

# Sheep Farmer

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2017



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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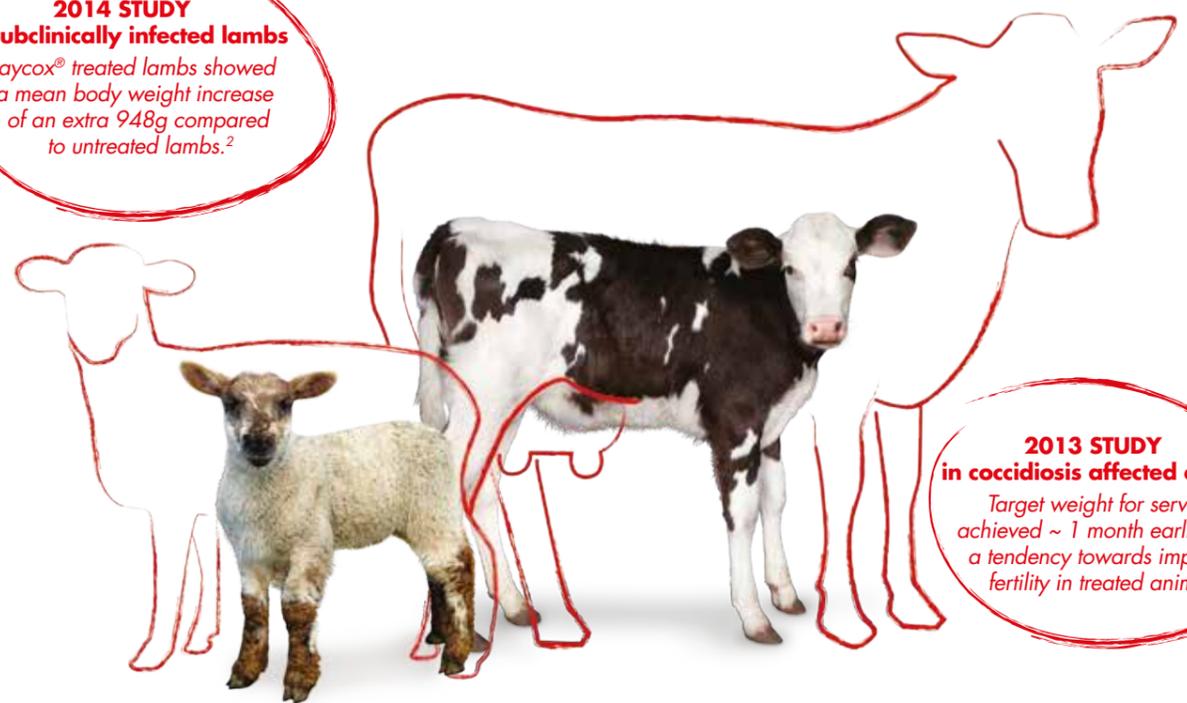


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## Sorting the known from the unknown for 2017

By Phil Stocker, NSA  
Given what we've seen of 2017 already, it's not too risky to predict there will be few certainties and no shortage of unknowns. We've known for a while that Brexit will create big changes in the UK, but recent events in the USA will likely result in even more rapid and further change both here and far wider.

Theresa May will trigger Article 50 this spring, setting the likely two-year clock ticking towards our EU departure. She recently announced our future lies outside the single market but that we want the 'freest possible trade'. With the UK's financial contributions to the EU set to end, 'freest possible trade' suggests the acceptance of a level of tariffs, the result of which will be industry paying for any market access it can get to work economically.

This will be the start of many unknowns – not only our future trading relationship with the EU but also our ability to open new trade deals with nations beyond. Then there is the thorny issue of migrant labour and to what extent a willingness to work is considered an adequate qualification to allow our abattoirs and cutting plants to function. And it is a certainty that we will be discussing the future for post-CAP farm support.

### Global deals

Donald Trump's decisions in the USA will influence much of the future of global trade and relationships, and although it looks like we will be at the front of the queue for a trade deal, you can be sure it will be one that serves the US well. Another certainty is that important elections will take place in Germany, France and the Netherlands, with the results influencing where the EU goes next and how our negotiations will fare.

Coming down to farm level, it's safe to predict we will be expected to deliver efficient and quality food production alongside an improved and enhanced environment. Members will know I am optimistic about the future of British sheep farming to thrive within this framework, although we need fair play and reward for all the quality products and outputs that we deliver. But collectively we have to find smart ways to raise our game and provide evidence of our value, because we are not in the game of allowing our smaller farmers, family units and part-time keepers to be



squeezed out in a rush to gain textbook efficiency.

Among all this, we will not forget a number of topics NSA has been working on for some time – carcase splitting, the legal production of smokies, and a review of movements reporting requirements and cross compliance penalties for innocent breaches. We can't lose sight of these and many others in the Brexit frenzy.

### World vision

But to thrive we will need a marketplace and trade that provides for viability – and there are still big questions here. For decades we have been investing in exports, in line with a global movement towards global trade, but it's not yet clear whether the world's superpowers will continue down this road or become more inward looking and protectionist. Free trade deals may look beneficial for the UK's economy as a whole, but their impact on individual business sectors has to be understood and a free trade deal with New Zealand will only see lamb going in one direction.

Losing free access to the EU will not be replaced with trade options elsewhere overnight, so further investment in our domestic market might help buffer some of the choppy waters ahead. A recent experience I had shows what we're up against. It was not altogether surprising, but a major top-end retailer offering a £5 discount voucher for a leg of lamb would only permit its use against New Zealand lamb, not UK product. NSA has raised the issue of discounting NZ lamb without similar discounts on British with the Grocery Code Adjudicator Christine Tacon in the past, and with new powers maybe she can do something to stop it.

Find NSA's Brexit vision on page 14.

### Front page

Many thanks to NSA member Graham Ryves-Webb for sending the photograph used on the front page. It features a New Zealand Romney pictured in the winter sunshine on the Oxfordshire Chilterns, where Graham is a shepherd. To supply a picture of your sheep for the front page, use the contact details overleaf to ask NSA about photo specifications.

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# News Update

## New chairman

A number of NSA regions have already held their annual members' meetings, with one region electing a new chairman. Antony Spencer of Lower Quinton, Warwickshire (pictured), has taken the helm for NSA Marches Region, taking over from Kevin Harrison of North Stoke, Gloucestershire.

Thanks go to Kevin, who served two consecutive terms as regional chairman and continues in his role on the NSA English and NSA UK Policy and Technical committees. Each English region has three representatives on the NSA English Committee, so Antony joins Kevin and Mike Credland in this role.

Details of all NSA office holders and representatives at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk). Meet Antony on page 18.

## Regional meetings

Official notice of forthcoming NSA Annual Regional Members Meetings was given in the previous edition of Sheep Farmer, but some are still to be held and members are very welcome to attend:-

- NSA Scottish Region at Airth Castle Hotel and Spa, Airth, Stirlingshire, FK2 8JF, 4pm on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February.
- NSA Central Region at the Bluebell Inn, Buxton Road, Tissington, Derbyshire, DE6 1NH, 7.30pm on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> February.
- NSA Northern Region at the Hired Lad, Penrith Auction Mart, Penrith, CA11 7JG, 7.30pm on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February.
- NSA South West Region at Fingle Glen Golf Hotel, Tedburn, Exeter, Devon, EX6 6AF, 7.30pm on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.
- NSA Cymru/Wales Region at the Royal Welsh Showground, Hafod y Hendre, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY, 2pm on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February.

As well as the formal business of electing office holders, each meeting has invited additional speakers so will be enjoyable and informative.

More information at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events) or, for English regions, on pages 6-7.



## Fifth wool bedding winner

The final winner in NSA's 2016 giveaway to win a wool bedding set was named just before Christmas, taking the final tally to five sheep farmers now enjoying a more comfortable night's sleep.

