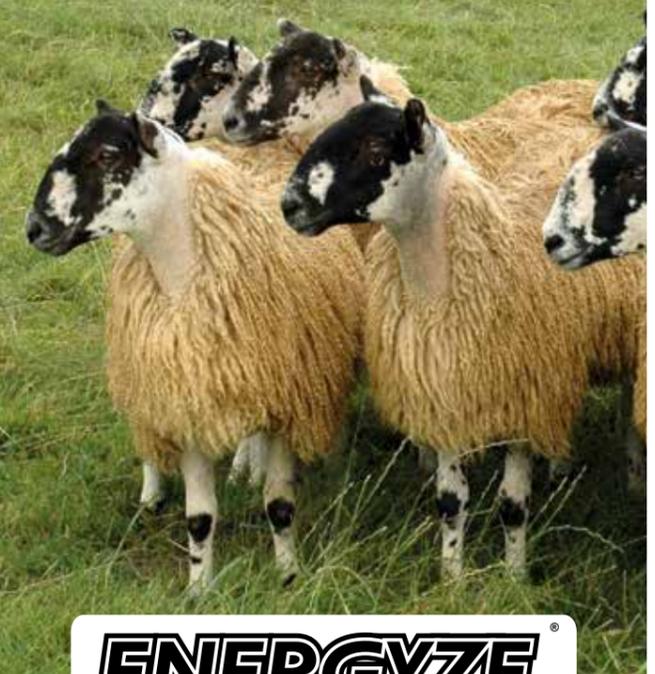
The cost of vaccinated a 600-ewe flock in the first year of a vaccination programme, based on £2 per dose, is £1,200. Assuming a replacement rate of 21.5%, the cost of vaccinating replacements in subsequent years would be £258. This is compared to costs running into the thousands if you work on the assumption that a lamb taken through to finished is worth the best part of £90 before input costs.

Flock status	Lamb output per ewe per year (£ per head)	Lamb output for 600-ewe flock per year	Potential loss in 600-ewe flock
No EAE	£88.78	£53,268	
Endemic disease (ongoing) - 5% fewer lambs weaned	£84.14	£50,484	£2,784
Abortion storm (new outbreak) - 25% fewer lambs weaned*	£66.25	£39,750	£13,518

*It is worth noting an abortion storm due to campylobacter can often result in an abortion rate of 40%.

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Abortion vaccines				
Vaccine	Disease	Type	Use	Vaccination programme
Enzovac (MSD Animal Health)	Enzootic abortion	Live	Prevention	Initial single dose more than four weeks pre-tupping with booster every three to four years (farm replacement rate dependent); replacements must be vaccinated annually.
Cevac Chlamydia (Ceva)	Enzootic abortion	Live	Prevention	Initial single dose more than four weeks pre-tupping; replacements must be vaccinated annually.
Mydiavac (Benchmark Animal Health)	Enzootic abortion	Inactivated	Prevention or in the face of an outbreak	Initial single dose four weeks pre-tupping with booster every two years; replacements must be vaccinated annually.
Toxovax (MSD Animal Health)	Toxoplasmosis	Live	Prevention	Initial single dose three to four weeks pre-tupping with booster every two years (farm disease status dependent); replacements must be vaccinated annually.
Campyvac 4* (MSD Animal Health)	Campylobacter	Killed	Prevention	Initial two doses four to eight weeks apart pre-tupping; single annual booster.

Discuss your flock's individual requirements with your vet prior to starting a vaccination programme. In flocks which continue to vaccinate replacements every year, some vaccines do not require a booster for ewes due to the natural lifespan of the ewe within the flock.

*Imported from Australia under special VMD import licence.

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Consider pain relief to safeguard welfare, health and productivity

By Mark Thompson, Kingsway Vets, North Yorkshire



Just like ourselves, sheep suffer acute and chronic pain – but unfortunately it can be difficult to assess how much.

They cannot communicate when they are in pain and have evolved to hide it so as not to appear weak and vulnerable to potential predators. Coupled with this is the fact there are no licensed pain-relieving medicines (analgesics) in sheep.

But, while we know sheep seldom receive pain relief, there are two reasons why we should consider it. The first is welfare, as it is unacceptable for an animal to be needlessly suffering and one of the five freedoms is for an animal to be free from pain. While pain is not completely avoidable it should be controlled and the cause treated as soon as it is identified.



Lameness is one condition in sheep where pain can impact productivity as well as welfare.