The lucky final person drawn out of the hat in the NSA and Wool Room prize draw was Lynda Krypczyk, an NSA member from Bedfordshire. She and her partner run a small flock of pedigree Hampshire Downs and were delighted to receive the British wool bedding set.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "It's been a pleasure to have been able to offer this fantastic prize to visitors, both NSA members and non-members, at events NSA has hosted and attended during the year. The success of the Wool Room's British bedding range is an excellent example of adding value to the wool supply chain, not to mention achieving it with responsible sourcing and branding, which is a key interest for NSA. Teaming up with a British retailer and manufacturer offering a product made using British wool was very appropriate and enjoyable."

## Award recognises outstanding contribution

We are delighted to announce Chris Lloyd as the 2016 winner of the highly regarded NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep sector.

With a career spanning three decades, Chris was nominated for and ultimately won the award for the work he has delivered on behalf of the UK sheep sector, particular the successful Sheep Better Returns Programme.

Chris started his career in 1987 when he took a job with NSA that saw him spend 16 years as an integral part of the association's activities. During this time he was awarded a Nuffield Scholarship (1999) to assess the impact of the South Africa, Australia and New Zealand sheep industries on the UK market.

His next step was to join Eblex (now AHDB Beef & Lamb) where he

## How long do your rams last?

NSA is urging farmers who buy in rams to help us find out the facts around the working life and cost of males in commercial sheep flocks.

We want to find the views of people who are happy with how long rams last, as well of those who wish they'd work for more seasons. If you've not already done so, please complete a short survey at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ramlongevity](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ramlongevity).

There are also two opportunities remaining to attend a one-off evening meeting to explore the topic in more detail. If you have more than 200 commercial breeding ewes and at least two years' worth of ram purchase information, please consider joining with local farmers and one of three expert sheep consultants. As well as a hot supper, you can make the most of the knowledge of either Lesley Stubbings, Kate Phillips or Chris Lewis.

The two remaining meetings are in Devon and Derbyshire in late February. Contact Laura Williams at NSA for information; contact details on page 2.

# NSA Chairman begins final year in post

At the first NSA Board meeting of 2017, Samuel Wharry of Carnlough, County Antrim, was reapproved as NSA Chairman. He begins his final year in the three-year post with these words to NSA members.

It is with great pleasure that I continue as Chairman of the NSA Board. I have met a huge number of wonderful people and visited some superb farms right across the British Isles in this position; it has really opened my eyes to just what an interesting and diverse industry we are a part of.

## Meeting members

The one thing that is constant is the hospitality I have encountered from fellow sheep farmers wherever I have travelled, and I look forward to attending as many events and meeting as many members as I can in 2017.

Last year was a busy one for NSA and there will be little respite in the year ahead as we intend to follow up our report into the complementary role of sheep in upland areas with another into the benefits of sheep in arable rotations. This is very timely, with concerns over levels of organic matter and soil structure on arable farms. Sheep have for generations been known for their contribution to soil fertility, famed as the 'golden hoof'. NSA sees opportunities for young farmers and

was involved in the establishment and launch of Sheep BRP in 2004. Under Chris's leadership, the programme has widely engaged producers and been the starting point for a variety of other projects. He has also overseen the development of numerous technical publications and interactive management tools to aid decisions for 'better returns'.



new entrants keeping sheep, either on a share farming or a contract basis, on these arable units and we will continue to support them through the NSA Next Generation programme.

Brexit will also continue at the forefront of our activity this year. Regardless of your views on the subject it will have an impact on all our businesses, so NSA will be working to ensure sheep farmers' voices are heard and that politicians are held to account for their promises.

Having had a closer involvement with NSA over the last couple of years, I have been amazed at how much work is carried out on our behalf by NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and the team at Malvern. Their enthusiasm means that NSA punches well above its weight on so many issues.

May I belatedly wish everyone a very Happy New Year and hope you have a good lambing with decent weather, regardless of where or when it takes place.



Chris is married to Bridget and has three daughters. Alongside his work for AHDB he runs 100 ewes in Herefordshire. He will be formally presented with his award this summer.

# NSA reports – devolved nations

## NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Davies, Development Officer



**Our Annual Regional Members Meeting will take place on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> February with an exciting array of speakers. If you would like to attend, please let me know for catering purposes.**



Jacob Anthony, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, will give us an update on how his 12 months in the NSA programme went. This will be followed by two Nuffield Scholars – Aled Davies talking about alternatives to antibiotics in agriculture, and Aled Jones on the future of agricultural societies and shows. We will round up with Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, giving an update on NSA activity including that around Brexit.

On the topic of Brexit, it is essential we try to have some continuity with the single market and strike the best trade deal we can for the sheep sector. It is an exciting time to embrace new challenges and we have to be ready and make sure agriculture is at the forefront of discussions. Phil and I made this case when we recently met with Andrew Slade, Welsh Government's Director of Agriculture. It was clear the NSA Brexit position paper had been well received, which will allow us to be involved in future negotiations. It is appreciated that NSA is a national organisation and can sometimes bring more to the table than just the Welsh angle.

## Movement changes

We also made the most of the opportunity to cover the CPH review and what will happen for cross-border farms, as well as to discuss the impending changes to quarantine units. NSA advocates better biosecurity but it has to be done in a way so the sector can still trade effectively. Also, it must not be too different to what happens in England, as we have a long border that should be respected not ignored.

HCC has put together a group to discuss the issues around light lambs, which NSA Cymru/Wales has been active in and looks forward to seeing the resulting report. There have also been more talks with FSA Wales regarding smokies so we will keep you informed as this progresses.

NSA Cymru/Wales hosted the NSA board meeting in January on the Royal Welsh Showground. This provided an opportunity to see the NSA building and discuss how we may replace it in the future. Plans for NSA Welsh Sheep are well in hand, with the hogg sale confirmed to run again, plus a new shearing competition – *more on page 10*.



NSA Cymru/Wales attended the Welsh Winter Fair since the last edition of Sheep Farmer. Lamb and mutton tastings on the stand went down very well.

## NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



**We held our Annual Regional Members Meeting at Hillsborough, County Down, just as the last edition of Sheep Farmer was going to press. There were no surprises and all office holders were re-elected, including Campbell Tweed as Chairman.**



Immediately afterwards was an open meeting that proved very informative and sparked much debate from the audience. Dr Philip Skuce of Moredun spoke on the symptoms and treatment of fluke, followed by Dr Jason Barley and Aurelie Aubry from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute on reasons why farmers should implement flock health plans. They explained the programme they have introduced to participating farms, which NSA Communications Manager Joanne Briggs held up as an example of what NSA would like included in the post-Brexit successor to RDP. Joanne covered other aspects of Brexit and encouraged applications for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. The open meeting with Moredun and AFBI was repeated the next night in Omagh, County Tyrone, and NSA NI Region is indebted to the speakers for their support.

## EU divorce

The UK Government's finger is on the trigger to activate Article 50. Will the UK be unceremoniously dumped, as if sitting in Graham Norton's infamous chair, or will the interested parties talk and argue for years to come? Some say the UK is now in control of its own destiny, but is it not in the hands of the other 27 member states? Most divorce cases inevitably become messy, with each side trying to claim as much as they can from the other. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland both have much to lose in the negotiations, with neither wanting to see change to the present situation.

NSA NI Region is in negotiation with our DAERA Brexit team, but it can only feed into the UK view and may have to depend on David Davies, the so-called Brexit Minister, sitting up and taking notice of the numerous sectors in Northern Ireland expressing their views.

The best thing we can do as sheep farmers is keep a tight grip on our own business management, reducing costs where we can and increasing output through better grassland management and improving genetics. Gone are the days when we can say that if we 'hang on in there' something will turn up – now is the time to go out and look for that 'something' ourselves.



NSA NI meeting speakers (left to right): Joanne Briggs, Philip Skuce, Jason Barley and Aurelie Aubry, with Regional Chairman Campbell Tweed (far right).

## NSA Scottish Region



By George Milne, Development Officer

**We have held three winter roadshow meetings, held jointly with Caltech Crystalyx for a second year running.**



Held at Moffat, Lauder and Thurso, more than 130 farmers attended in total to hear Euan Hart from Caltech give a comprehensive talk on improving nutrition and management of breeding ewes prior to lambing, Iain MacDonald from QMS on a wide ranging number of issues that could potentially effect lamb pricing and trading over the next few years, and myself covering all the important work NSA does for the sheep industry.

## Policy issues

Brexit was a hot subject particularly for the final evening meeting, with the Prime Minister's announcement that the UK was unlikely to be part of the single market coming just hours beforehand. But many policy issues were covered on all three nights and questions at the end led to a good debate about the sheep industry. These meetings have certainly been a great opportunity to present important NSA work that is carried out on behalf of farmers, and also to connect with both members and non-members that were present.

Representatives from NSA Scottish Region have met with Scottish Government officials to discuss options around a change from the Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme (LFASS) to Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC). EU rules require this to happen by 2018, although we understand LFASS will only be able to continue after 2018 at a reduced rate. We therefore discussed an ANC scheme from 2018 that could see a significant change in payment rates, or sticking with LFASS for one or two years with a reduction in payments and the balance being used in another Scottish specific scheme for LFASS claimants. NSA was clear the current LFASS budget of £63m must in the short-term and long-term to support upland and hill production. Talks will continue over the coming weeks.

It has been a busy winter period for the region and this will be certain to continue over the next two years at least. Never has there been a more important time for the sheep industry to develop a way forward for a successful future. We must make sure our voice is heard loud and clear, as the Brexit agenda changes on a regular basis.



More than 130 farmers attended the NSA Scottish Region roadshow meetings, held at Moffat, Lauder and Thurso with generous sponsorship from Caltech Crystalyx.

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# NSA reports – English regions

## Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

**The past few weeks have been focused on planning for and arranging the new-style NSA Central Region Early Gathering.**

This is the fourth winter event we've held at Bakewell Market, Derbyshire, and thankfully this time (unlike others in the past) the weather conditions were kind to us.

It was so good to see the event so well attended with a buzzing atmosphere and plenty going on all day. We hope all those who attended enjoyed themselves and took something home with them to benefit their businesses. A big thank you to all those who helped to make it a really good occasion – our sponsors, the staff at Bagshaws and Derbyshire Dales District Council, NSA Head Office, Bakewell Agricultural Society, all the speakers and chairman who took part in sessions, competition organisers and those who supplied sheep on the day, stewards and photographers, and particularly all of you who came along to support the event.

On a less positive note, there have been instances of Schmalleberg reported in our region in some early lambing flocks. Chris Lewis, an independent vet in our region, has outlined his concerns for the rest of the lambing season and is urging farmers to contact their vet about testing to confirm cases. Let's hope the effects are not as bad as are feared.

Other news too brings me to rural



crime. Back in December, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Assistant Chief Constable for Derbyshire attended a primestock show at Bakewell Market to meet and talk with farmers about thefts from farms. After further meetings with NFU, NSA and others, there are now urgent plans to establish a Rural Crime Unit in the county. We've learnt several defendants are now due to appear in court following thefts of quad bikes and farm vehicles and, with extra vigilance following this recent epidemic of farm thefts, law-abiding farmers should not be surprised if stopped and questioned.

## Marches

By Antony Spencer, Chairman

**It is my pleasure to introduce myself as your new NSA Marches Regional Chairman, having taken over the reins at our Annual Regional Members Meeting back in November.** We had an excellent turnout to our meeting at the Ludlow Food Centre, Shropshire, which included a top butchery demonstration from the centre's butcher John Brereton.

I am looking forward to getting to know more of you in the region, and setting the wheels in motion for some exciting regional events in coming months, particularly our regional NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition which is due to take place in the summer. More details on that to follow soon.

The NSA Next Generation programme



is something I'm particularly keen to get involved in and support and I was pleased to host the 2016 group of Next Generation Ambassadors at the end of last year, taking the group round some of the systems I have in place and hopefully getting a few of them thinking about their own set-ups back at home. I think it's so important to encourage sheep farmers of the future at every opportunity, and I hope to see more NSA Next Generation Ambassadors get involved in the Marches region committee as those in previous years have successfully done.

Getting voices heard is a big part of what NSA is about and I'm keen to get the ball rolling on things that matter to you in the region, be it new or ongoing issues in our industry or some thoughts or ideas on farm walks or debates you would like to see happening. Feel free to contact me for information about activity in the region, and I'm sure I'll see many of you at events in the coming months.

## Northern

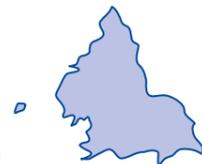
By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**Please do not forget to book your stand for NSA North Sheep.** Stand space

and some sponsorship packages can be booked online at [www.northsheep.org.uk](http://www.northsheep.org.uk). Follow the links to 'exhibitor' and then 'apply online' to simply fill in the online form following the instructions on screen.

New for 2017 is a section for individual breeders to book stand space, and NSA members who wish to do so can enjoy this for a discounted rate. There are still a small number of larger sponsorship packages available. If you are interested in standing out from the crowd at this popular event please contact me for more information.

Our Annual Regional Members Meeting is to be held on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2017, 7.30pm at the Hired Lad, Penrith Mart, Penrith. All NSA Northern Region members are invited to join us. The evening includes the usual business followed by presentations from Jean-Pierre Garnier, Head of Exports at AHDB, and one of our regional NSA Next Generation Ambassadors Hannah Jackson. An update on NSA activity will follow from Joanne Briggs, NSA Communications Manager. Refreshments will be provided so it would help if you could contact me to confirm your attendance.



## Butchery demo for Marches Region



One of the speakers at the NSA Marches Region Annual Members Meeting was butcher John Brereton, who demonstrated tradition and innovative cuts that get consumers exciting about eating British lamb.

## South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

**By the time you receive this copy of Sheep Farmer, our Annual Regional Members Meeting will have taken place.**

Although our current Regional Chairman Andrew Barr feels he should move on from the role, we don't have anyone waiting in the wings at present so we are not expecting any changes in officeholders – but look out for a full report on the NSA website after the meeting.

The committee will have met ahead of the Annual Regional Members Meeting to make some decisions about future events within the region. We will have some new committee members and, if there is anyone else who wishes to get involved, please don't hesitate contact me.

One of the presentations after the formal part of the meeting will involve NSA Next Generation Ambassadors from our region explaining how their year being involved in the programme has helped them progress their own businesses or careers. And with the 2017 selection process now complete, I would like to offer our congratulations to Richard Taylor from Wiltshire on being successful in joining this year's programme – *details on pages 34-37*. We look forward to the coming year and getting him more involved in NSA through our regional committee.

## South West

By Alan Derryman, Chairman

**The weather has made the winter so far one of the easiest I have experienced in a long time.** It just doesn't seem to want to rain! What a contrast from last year, and let's hope we don't pay for it in the spring.

Since the New Year I've noticed lamb and ewe prices have been poor compared to the late summer and early autumn



trade, disappointing to say the least for the winter finishers. Let's hope it picks up soon.

It seems that finally the Prime Minister has given us an insight into the Government's Brexit plans. It would seem we are going to have to fight our corner to secure our export trade, but I am confident the sheep industry can meet these challenges. We all need to keep putting our views across whenever possible.

I recently attended an AHDB Levy Payer Open Meeting, which was well attended by a good cross section of farmers, auctioneers and processors. It reminds us that it is important we attend these meetings and make sure our opinions are heard.

Thanks goes to NSA for sponsoring the four home nations for the forthcoming World Shearing and Wool Handling Championships in New Zealand in February. I wish all the British competitors the very best of luck. Let's hope we can have a new World Champion, as we have had in the two previous championships.

The NSA South West Annual Regional Members Meeting is to be held on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 7.30pm at Fingle Glen Golf Hotel, Tedburn St Mary, Exeter. We have guest speaker Alistair Mackintosh from Red Tractor, as well as NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker giving an update on NSA's current and ongoing work. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Your regional contacts

Contact details for all NSA regions can be found on page 2. Office holders are always keen to hear from members, and many regions are actively looking for additional people to join their committees and/or get involved in events.

Not in the loop? Inform NSA Head Office of your details on 01684 892661 or [membership@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:membership@nationalsheep.org.uk).