Productivity loss

The second is health and productivity, as an animal in pain is often in-appetent, less productive and has a slower recovery. An example of this is a ewe in pain after a difficult lambing (see diagram) but this scenario can be replicated across other painful situations, such as lameness.

Conditions that are not always associated with pain, such as pneumonia, mastitis, fever and twin lamb disease, can also be dramatically improved by the use of a group of analgesics known as NSAIDs (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs).

These relieve pain and, importantly, have anti-inflammatory and anti-fever properties that help increase the speed of recovery.

Assessing pain

Assessing whether an animal is in pain, and the degree of pain, is very subjective and there is huge variability between different observers. Behavioural changes, such as reluctance to move, head/ear position, teeth grinding and lip curling, is the assessment method most often used. One of the most obvious examples of pain in sheep is the castration of a two-day old

lamb; it appears incredibly painful with the lamb refusing to stand, kicking at his belly and crying out in pain. Another example is a lame sheep. However, there are different degrees of lameness and, therefore, different degrees of pain; knowing when to intervene can be difficult.

It is easy to anthropomorphise (give human feelings to animals) with respect to assessing pain in sheep and this is a huge discussion in itself. But from my stand point I would suggest it is better to over-assess the amount of pain a sheep is in and to therefore try to alleviate that in appropriate ways.

The most important step is to treat the cause. However, in many cases (e.g. lameness) the pain will remain for several days after primary treatment, while in other scenarios the cause cannot be immediately treated. Alleviating pain will improve welfare and improve the chance and speed of recovery.

Nursing

There are not many practical factors, other than treating the cause, which can help alleviate pain in sheep. Good nursing and supportive care can help but the limit to this is soon reached. However, providing a comfortable warm place to lie with food

and water within easy reach will offer some comfort.

Medicines can be used to alleviate pain and there are several groups of analgesics to do so. None are currently licensed for use in sheep but this should not be a barrier to their use, particularly as welfare standards insist every opportunity be taken to alleviate pain in an animal. Analgesics can be used off licence under the veterinary prescribing cascade,

which allows the use of a product that is 'licensed for use in a similar food producing animal' (i.e. cattle).

Product choice

Analgesics available for use on farm are shown in the table. Although others are available they are for use by vets only and rarely used in sheep. All the products mentioned will have a minimum of 28 days meat withhold and seven days milk withhold, due to their use in sheep being off label, but in some cases the withhold periods may be longer.

Other than licencing issues, there are numerous other reasons why analgesics are not used, such as different perceptions of how much pain a sheep is in, lack of knowledge about available products, cost of medicines, perceived benefits, potential side effects, withhold periods, and the availability of the product at the time of treatment.

Cost benefit

The last point is very pertinent and I believe more pain relief would be given to sheep that are lame or have had a bad lambing if a bottle of analgesics was close to hand at the time of examination or treatment. Ideally NSAIDs should be in every shepherd's first aid kit.

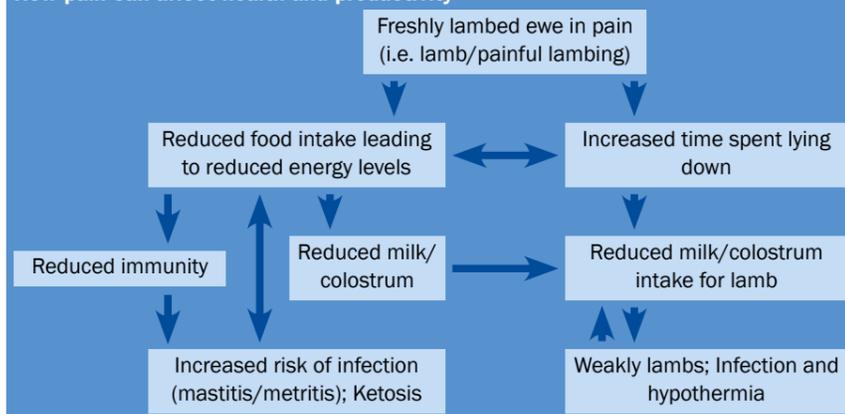
With respect to cost and perceived



Conditions not always associated with pain can be improved by the use of combined pain relief and anti-inflammatories.

benefits being an obstacle, analgesics will likely increase the rate of recovery and may even prevent some casualties. Side effects may occur but are only really seen if animals are overdosed. Following the dosage guidelines closely should minimise the risk of any problems. The most appropriate products to use, along with dosages and withhold times, should be discussed with your vet.