## Buzzing event at Bakewell



Changes to the NSA Central Region winter event saw a real buzz at Bakewell Market in late January, aided by better weather than previous years. See page 8 for a full report of the day.

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# Successful debut for re-vamped NSA Central Region winter event

A successful start to a busy year of NSA events kicked off at the end of January, with the NSA Central Region Early Gathering. A new style meant much more of the event was moved undercover within the warmth of the market concourse, making way for a packed programme of seminars, interactive workshops and demonstrations.

Four seminar sessions ran through the day, all with the topical theme of health, be it securing the industry's health through the next generation, keeping farm records healthy and staying



Martin Eccles of AHDB Beef & Lamb providing butchery demonstrations.

legal, ensuring businesses healthy survival post-Brexit, or a look at common health problems experienced by farmers.

Samuel Wharry, NSA Chairman, introduced three NSA Next Generation Ambassadors to the audience in the first session of the day. Ellen Helliwell, originally from North Derbyshire, Fred Love from Nottinghamshire and Robert Spink from the Norfolk/Suffolk border all ably demonstrated the vital ingredients to success as they outlined the determination, commitment and energy behind their various routes into the sheep sector.

## Next Generation

Ellen spoke about beginning her career as an employed shepherd in the Cotswolds to her current job as shepherd for a flock in Cumbria, while Fred is certainly well on his way to achieving his goal of 1,000 ewes in five years, with his mantra of 'work hard until

## Event Fact File

**Event:** NSA Central Region Early Gathering 2017

**Venue:** Bakewell Market, Bakewell, Derbyshire

**Date:** Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January

**Competition winners:-**

• **NSA Next Generation Shepherd:** William Leese (also highest placed under 21)

• **NSA Next Generation Inter-Schools Shepherding Team:** Joint team from Leek and Buxton schools.

• **Trade stands:** Craven Cattle Marts  
Full results at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).

your idols become your rivals'. Robert spoke about finding and keeping multiple grazing arrangements, which have helped him build on his owned 53ha (130-acre) business and grow to 350 Mules.

A later seminar session provided a frank and forthright discussion about what the future holds for the sheep industry post Brexit. Panellists included Martin Redfearn of the Policy Group, David Swales of AHDB and NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. Mr Redfearn was quick to point out change is inevitable in agriculture and was clear in his message that 'doing what you have always done will not do'. He described the future market as one where it will be essential for farmers to 'out-run the competition' and he proposed discussion groups and benchmarking as key strategies for improving performance.

## Brexit debate

Mr Swales presented a mix of optimism and concern regarding the post-Brexit future for the sheep industry. Although quick to point out that the European Union is a crucial market for sheep meat, he said the industry might not end up with a rational decision because much of the negotiation came down to politics. However, he also highlighted a positive aspect in pointing to the potential markets in the Far East.

Mr Stocker sums up the day: "A huge credit goes to all those that helped plan, organise and deliver the event, in particular Anne Payne, NSA Central Region Manager, and Alastair Sneddon, NSA Central Region Chairman and Bagshaws Senior Partner. Hopefully all who attended went home with information to benefit the long-term health of their businesses."



The winner NSA Next Generation Shepherd was 17-year-old William Leese of Eccleshall, Staffordshire.

## Top tips from the event

**NSA Next Generation Ambassadors on a healthy career**

- **Ellen Helliwell:** See as many farms as you can and pick up something from each one so you keep learning.
- **Fred Love:** Treat land like it is your own, keep it tidy, pay the rent on time and be honest.
- **Robert Spink:** React quickly to problems with your grazing sheep; drop everything if necessary to sort them out but always keep positive.

**Katy Cropper on keeping sheepdogs healthy**

- Worm puppies twice by the time they are eight weeks old; consult your vet on the best medicines to use.
- Make sure puppies quickly start learning the right way to do things;

80% of how a dog turns out is down to training so start as early as possible.

- Feed your twice a day with a high quality dog food, because they need to be fit and will be working hard.
- Tailor training and experiences to the dog, as each will mature at a different time.

**Lesley Stubbing on tackling parasite for healthy sheep**

- Test the efficacy of medicines used on farm.
- If lambs are not thriving as expected, consider if wormers resistance issues are responsible.
- Do not assume drenches from the white group will control parasites, as some level of resistance exists on almost every farm.

# Proof of the mutton is in the tasting

By Bob Kennard, NSA Make More of Mutton Project Manager



The perception of many people that mutton was overwhelming disproved on the NSA stand at the Welsh Winter Fair at the end of last year.

Samples of mutton dishes were offered to passers-by and, once they'd eaten it, they were asked to dispose of their sample pots in 'Yes, I liked it' or 'No, I didn't like it' bins. By the end of the day the 'liked it' bin was overflowing and the 'didn't like it' bin had just two pots.

The delicious dishes were prepared by celebrated mid-Wales cook Lavinia Vaughan, using mutton provided by suppliers including NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman Llew Thomas. They included a traditional Welsh mutton cawl, a mutton and ginger dish, and a spicy coconut and black pepper casserole.

It is now very well established that a key to getting people to buy quality mutton is to get them to taste it first, as they will very rarely be disappointed.

The versatility is also appealing, be it traditional roasted leg or shoulder, more alternative casseroles, curries, burgers, sausages and chops, or simple dishes made from leftovers. Added-value products include mutton ham and mutton bacon (macon) are also becoming increasingly available, while a resurging interest in slow cookers is perfect for mutton – just put the ingredients in the pot before you leave for work and enjoy a tasty, melt-in-the-mouth meal when you get home.

With all the elements there for quality mutton to continue its current revival in popularity, the key is supply of quality mutton animals. It is a great enterprise for farmers to try, with minimal extra investment other than your time, but you need to consider certain factors:-

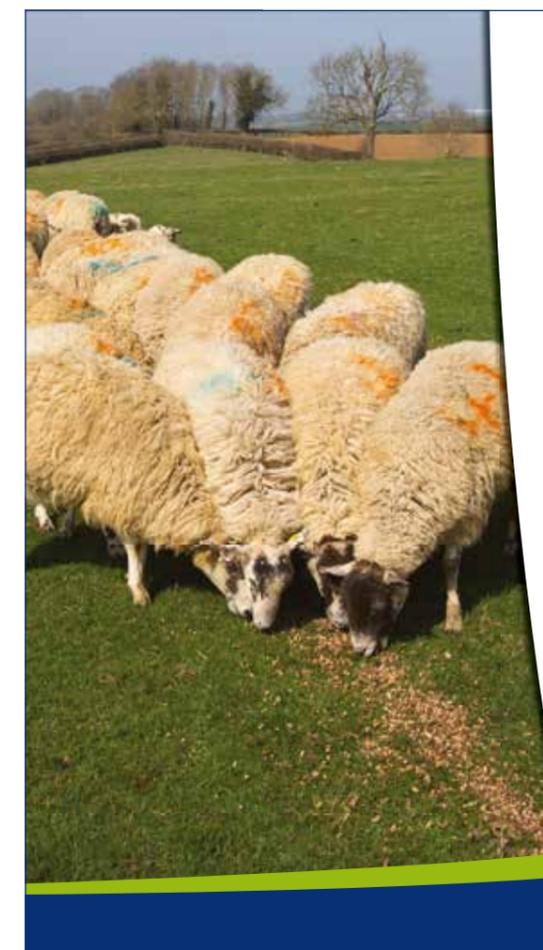
- Quality mutton is a specific crop, not a disposal system for older sheep.
- You need a well-fleshed animal (normally ewes) and a correct level of finish.
- Find a local abattoir with cutting and packing facilities and potential local customers in the form of butchers, farm shops or caterers.
- Create a clear marketing message



Handing out mutton samples from the NSA stand at the Welsh Winter Fair.

around the breed of animal, its age and feed and the landscape it was reared in. That will give farmer-producers a marketing edge over the mass market meat product.

Find Lavinia's mutton with coconut and black pepper recipe at [www.muchadoaboutmutton.com/recipes](http://www.muchadoaboutmutton.com/recipes) and more information for mutton producers at [www.nsamutton.org.uk](http://www.nsamutton.org.uk).



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# NSA's new weigh crate giveaway

NSA is thrilled to announce it has four IAE lamb weigh crates, each worth more than £500, to give away in its 2017 membership recruitment prize giveaway.

New members will automatically be entered into the draw, but if you are already an NSA member there are even more chances to win. You can gain multiple entries by simply recommending friends, neighbours or anyone who might be interested in signing up to the organisation. The more people you recommend the more entries you earn, and each time a winner is picked all non-winning entries roll over to the next draw.

## Top prize

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "NSA is delighted to be able to offer these fantastic prizes, with much thanks owed to IAE for its generosity. With no shortage of industry reminders around the importance of hitting target specifications when selecting lambs



for slaughter, it is kit like this that can help producers be more vigilant at every opportunity."

Jack Jackson, IAE Sales Manager, says: "IAE is proud to be associated with NSA for its 2017 membership

## The prize

Each weigh crate comes with front and rear gates, wheels and handles, as well as lugs to allow the unit to be incorporated within a handling system if required. The 100kg mechanical weigh head is standard, with the option for winners to upgrade to the electronic equivalent at their own cost.

recruitment prize draw. The weigh crates are part of our range of high quality and durable animal handling products – and we will be happy to discuss with winners the possibility of upgrading the mechanical weigh crate to one of our Scanweigh range of weighers."

Full terms and conditions at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw).



# Hill farm to host NSA Welsh Sheep



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Email: [helen@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:helen@nationalsheep.org.uk)

TICKETS £12 NON-MEMBERS  
**Free entry for NSA members**

For more information please visit [www.welshsheep.org.uk](http://www.welshsheep.org.uk)

A traditional family farm with spectacular views over one of the largest reservoirs in South Wales will provide the setting for NSA Welsh Sheep 2017, to be held on Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> May.

Llwyn Bedw, a farm rented from Dwr Cymru (Welsh Water), lies in the heart of the Brecon Beacons with grazing stretching towards Pen y Fan. It is the home of Stephen and Lisa Williams and son Luke, who at 21 is the fifth generation of the family at the farm. Stephen's father Godfrey is also heavily involved with running the 3,500 ewes and 70 suckler cows.

Godfrey, who established a successful contracting business before returning home to farm in 1981, was born the year that Talybont-on-Usk was flooded to supply Newport with water. He relishes his role in supporting future generations and says his daughter-in-law is 'the best shepherdess in the area'.

With 400ha (1,000 acres) under fence and hill rights on 900ha (3,000 acres), the farm supports 3,000 hefted Talybont-type ewes (Welsh cross Cheviot) and 500 Charollais cross Talybont-type ewes.

The family is looking forward to the event but, since they don't turn the cattle out until 1<sup>st</sup> May, say it will be a bit of a rush to get sorted. They take pride in keeping the farm tidy and enjoy sharing their lifestyle and experiences with visitors.

Stephen is particularly keen to demonstrate the part farmers play in creating and conserving the Brecon Beacons National Park, as he feels too many people assume it is primary concern of environmentalists, whereas farmers are the true day-to-day custodians.

More information at [www.welshsheep.org.uk](http://www.welshsheep.org.uk).



# Join NSA today for a chance to win an IAE LAMB WEIGH CRATE



NSA has four weight crates to give away throughout 2017. The sooner your names goes in the hat the more chances you have to win. Closing date is Thursday 2nd November 2017.

Your membership subscription will facilitate the vital work NSA does on behalf of the UK sheep sector, as well as allowing you to access a number of membership benefits - find out more at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership).

Already an NSA member? Fill in your details and pass this leaflet on to a friend so you too can enter the draw



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Please state where you obtained this form from and your reasons for joining:

Your Sheep Enterprise

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No of bought-in store lambs finished per year? .....

SF



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Service user number

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To: The Manager Bank/building society

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Signature(s)

Date

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

Has an existing NSA member recommended you? Details of member recommending (required for valid entry)

Existing members name, membership number, address including post code:

Already an NSA member? To be entered into the draw, fill in your details here and pass this leaflet to a friend to sign up

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## County Durham host

The thriving family partnership of W.H. Smith and Sons in County Durham is to host NSA North Sheep 2017 on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> June.

Not only will the event provide visitors with a wealth of opportunity to hear from industry experts and visit hundreds of trade stand exhibitors, but will also provide an insight into how the farm operates its commercial sheep enterprise of 1,350 ewes and 300 suckler cows.

The one-day biennial northern showcase of the sheep industry will give farmers access to information on the sheep sector's latest developments through topical seminars and workshops running through the day. New for this year is a Lamb Festival Corner. Dedicated to British lamb production, this brand-new area will be highlighting the diversity of lamb through recipes and information.

### Trade stand space

Those wanting to take a trade stand at next year's NSA North Sheep can do so online, with a dedicated breeders trade stand package new for this year. Sponsorship opportunities are also available.

Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Event Organiser, says: "NSA North Sheep provides an ideal shop window for businesses and breeders to hear about the latest industry and consumer information. There is a growing trend for breeders choosing to promote their own stock to customers and that is why we have this year introduced a dedicated breeders trade stand package."

More on the event, with major sponsorship from rural chartered surveyors Vickers & Barrass in conjunction with Darlington Farmers Auction Mart, at [www.northsheep.org.uk](http://www.northsheep.org.uk).

## Third Highland fling

NSA Scottish Region's biennial sheep event in the Scottish Highlands is to be held on a Ross-shire farm this year. The Clark family at Kinnahaird will host NSA Highland Sheep 2017 on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> May, showcasing their breeding ewes and suckler herd running across 365ha (900 acres).

Sybil Macpherson, NSA Scottish Region Chairman, says: "We are delighted the Clark family has kindly agreed to host NSA Highland Sheep. The previous two events were highly successful and attracted a large attendance of sheep farmers from all over the Scottish Highlands and further afield. I'm confident this year's event will be equally successful."

The annual multi-breed show and sale of ewe hoggs will be going ahead at the event this year, and sheep breeders in the Scottish Highlands and Islands and further afield are being urged to start looking out for suitable sheep now.

Mrs Macpherson continues: "The show and sale provides an opportunity for breeders to showcase their top ewe hoggs and has attracted strong buying interest in previous years with four-figure prices achieved. Entries for the show and sale may have to be limited and I would urge prospective exhibitors to start thinking about what they might want to enter and get their entries in early."

The entry fee is £25+VAT per pair with prize money on offer for first, second and third place. This year for the first time there will be an overall championship attracting a cash prize of £100. The closing date for entries is Friday 12<sup>th</sup> May.

More on the event, with Harbro as major sponsor this year, at [www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org).



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Further Info, Competition & Trade Stand Application Forms from  
 Euan Emslie, NSA Highlandsheep Organiser  
 T: 01430 441870 M: 07718 908523 E: [euan@nsascotland.org](mailto:euan@nsascotland.org)  
**[www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org)**

## Could you use the law to become the legal owner of unclaimed land?

By Tim Russ, Roythornes Solicitors  
**Adverse possession is the process where a person becomes the legal owner of a piece of land by possessing it for a specified period of time. It can therefore be used to determine when the grazing of livestock on another person's land amounts to a claim for a squatters' title.**

Two elements are needed to claim a piece of land, regardless of whether it is registered or unregistered:-

- **Factual possession:** A court would look at whether the applicant has shown a sufficient degree of exclusive physical control over the land.
- **Intention to possess:** This requires that the applicant treat the land as their own to the exclusion of all others, including the actual legal owner of the land.

Adverse possession claims normally relate to small residential boundaries, such as a fence mistakenly put a couple feet onto neighbouring garden, so matters are more complex for a pastoral farmer grazing a certain piece of land for a number of years. For example, the claim must show the possession was without permission of the landlord so the first very common stumbling block is if, at any point, the livestock was grazed under a licence. Any written or oral agreements that granted permission for a farmer to graze livestock on a certain piece of land will be fatal to any claim.

### Evidence

Another issue can be proving factual possession and intention to possess. Many farmers seeking an adverse possession claim on the basis they have fenced the land (factual possession) have often struggled to prove the fencing was intended to operate as a means of retaining exclusive control of the land (intention to possess) rather than to contain livestock.