How pain can affect health and productivity



Analgesics available for use on farm

Type of analgesic	Example trade names	Uses
Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory (NSAID)	Meloxicam, Flunixin, Ketoprofen, Carprofen,	Anti-inflammatory and analgesic. Can improve outcomes in pneumonia, mastitis, lameness, twin lamb disease and general pain. Lasts about 24 hours.
Steroid	Dexamethasone	Anti-inflammatory but can negatively affect immunity. Lasts one to three days. Must not be used in pregnancy.
Local anaesthetic	Procaine	Very short acting; no anti-inflammatory properties. Causes complete desensitisation in a localised area. Excellent for painful procedures such as removing toe granuloma, horn removal or minor surgery.



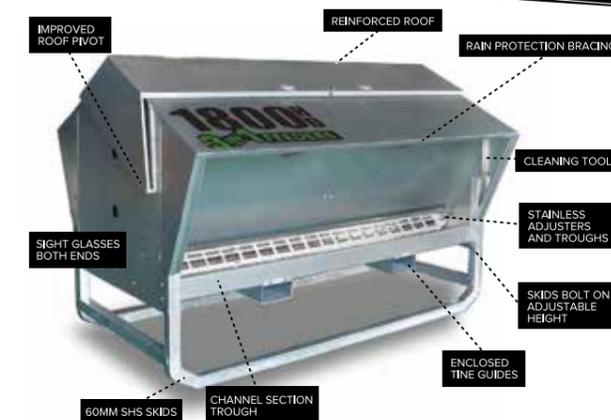
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Recent sheep deaths highlight threat of gamebird feeding sites

By Amanda Carson, Animal and Plant Health Agency

One of APHA's roles is to investigate chemical toxicity incidents on livestock farms through submissions to its veterinary investigations centres and network of contracted post mortem providers. This work is to ensure the health and welfare of livestock and also protect food safety.

Two recent incidents in quick succession have highlighted the risks to ruminants from gamebird feed. One case involved medicated partridge feed being fed on moorland that was co-grazed by sheep, causing some sheep to die. The second involved medicated pheasant feed to which beef cows and calves had access.

Toxicity

The feed contained lasalocid, which is a coccidiostat aimed at controlling coccidiosis in young game birds. This can lead to clinical disease and death in ruminants due to ionophore toxicity, the clinical signs of which include sudden

Reasons to avoid unintended exposure to non-livestock medicated feed

- It can be harmful to livestock and unacceptable for many environmental reasons.
- As it is grain-based, sheep can potentially gorge themselves, leading to grain overload, ruminal acidosis and clostridial enterotoxaemia that can be fatal.
- A long meat withdrawal period would need to be set and observed to protect the food chain.
- It can contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance.
- If the feed contains fish protein, it breaches Animal by-Products Regulations.

death, diarrhoea, respiratory signs and recumbency. Pathological findings include focal cardiomyopathy, skeletal muscle necrosis and pulmonary oedema.

Farmers need to be alert to the potential for their sheep being exposed to gamebird feed at this time of year and



Picture credit: Wikimedia Andy F.

Take care that sheep cannot access gamebird feeding stations.

to be aware of any feeding stations their sheep might gain access to. Preventing access will avoid illness and possible food chain issues – see panel. If accidental access is suspected, farmers should discuss this with their vet who can seek advice from a Veterinary Investigation Centre and APHA adviser.

APHA publishes a Chemical Food Safety Report each quarter, which includes chemical toxicity incidents on farms. See www.gov.uk/government/publications/chemical-food-safety-reports.

More from APHA

Copper poisoning

Copper requirements for sheep are complex. Deficiency occurs when sheep graze pastures low in copper but more often it is associated with pastures that are high in iron, molybdenum and sulphur, as when these elements are present they can combine to prevent copper being available to the sheep. Copper deficiency in ewes during mid-pregnancy can lead to swayback in lambs, but there is a fine balance as sheep are also prone to copper poisoning.