Any applicant will have to evidence something more than just fencing off the land and grazing sheep for the requisite period of time. Activities such as constructing barns, creating hard-core tracks and laying water pipes are all good examples of activities that imply the applicant is treating the land as their own. However, it should always be remembered expenditure on a contested adverse application may well be challenged and proof such as photos and receipts will be essential.



The Land Registration Act 2002 has made adverse possession claims more complicated, but not impossible.

The Land Registration Act 2002 has further complicated adverse possession claims. Under the old scheme all that was required for a claim on unregistered land was to establish factual possession and intention to possess for 12 years. Now an applicant is entitled to apply to be registered as the proprietor of a registered estate only if they can prove to the Land Tribunal that it had been in adverse possession of the estate for 10 years. This means you only have a right to make the application, as opposed to having the land transferred to you. The Land Registry will notify the landlord of the application and allow them to serve a counter notice to oppose it.

### Objections

For unregistered land, the landlord's only right of objection would be to state the applicant has not satisfied the factual possession of the land or did not have the requisite intention to possess. For registered land, the landlord can also request that the registrar (the Land Tribunal judge) reject the application unless a squatter can establish one or more of three conditions as set out in the legislation.

**1. Estoppel:** The applicant must show it would be unfair to be dispossessed of the property and that the circumstances are such that they should be registered as the proprietor. The tribunal would look at

whether the legal owner encouraged the applicant to expend money on the land and/or allowed him to believe the land was his.

**2. Some other right to the land:** The applicant must prove an entitlement to be registered as a proprietor of the estate based on some reason other than having been in adverse possession for 10 years. For example, if the applicant had contracted to buy the land and paid for it but there was no transfer of the legal estate.

**3. Reasonable mistake on boundaries:** This is most likely not applicable to livestock grazing, given that any applicant would probably be more concerned about a number of acres as opposed to a few feet on a boundary line.

It is worth noting an applicant can make a second application registration as a proprietor of the estate if the first application is rejected but they remain in adverse possession of the land for another two years from the date of the first application. In this scenario, the registered proprietor automatically loses the land and the squatter becomes entitled to be registered as the new proprietor.

NSA members are entitled to half an hour of free legal advice with Roythornes, to discuss adverse possession claims or any other issue. Details in the members-only area at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk).

# Lengthy consultation results in clear Brexit priorities for NSA

Via its network of regions and various committees, NSA has spent several months consulting with members and office holders about what the sheep sector wants in a post-Brexit world. While many varied views have been expressed, a great deal of common ground has enabled a policy position to be put together and be summarised here.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "What became abundantly clear through our consultation exercise was how little appetite there was for continuing with the status quo. Despite the many unanswered questions and considerable concern about European and global trade deals, many sheep farmers see Brexit as an opportunity to implement a better farm support system and review much of the cumbersome legislation we're saddled with.



The immediate concern is market access to export destinations.

"Therefore, the first priorities to come out of the NSA consultation were consistency between the four UK nations and the necessary budget to ensure we are not disadvantaged from our current position."

## Public goods relating to sheep farming

- Production of affordable, quality food that contributes to health and nutrition.
- Contribution to national food security.
- Protection of natural capital, such as air, water, soil and carbon.
- Grazing for biodiversity and habitat management.
- Water catchment management.
- Positive role of permanent and rotational grass, as well as forage crops and livestock within predominantly arable regions.
- Landscape aesthetics.
- Contribution to public health and wellbeing through access and enjoyment.
- Value provided for benefit of other rural businesses, such as rural tourism.
- Employment and economic development in rural areas / prevention of rural depopulation.
- Maintenance of rural society, heritage and skills.
- Sheep genetic diversity.
- High animal health status and good welfare.

## NSA Brexit priorities

- A common, UK-level framework for trade development, farm support and regulation, developed in partnership and with combined effort from four nations.
- No reduction in UK funding for farming, land management and rural development, accepting a shift towards delivery of public goods
- Fair funding for the four UK nations, ring-fenced within each region for farming/ land management and rural development.
- Development of the domestic market for sheep meat.
- Continued, tariff-free access to the EU single market, plus bespoke trade deals with non-EU markets that give special protection to agricultural goods to mitigate any negative impact on the sheep sector.
- Visas for migrant labour from other countries where the need exists, for example permanent positions in abattoirs and seasonal shearing work.
- A mechanism to shift from 'income foregone' to 'reward for public good' within World Trade Organisation rules.
- A further broadening of the definition of public goods beyond agri-environment.
- Recognition of the value of grassland and pastoral sheep farming.
- Use of 'earned recognition' for sheep farmers who choose to join an assurance or certification scheme to simplify current inspection processes and reduce the role of RPA.
- Maintenance of the core regulatory framework to protect trade and reputation – but a move to more flexible and practical regulatory delivery with tolerance levels.
- Improved rural infrastructure.
- A viable sector where sheep numbers can be maintained and skilled new/young entrants encouraged to progress.

While the timeline for turning our aspirations for future farm support and regulation into reality is slightly longer, issues around markets and trade are very immediate. NSA has been clear through its engagement with ministers that we want access to the single market and tariff-free trade, as well extreme caution to be exercised around free trade deals. Despite recent announcements by the Prime Minister not being in line with this, NSA will continue to be among the large number of organisations and individuals speaking out against a 'hard Brexit'. Given the many years it will take to build up export deals, both with partners we already trade with and new countries,

NSA is also giving equal priority to the domestic market.

Mr Stocker says: "The domestic market for UK sheep meat must be further developed and flexibility provided to allow promotion and branding of UK product, in addition to protecting our market from products not meeting our standards and keeping current PGI and PDO brand, Borders between our four nations must remain open and steps be taken to ensure we all operate on a level playing field for production, sheep health and welfare and agri-environmental standards, rural development and farm support structures."

## Farm support

When it comes to future farm support, NSA believes there is clear justification for taxpayers' money being allocated to agriculture. This is due to the hugely important role farm businesses play in the provision of public goods that are not paid for by the current marketplace – see panel. However, following an essential transition period from the EU Basic Payment Scheme to its post-Brexit successor, NSA believes improvements could be made to the current system of distribution and administration.

Mr Stocker explains: "NSA supports a BPS successor that works to the principle of incentivising good farming that delivers good public services. Such

## Non-Brexit activity continues

It is frustrating that Brexit has massively slowed down areas of activity where NSA was working with other stakeholder groups and felt progress was being made, such as changes to carcass splitting rules and tolerance on eartag read rates.

However there are other topics, unrelated to Brexit, where work is continuing. This includes ongoing promotion of the NSA report on the *Complementary role of sheep in upland and hill areas*, which was the topic for an exhibition in the Houses of Parliament just before Christmas. The four-day event (pictured) culminated with a reception hosted by Farming Minister George Eustice and involving a number of MPs, Government officials and invited guests. NSA plans to build on the success of the report with the release of a similar paper in summer 2017 highlighting the role of sheep in arable rotations.

It has become clear in recent weeks that a great many Schmallenberg cases have been seen in early lambing flocks. Initially rumours were not backed up by cases being confirmed by APHA, but an increase in lambs submitted for post



mortem inspection means more than 40 cases were confirmed by mid-January, some as far north as Northumberland. NSA is engaging with animal health companies as, due to low vaccine sales in 2016, there is no guarantee the industry will be able to protect itself in the future.

The Lynx UK Trust is continuing its campaign to introduce the high level predator in Kielder Forest, which spans the England-Scotland border. NSA is highlighting the underhand nature in which Lynx UK is operating and has been reassured by Natural England and Scottish Natural Heritage that strict procedures will be followed if and when a licence application for release is submitted.

a scheme would only pay for activity, therefore supporting businesses and individuals who are taking risk in what is an increasingly volatile market. This should include landless livestock keepers that have historically been excluded from support structures in the past, and be structured so farmers can access the money in a straightforward way without the need to use agents."

## Delivery options

NSA would like to see this delivered through four main schemes:-

- Capital investment support / grant funding to encourage investment in efficiency and agri-environmental improvements. This would include

farm buildings, handling systems, fencing, drainage, bracken management, manure storage and lime.

- Best practice/efficiency schemes, such as the NSAs proposed sheep health scheme to include farm health planning, specialist veterinary support, involvement in accreditation schemes, disease screening, post mortems, and health information that contributes to national disease pictures.
- A public goods reward scheme to recognise the delivery of benefits listed in the panel.
- Succession planning and facilitation, to enable older farmers to retire

and the next generation to come through. This would include: start-up loans and low interest loans for new entrants; percentage-based additional payments for young entrants; the relaxation of planning controls to encourage older farmers to retire yet remain on the farm; and tax breaks to encourage business succession.

Within this structure, there should be particular recognition for farming in upland, hill and marginal areas, potentially utilising the existing system of Less Favoured Areas and/or Areas of Natural Constraint. However, this should not be to the exclusion of other pastoral systems in all areas of the UK that provide similar public goods.

## Better regulation

The other element of Brexit specifically covered in the NSA consultation was regulation, which is an area where NSA wants to see UK government farming departments allocate personnel with appropriate skills to proactively work alongside industry organisations to exploit opportunities for improvements. This would include the immediate stripping back of sheep TSE controls, plus a review of sheep identification and movement rules, while always bearing in mind that any changes should not jeopardise export opportunities.

"NSA also wants the post-Brexit successor to BPS to be simplified and have less red tape. It must have integrated tolerance levels to ensure requirements are proportionate and realistic, and the current system of inspections should be replaced with earned recognition for farmers who choose to demonstrate good practice through, for example, meeting layers of farm assurance requirements."

The summary provided here is only a snapshot of the NSA position, which we will be talking about extensively in the agricultural press over the coming months. Contact your regional committee or NSA Head Office for more information.

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# More traits being captured in work to increase range of EBVs

By Laura Williams, NSA

**As Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) become increasingly accepted by the pedigree breeders generating the data behind them and the commercial farmers looking at them when purchasing stock, it is important to keep an eye on new work being done.**

Samuel Boon, Signet Manager, is particularly excited about new projects that will help the selection of sheep with superior maternal genetics. He says: "There is a real buzz of interest in selective breeding within maternal breeds at the moment, with new across flock evaluations being produced for Romney and Roussin sheep, expansion of Poll Dorset recording into Northern Ireland and continued growth in the recording of wool shedding composites and crossing sires, like the Bluefaced Leicester."

Research involving maternal traits includes:-

- Development of new EBVs for ewe longevity and age at first lambing to help producers enhance ewe lifetime productivity.
- Completion of research into lamb survival, result in a potential new EBV.
- Increased support for projects to understand the genetic influences on ewe mature size, including enhanced breeding indexes for Lleyn sheep to optimise (rather than maximise) prolificacy and limit excessive increases in ewe mature size.

"Many maternal traits have traditionally been hard to influence through selective breeding, but access to large datasets of well recorded data, brings genetic solutions back within our reach" Mr Boon says.

Funding from AHDB Beef & Lamb is allowing much of this work to go ahead, including research at SRUC into developing EBVs for economically viable traits using novel measurements from CT scanning. While CT scanning has been used to assess body composition of sheep for 20 years, with more than 10,000 ram lambs scanned in this time, the team at SRUC is now looking to produce EBVs for vertebrae number and spine length and CT-predicted intramuscular fat and eye muscle area across the loin. Mr Boon says this work will have the potential to benefit producers to find greater consistency in the quality and quantity of lambs, and consumers who will find better eating quality at lower cost. The project hopes to make the EBVs routinely available by the end of 2017.

## Saliva testing

Another exciting project is the result of work conducted at Glasgow University that found high levels of the parasite-specific antibody IgA regulates the growth and reproductive rate of worms, resulting in a decreased egg output. Levels of IgA can be recorded from samples of saliva, which is easier and less costly than taking faecal samples for egg counts, and can also be used to indicate IgA levels even if sheep have been wormed.

Farm Innovation Grants (FIGs) from AHDB Beef & Lamb in 2013 and 2015 have supported the work of the Performance Recorded Lleyn Breeders group in investigating genetic influences on saliva IgA, converting these into EBVs to allow more informed future breeding decisions. More than 5,000 samples of Lleyn saliva have been collected and uploaded



More measurements taken by SRUC's commercial CT scanning and measuring service are now being used for EBVs.

to the Signet database since 2013, alongside the ongoing collection of FEC data. The result is that an updated EBV for faecal egg count, specific to strongyle and nematodirus worms, and a new saliva IgA EBV are now available to Lleyn breeders.

## Commercial application

Mr Boon continues: "The Lleyn breeders we have worked with are really enthusiastic about the potential for this new technology and its application to the selection of genetically superior sheep. An impact on progeny performance will hopefully be seen following planned matings between high EBV animals for these traits."

Richard Evans, a Lleyn breeder from Norfolk, is Chairman of Performance Recorded Lleyn Breeders (PRLB). He says developing this novel technology into a practical way of assessing lambs' resistance to worms in a commercial setting has been a really exciting step for the group. He believes selecting future breeding stock using the EBV is a step forward in the fight against anthelmintic resistance and that, as activity continues to develop with both FECs and saliva, it will ensure future Signet-recorded Lleyn breeding animals are more resilient to



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Performance Recorded Lleyn Breeders are working together to utilise saliva data for a commercially available EBV.

worm infestation and drop fewer eggs onto pastures to contaminate other sheep.

Mr Evans says: "We all know the sheep industry is facing major challenges from anthelmintic resistance, with some farms finding it may become impossible for them to continue in sheep. PRLB is ideally placed to take part in this cutting-edge research, with large numbers of commercially produced recorded lambs on the ground. As an individual farmer, the research offers me the opportunity to identify the most resilient stock and pass this on to our customers."

## Performance-recorded prize for NSA members

At NSA Sheep 2016, John and Sarah Yeomans of Newtown, Powys, won a competition to have the use of three performance recorded Bluefaced Leicester ram lambs for the 2016 tupping season.

The couple jumped at the opportunity, already being advocates of progressive and profitable farming methods and employing performance recording technology wherever possible. They used the ram lambs, all from the top 25% of the recorded Bluefaced Leicester breed, across a selection of their Beulah Speckled Face Sheep in October and November, each to a separate group of females. Their performance will be diligently recorded by Mrs Yeomans at birth, eight weeks and until they are sold for either breeding or slaughter.

Mr Yeoman says: "We are very pleased to have won this prize and look forward to seeing how the progeny of the performance recorded Bluefaced Leicester rams do."

The competition was an initiative organised by Progressive Breeders,



The three Bluefaced Leicester ram lambs that John and Sarah Yeoman won the use of at NSA Sheep 2016.

a group of performance recorded Bluefaced Leicester breeders, and were all qualifying sires for the Welsh Mule Society's Performance Mule Scheme.

## More data

Aled Jones from Progressive Breeders says: "Progressive Breeders have been collecting data for many years and we are very grateful to John and Sarah for the work they will complete in the spring and summer of 2017. We look forward to reporting on the outcome and hope it will encourage other commercial farmers to consider the benefits of choosing performance recorded Bluefaced Leicester rams."

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# EID technology a valuable management tool for Warwickshire one-man-band

By Hannah Park, NSA

**Running a flock over multiple land parcels might present its logistical challenges at times, but it's a set up Antony Spencer has mastered at Lower Quinton, Warwickshire, making the most of ground at its most productive to suit his system at different times of the year.**

Starting from scratch at the age of 21, Antony is certainly proof that hard work and determination pays. He built up his sheep enterprise on the back of working in Stratford Market and later establishing his own contact shearing and jetting rounds, gradually building up his sheep numbers alongside.

"The beauty of sheep farming is that you can start with very little and work your way up," he says. "If you've got a bit of a brain and you've got a tongue in



Antony Spencer.

your head to go and ask people about keep, then you're away."

It is this positive outlook that has seen Antony become a familiar face in the local area and, more recently, as NSA Marches Region Chairman after taking up the post in November 2016.