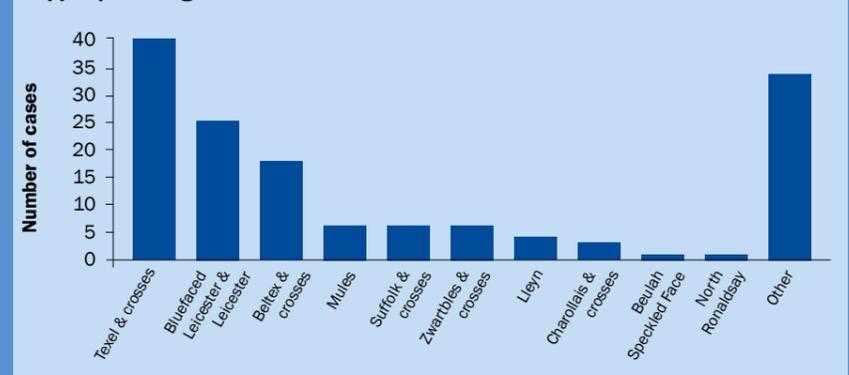
APHA has diagnosed copper poisoning in rams being prepared for shows or sale and on a higher plane of nutrition with concentrates. This can lead to copper loading of the liver and when subjected to stress, such as moves to shows or sale, can tip the balance resulting in a haemolytic crisis, jaundice and death.

It is well recognised that some breeds are more susceptible to copper poisoning, but data held by APHA shows other breeds can be affected too – see graph.

Post mortems

To aid diagnosis of sheep diseases, APHA Veterinary Investigations Centres in Bury St Edmunds, Carmarthen, Exeter, Penrith and Thirsk work closely with a

Copper poisoning incidents 2014-2015



network of APHA-contracted post mortem providers at Bristol University, the Royal Veterinary College, Surrey University, the Wales Veterinary Science Centre and SAC Consulting Veterinary Services.

Use the APHA postcode tool to find out where an APHA post mortem can be performed and if you are entitled to a free carcase collection service. Go to ahvla.defra.gov.uk/postcode/pme.asp. Please note post mortems can only be arranged through APHA by your vet.

Scrapie monitoring

Flock owners wishing to export breeding animals throughout the EU may have their flock or herd monitored under the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme administered

by SAC Consulting Veterinary Services' Premium Sheep & Goat Health Schemes. Registered flocks undergo an annual inspection and brains from a proportion of adult animals are screened for the disease.

Members of the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme must also ensure any fallen sheep are tested for evidence of scrapie, and a recent change means NFSCo sites can now be used for this as well as APHA (England & Wales) Veterinary Investigation centres and Disease Surveillance Centres of SAC Consulting (Scotland). Farm Post Mortems in County Durham and Veterinary Investigation Services (Gloucestershire) are also offering testing by private arrangement.

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European project working to make worm vaccines an on-farm reality

Moredun is currently part of a large EU-funded Horizon 2020 project called Paragone, which aims to move trial vaccines for animal parasites towards commercial reality. It is a partnership of academic and commercial organisations working to develop animal vaccines for use on farms in the EU and beyond.



The complexity of sheep parasites makes vaccine creation difficult, but an EU project hopes to overcome common barriers.

The development of vaccines for parasites has proved a real challenge to the global research community. This is due to the complexity of the parasites involved and their ability to adapt host immune responses. However, recent research has been working on developing vaccines designed to control a number of globally important worms of ruminants and, under trial, these vaccines have shown promise.

Worm cocktails

These parasite vaccines mostly consist of cocktails of worm proteins. In Paragone the partners are using a number of these trial vaccines and testing them in further studies, as well as combining some to make multivalent vaccines.

For parasites for which vaccines have proved difficult to develop, basic studies are being performed to help clarify the type of host response that needs

to be stimulated to obtain protection. This information will then feed into the selection of appropriate novel adjuvant systems with which to deliver the vaccines.

By bringing these streams together, Paragone will take the current best parasite vaccine prototypes forward to practical outcomes for use on farms in the EU and beyond.

Find more about the Paragone project at www.Paragoneh2020.eu, or follow progress on Twitter @ParagoneH2020.

Moredun newsheet

NSA members receiving this magazine in the post within the UK will find a newsheet enclosed, produced by Moredun to help sheep farmers tackle sheep scab. You receive this as all NSA members are also associate members of Moredun. You can support Moredun further by becoming a full member. Details on 01314 45511 or www.moredun.org.uk.

cocktail of eight proteins. When the sheep are subsequently exposed to the parasite they are able to recognise and mount an effective immune response that stops the parasite developing, thus reducing the effect of the worm on health and productivity.

In the lab we use yeast and bacteria to manufacture large amounts of the worm proteins. These are then purified and formulated into the vaccine. Although the vaccine has been proven to be effective in protecting lambs and older sheep against infection, its production is time consuming and needs to be refined for commercial exploitation.

Simplified

My role in Paragone is to find ways to simplify vaccine production and move it towards commercial reality. To simplify protein production I am using a new technology to trick yeast into co-producing all eight proteins at the same time. The technology involves producing a synthetic gene containing coding-regions for all of the proteins, combined with a special 'spacer' region that tells the yeast where one protein finishes and a new one starts. Yeast cells are then able to produce all eight proteins as separate entities in a single fermenter.

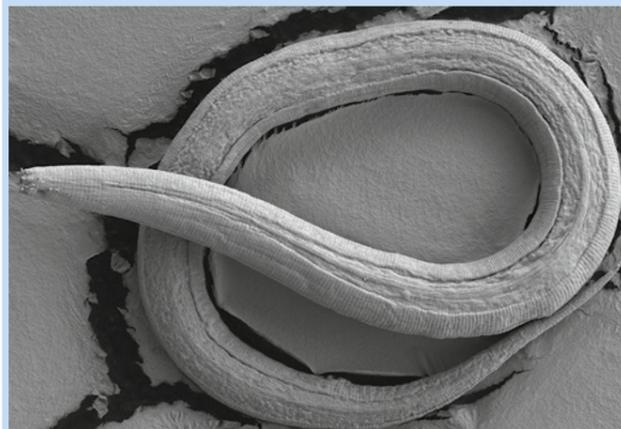
Our initial experiments look very promising, as we have been able to successfully co-produce two worm proteins and are now looking towards co-production of all eight. The proteins will then need to be tested in sheep to see if they offer protection against infection and, if so, a commercially-viable vaccine against *T. circumcincta* is not too far away.

View from a scientist

By Dan Price, Moredun

Paragone is a great project to be involved in as we have 17 academic and industrial partners from six EU countries and places as far away as Uruguay. There is a wealth of experience on hand and we have regular training workshops and meetings for exchange of ideas.

I am working on a vaccine developed by Moredun scientists that protects sheep against the common roundworm *Teladorsagia circumcincta*, or brown stomach worm as it is commonly known (see picture). The vaccine is based on a



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Don't let scab/lice confusion cost you time and money this winter

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

Looking at the picture on this page, would you know if the lamb had sheep scab or lice? The answer is probably not.

Every year there are many instances where sheep farmers assume the worst (scab) and inject with an endectocide, only to find they wasted their time and money because it was lice. Not only that, they are adding to the selection pressure for resistance to the 3-ML (clear) group of wormers on any worms that are present at the time of treatment.

The actual and potential costs of getting things wrong easily justify the price of a proper diagnosis, and this must be your first step if you suspect an outbreak of scab. Your vet can take skin scrapings to confirm whether it is lice or scab or both – and in Scotland, where sheep scab is notifiable, SAC Veterinary Services can examine these scrapings free of charge. There is also a new blood test available, developed by Moredun, which detects antibodies to a specific protein found only in the sheep scab mite to accurately determine if scab mites are present. The test can detect infestation at an early stage, before the onset of clinical symptoms, which could prove extremely valuable.

Treating scab

If scab is confirmed, the treatment options are either plunge dipping with an OP or using an injectable endectocide. Also let your neighbours know so they can also take action. Jetting and showering will not eliminate sheep scab as OPs are not licensed for use in showers or jettiers.

Failure to control scab is usually due to ineffective or incomplete application of treatments. When dipping, the dipwash must be properly replenished and sheep dipped for one minute each and fully immersed.

When opting for an endectocide, the manufacturer's instructions must be followed to the letter. In practice this can be difficult and you need to prepare and take your time to make sure each sheep is properly treated. As with all products where dose rate is influenced by weight, treating to the heaviest in the group is essential for full effectiveness. It is also critical to treat all in-contact sheep and then make sure these do not come into contact with any untreated sheep (for example those



Would you know whether this was sheep scab or lice?

awaiting treatment). This is because most endectocides do not kill scab mites immediately. Treated sheep need to be moved to a clean area and the segregation time required is specified in the datasheet for each product. It can take up to 14 days for the sheep to become non-infective. A clean area would be fields ungrazed by sheep for 17 days. Moxidectin has persistent action so it is not necessary to worry about environmental re-infestation.

Treating lice

If the problem turns out to be lice, pour-ons licensed for the control of 'chewing' lice are the only option other than plunge dipping. There is a type of lice that is a 'sucking' lice, but these are rarely seen in the UK. Be aware that pour-ons applied to fully-fleeced sheep they are unlikely to be fully effective and this incomplete treatment is potentially a factor in the development of resistance in lice. In most cases, sheep in good condition that are well fed will not be adversely affected by lice over winter (though they may look scruffy) and can be effectively treated 'off shears' with a pour-on, or be dipped about three weeks after shearing.

Go to the "Ectoparasites" section at www.scops.org.uk for a list of scab treatments and withdrawal periods. Also find a Moredun scab newssheet posted to NSA members with this magazine.

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Test mineral statuses pre-lambing

Getting your sheep into the best possible condition before they enter their most challenging times of the year – pre-tupping or post-scanning – is crucial, says Tom Darling from Agrimin.

"At these key times, sheep need all the help they can get to achieve optimum body condition at the very beginning of their seasonal task," he says, highlighting the need to get the correct balance of available minerals into the body.

Bolus application

Application with a bolus is simple and straightforward, but the following steps are recommended:

1. Hold the animal firmly to safely restrain its head - see top picture.
2. Lift the head up, stretching the neck, to create the best angle before inserting the application - see bottom picture.
3. Place the applicator into the mouth and squeeze the handle over the back of the tongue.
4. Eject the bolus down the throat.
5. Hold the animal for a few seconds, until the bolus has been safely delivered before releasing



"Any shortfalls will have long-term effects on the ewes' health and a knock-on effect on overall profitability."

More and more farmers are checking

the mineral status of their soils, or working with their vet to blood test their flock to look for cobalt, selenium and/or iodine problems. If testing suggests supplementation will have a cost benefit, Mr Darling recommends choosing a bolus that will release essential minerals into the rumen each day, lasting for many months and meaning sheep only have to be handled once.

"A bolus is a 100% accurate way of knowing the correct application is given," he says. "And once done, you don't handle the ewe again, minimising stress at this time and also meaning the ewe has a guaranteed level of minerals released into her body to maintain her lamb/lambs during the following months when they're growing inside the womb,"

"It also means the best quality colostrum is delivered to the lambs immediately after birth, and this continues in the mainstream milk leading up to weaning time."



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AHDB lamb carcass data (2015) shows 43% of finished lambs sold in GB failed to meet market specification.

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World and British records broken

Never mind Rio – a world record and two British records, actively supported by the British Wool Marketing Board, have been set by British shearers on home soil this summer.



New Zealander Matt Smith, now settled in Launceston, Cornwall, displayed an incredible exhibition of shearing in late July to smash the nine-hour world shearing record. As the first attempt in the Northern Hemisphere, Matt sheared 731 ewes at an average of 44 seconds each, beating the previous record by 10 sheep. The three world record judges from Wales, Australia and New Zealand said the consistency in Matt's shearing was second to none and the quality mark awarded throughout was in the region of 10.

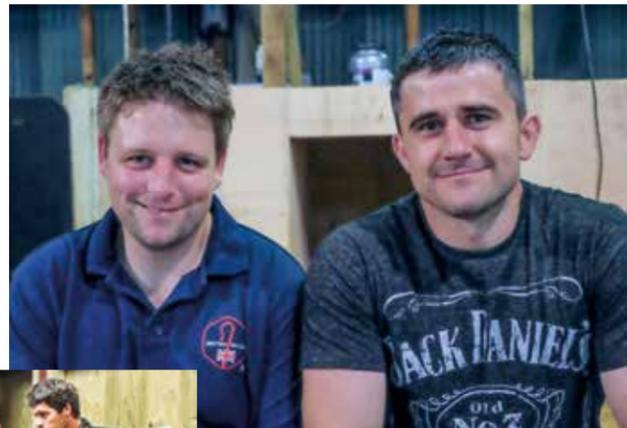
Matt says: "I am chuffed to bits to have set a new world record. It has not been easy getting here but all the hard work and preparation has paid off. It's been a long-time ambition of mine and is proof that if you're willing to put your body on the line you can achieve your goals."

Record smashed

Three weeks later 33-year-old Gareth Daniel and 36-year old Ian Jones, both from Powys, set the British nine-hour two-stand British lamb shearing record. Managing 1,457 lambs each, Gareth also smashed the individual nine-hour British record by shearing 781 lambs, beating the previous record by an astonishing 244.

Gareth says: "We owe our success to the many helpers from across the shearing industry who brought the lambs forward, packed the wool and provided help and support in the build up to the day. Setting a record like this is a real team effort."

BWMB says it supported the record attempts to highlight the potential for huge achievement and the importance of shearing



Picture credit: Philippa Gillespie Jones.

Matt Smith (left) broke a world record while Ian Jones and Gareth Daniel (above left and above right respectively) set British records.

as a skill. It hopes the records will inspire young shearers starting their careers and act as a reminder that BWMB offers a range of shearing courses delivered by highly experienced and passionate instructors with invaluable knowledge and expertise. Around 1,000 people attend the 'Seal' award system courses each year, from absolute beginners through to professionals aiming to refresh and

develop their skills.

Bedwyr Jones, BWMB Field Services Chairman and North Wales Board Member, says: "These two events have highlighted the strength of the British wool industry to a global audience. BWMB congratulates Matt, Gareth and Ian on their phenomenal achievements."



Picture credit: Emily Fleur.

Getting it right with shearing gear

Sheep shearing combs and cutters that are sharpened properly, coupled with correctly adjusted handsets, will have an instant impact on shearing performance and ease, as well as clip quality and financial value, says Selwyn Williams, shearing contractor and equipment specialist for Heiniger clippers.

He says learning the skills for blade sharpening is an essential element of handset maintenance, akin to looking after any other regularly-used equipment. "A professional fulltime shearer working their handset eight hours a day, four days a week, 40 weeks a year would clock up 1,300 hours. How many tractors are driven that hard? In that time, a car averaging 40mph would cover 52,000 miles."

Sharpening

A sign of poor sharpening, says Mr Williams, is a build-up of wool strands in the cutter blade channels. He adds that a well-adjusted handpiece should only get



Sparks off the blade's entire width should travel parallel to the pendulum.

comfortably warm, not hot. A common mistake by DIY shearers is over-tightening blades to compensate for bluntness or incorrect resharping.

"Over-tightening is like driving with the handbrake on," he says. "If you're not getting a clean cut, change the combs and cutters for a new or sharpened set. For anyone shearing more than 500 of your own sheep, I suggest buying a professional grinder and learning from the supplier how to use it properly. Mine has lasted 20 years and is worth as much today as I paid for it. Otherwise, get your blades sharpened by someone who already has one and knows how to use it."

Mr Williams emphasises that correct sharpening is all about precision. The grinder disc must run true, with pendulum and blades aligned correctly. As a visual guide, he says sparks off the blade's entire width should travel parallel to the pendulum. Off line towards the centre of the disc indicates the pendulum is too short; towards the edge, too long.

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Ambassadors head for final session

The 12 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors selected for training and personal development in 2016 are heading towards completing the first year of the programme.

Their fifth and final session in November will coincide with an open day that anyone under the age of 35 is very welcome to attend, to learn more about ways to get ahead in the sheep sector and meet likeminded people.

It will be the fourth year running that NSA had held an open event like this. The day will be free to attend and will follow a similar format to the 2015 event with a selection of workshops to get involved in. The same day will see the application window open for the 2017 NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. Find dates and details at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

Meanwhile, the 2016 Ambassador group will have met for the fourth time by the time you read this. The three-day session in Yorkshire and Lancashire will have included a live-dead day hosted by Dunbia and AHDB Beef & Lamb, a behind-the-scenes tour at an auction market, and a trip to the British Wool Market



Grassland management was one of the themes at the third NSA Next Generation Ambassador session, hosted by Barenbrug.

Board head office and nearby scouring plant. Two farmers will also give up their time to show the Ambassadors a pioneering share farming set-up and an inspiration approach to public engagement via Twitter. The aim, as with all the sessions, is to provide best practice information and inspire outside-the-box thinking.



On My Farm - The Next Generation

Regular blogs from the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors can be found at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk. Here is a taster from the latest entries.

Olly Matthews (28)

Running sheep and poultry in Somerset

We've taken the decision to tup some older ewes this time that were due to be culled originally. They were in great order at weaning and provide the possibility of selling ewe and lamb couples in the spring. The Suffolk cross and Texel cross ewe lambs have grown really well since weaning and will be tupped to lamb at the end of March (pictured), something we have done now for three years.



The grass can really suffer on our low lying moorland, particularly when we get a wet winter, so we're in the middle of putting up some polytunnels to allow us to house more ewes earlier if we need to.

The beginning of August saw my brother

jet off to Tasmania to spend six weeks working on our cousin's dairy farm. They calf 1,000 cows in a six-week period with very little assistance and it has really got me thinking about how we can simplify our system and increase stocking rates, without increasing workloads. I'm sure he will come home with plenty of ideas for us to consider.

Hannah Jackson (24)

Shepherding in Cumbria

I've been doing all sorts of work lately, including farm sitting, fell gathering, dosing, weaning, dipping, general shepherding and dressing sheep ready for sales. I've been almost fully booked and at times have had to turn down work. I've been on two different fell gathers (pictured) on common fells grazed by multiple farmers and involving a big group of farmers and dogs to gather the entire area.

My new addition Butch is starting to



come on some jobs with my main dog Fraser. It's important she becomes used to being at different farms and around different people, dogs and livestock. I always like to have my dogs under good control and with the basics firmly in place before I let them work other people's livestock. Butch is proving to come along nicely and showing really promising signs of becoming a good sheepdog.

James Wright (24)

Starting a new adventure in Wiltshire

It's been a busy month, the big news being that I've moved from West Sussex to Wiltshire to embark on a one-year graduate diploma at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester.

With the majority of my wether lambs now away, the few that are left are destined for my growing hog and lamb roast business. I've taken 12 bookings already for next year, from festivals to weddings, and being able to get an additional return for farm produce has helped flesh out the books.

I've recently been able to pick up some tack for my expanding flock, all in one location, something I wasn't able to do in Sussex. Although it was sad to leave, it was definitely the right decision. And Dolphin Sheep Fair in September was a great opportunity to catch up with friends before I completed my move.



Ambitious farming plans for UK and European Young Shepherd

By Hannah Park, NSA
Stakes were high in the NSA Young Shepherd of the Year national final, held in July at NSA Sheep 2016. Of the 18 under 27-year-olds who qualified, Richard Carter of NSA Marches Region was the victorious competitor.

"I really wasn't expecting it at all but was pretty happy to have picked up the red ribbon, as you always are when you compete," says Richard. "You go to win at the end of the day - but hopefully some of the pointers and tips given out will also go some way to making businesses of the future more profitable."

"In a competition like this with so many elements, you can never really gauge whether you're going to win. You could do really well with one thing and then make

a right hash of the next. It gives a fair opportunity to all competing and gives those doing it well a chance to stand out from the crowd."

Richard had the least far to travel of any of the competitors on the day, farming just down the road at Newent, Gloucestershire. The mixed beef and sheep enterprise is run as a family partnership between Richard, parents Roger and Joanne and brother Michael. It incorporates 80ha (200 acres) of owned and 40ha (100 acres) of rented ground plus seasonal grazing. All is permanent pasture bar 8ha (20 acres) leased out for maize annually.

Sheep flock

With growth and expansion very much on the agenda, Richard has taken a key role in the management of the farm's 900 breeding ewes and 300 ewe lambs. Around 300 are Suffolk and Cheviot Mules and the rest North Country Mules. Sourcing quality replacements is a major part of the system.

"We buy around 160 North Country Mule ewe lambs each September as a single group from Hawes Auction, which we put to a Suffolk tup alongside suitable homebred Suffolk Mule replacements," Richard explains. "In giving us a lamb, she goes some way to paying to keep her for that year and we end up with a reasonably priced yearling ewe that has had a lamb and knows what she's doing. We buy quality. They have done well as lambs too, which means they are more likely to go on



Richard's flock is based on the Mule.

Added European element

Adding to the pressure of the national Young Shepherds competition was the fact it ran alongside a European final too.

Pairs from the Republic of Ireland and France joined those from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, while 12 finalists from the six English regions fought it out

to represent their country.

Alongside the prestige of winning the UK final, Richard was teamed up with Will Hinton of NSA South East Region to take the European title. Second was Northern Ireland and third Wales.

All NSA Sheep 2016 results at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports.



Richard Carter with his NSA Young Shepherd of the Year trophy.

and do well as ewes."

Indoor lambing takes place from mid-January to April, with everything recorded at birth. Most finished lambs are sold through May Hill collection centre, a local marketing group, and once the first are fit Richard says he tries to draw some to send every week. Lamb weights are electronically recorded every time they're weighed, to keep an eye on growth rates.

"Generally we would feed the earlier born lambs and then try and finish the others off grass, but it does depend, especially when we're working towards getting lambs away every week," he says. "A lot have been fed this year because the trade has been so good and feed reasonable too."

Contract work

In addition to the sheep, Richard says he's hoping to expand on the cattle finishing side of the business, introduced in the last 12 months, with a growing number of British Blue calves reared each year to 12-18 months. He has also run his own shearing round in the area for the past four years and hires out a sheep shower to locals in the area.

"You pick up tips and ideas here and there by chatting to the other farmers," he says. "The Young Shepherds' competition was a good chance to do this too, meeting with people a similar age to me and seeing what they've got to say and how they do it at home. It usually involves debate about things we all disagree on!"





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