With Vicarage Farm as the central hub of around 30ha (75 acres) of owned land, Antony takes 100ha (240 acres) of rented grazing during the summer months and 80ha (200 acres) of stubble turnips rented on a per acre basis during the winter.

## Breeding ewes

The sheep enterprise is split, consisting of a 350-head flock of mainly Mule ewes alongside a flying flock of 250-300 North Country Mule ewe lambs bought annually from Kirkby Stephen and Cockermonth markets. Antony has also recently started keeping back around 100 homebred Suffolk cross ewe lambs each year to put into an early lambing group due in February. Everything is lambed to the Suffolk, Texel or Hampshire Down tup, with the Mules lambing from 20<sup>th</sup> March and ewe lambs from 5<sup>th</sup> April.

"The earlier lambing flock is a new thing really. I'll lamb them for two years and sell on as double theaves in the autumn at either Stratford or Rugby market," says Antony, adding that the thinking behind it is to hit the spring lamb market and get a bit of cashflow in the early summer months, but also have more breeding stock to sell in the earlier sales. The rest of the homebred stock is either sold as stores or finished off turnips and sold deadweight through Farmers Fresh or Tom James at Pye Corner Collection Centre.

With limited shed space, Antony lambs those scanned for twins outside, with triplets and singles kept indoors



Mule breeding ewes are lambed to a Suffolk, Texel or Hampshire tup, with some Suffolk Mule ewe lambs retained each year.

for easier management. Ewe lambs are lambed out as a separate group. Once lambed, ewes are kept on the holding for around a week before being moved to their summer keep, most of which Antony says is in a 10-mile radius of Vicarage Farm. In addition to the breeding ewes and their lambs, around 700-800 bought-in store lambs are also finished annually.

## Incoming stock

All purchases come through Vicarage Farm as a base, Antony explains. "We dip, dose and foot treat all bought-in animals before they go off to any keep," he says. "I go really hard at them as I'm a firm believer that if you get onto stock and sort any problems out quick enough you can get rid of most issues and it just makes life easier."

Before being treated, all incoming animals are weighed, electronically recorded and sorted into similar weight

decided to embrace EID technology as a management tool six years ago.

"It's massively useful when I keep so many sheep away from the main holding," he says. "Being able to scan and record every animal means I know exactly which and how many animals are going where. I've had problems in the past with animals going missing, so it helps to have a reliable record of the exact number that are supposed to be in a particular field in front of me. It also helps keep the legalisation boxes ticked. Doing moves all time, the new 10-mile rule will help me out massively.

## Weigh data

"Targeting worms is one of the main things I use weight data for, and I've also been doing my own FEC tests with my vet for a few years now, which has been really useful. When a lamb comes in the weigh

bunches. Antony says this has really helped with management decisions, particularly monitoring growth rates and timing worming treatments. This, as well as running the majority of the farm's stock away on keep, are reasons Antony



Up to 800 store lambs are bought in each year, finished during the winter months on stubble turnips.

crate now, I'm not so much looking at its weight on the day than its weight gain. I let the scales do the shedding with the weight and, so long as they're going the way they should be, then I'm happy.

## Growth rates

"I'd never of thought about it this way until I started using the scales and the EID reader, because it's just too much hassle to work out, but once it's done for you at the end of a weigh session it's there and it's easy. I think the old-fashioned way of worming lambs every three weeks, whether they need it or not, has well and truly gone out of the window. If we're not careful as an

industry, we are going to have some serious problems with resistance in the not too distant future.

"I'm careful about how I manage ground now too. As soon as you start looking at weigh data, you know what to expect from different fields. I've got fields where I'd hardly expect lambs

to put on 3kg over a six-month period, then I've got other ground they'll finish off in the same time. Once you know your ground, and know your lambs are growing at the rates you expect them to be growing at, you're away. That's how I work my system."

With plans to build flock numbers up to 1,000 ewes, Antony says he's confident the EID kit is a worthwhile investment. "If you offset it against the cost of things like labour and time, it

*Continued on next page.*

## Farm facts

- Vicarage Farm acts as the business hub, with 30ha (75 acres) of owned land.
- Breeding flock split into three – 350 North Country Mule ewes, 100 Suffolk Mule ewe lambs and a flying flock of 250-300 North Country Mule ewe lambs.
- Around 700-800 store lambs finished annually, alongside homebred stock.
- 100ha (240 acres) of grazing rented in the summer and 80 hectares (200 acres) in the winter.

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► speaks for itself," he says.

"I'll have 450 lambs in, weighed, drafted and be packed up in just under two hours. It just makes the whole process that much quicker and the farm has definitely got better since I started using the technology."

### Growing flock

Having always been a one-man-band previously, expansion plans have been fuelled by taking on Hartpury College apprentice Clarence Monk, who works for Antony four days a week. Antony says he'll probably look at breeding his own replacements and splitting the flock to allow for this growth, but will stick with the Mule ewes.

"I like the Mule as a sheep, it suits my system and I've



Ewe lambs are lambed in early April, while older ewes earlier in mid-March.



Antony says an efficient handling system is vital to his system.

always been a Mule man," he says. "One worrying thing at the minute though, with expansion in mind, is the Mule ewe lambs are just getting that bit too expensive. It's working for me in terms of replacements, as I buy them in to lamb and sell on and get replacements for my own flock on the back of it for next to nothing.

### Annual gain

"If you set a goal and keep trying to aspire to get closer to that goal every year then you've got to be going the right way. Fair enough, we all experience the unforeseen stuff, but in basic terms if you can be producing that little bit more each year off what you've got it's got to help. I can only see the sheep industry going one way, so we've got to aspire to be farming more savvy and more productively."



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# World title in sight for winning Welsh sheepdog competitor

By Wendy Short, contributor

**With a few months to digest the fact he is the current International Sheepdog Trial supreme champion, for the second time, Kevin Evans is far from thinking he's achieved everything he wants on the competition field.**

Sheepdogs continue to be the number one priority at Penclwyns Farm, Libanus, Brecon, as they have been for as long as Kevin can remember. A builder by trade, he was brought up on the farm by parents David (Dai) and Marion, with Dai also having enjoyed some trial success, representing Wales on no fewer than five occasions.

### World travel

Like many other top competitors, Kevin holds regular clinics at home, where farmers and trainers alike work with the Brecon Hill Cheviots on his 16ha (40-acre) smallholding. He also travels extensively, holding training courses all over Europe and the USA, where British sheepdog trainers are widely considered among the best in the world.

Kevin's kennel prefix is Kemi, a name which was chosen to pay tribute to a man whose help and encouragement played an influential role in his trialing career and who also gave him his first 'really good' dog. He explains: "Sadly Mostyn Isaac is no long with us. He never took part in trials, but he used to come and watch and his farm dogs were always trained to a very high standard. I was about 10 years old when he saw me struggling with an average sort of dog and he gave me Maid, a well-bred bitch that won a number of trials for me. Kemi is a name that I made up, using a combination of my initials, KE and Mostyn's, MI."

### Young success

It was with Maid that Kevin won the One Man and his Dog young handler competition at 13 years old. In the same year, the pair also represented Wales at the International, as well as picking up a number of first prizes at local events. However, it was not until his first International Trial win in 2008 that Kevin decided to make sheepdog training his main source of income. Since that date, trialing has experienced a rapid growth in popularity, particularly in Europe, where entry numbers have more than doubled, he says.

The most important element of training is the relationship

### International Competition

The International Sheepdog Trials are held annually by the International Sheepdog Society (ISDS). Handlers from the four UK nations qualify to represent their countries in teams of 15. After two days of qualifying, the best 15 teams go through to the International Supreme double-gather final on the third day.

Kevin was on home turf when he won the 2016 event, held at Sandilands Farm, Tywyn, Gwynedd. The 2017 competition will be 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> September at Lodge Park, Aldsworth, Gloucestershire, GL54 3PP, and will be preceded by the World Trial on 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> July in the Netherlands.



### Kevin Evans Fact File

- Qualified for the British Championship 13 times (eight different dogs, singles)
- Represented Wales 18 times in the Singles Championship
- Four times Welsh Brace Championship (singles)
- Supreme Championship 2008 and 2016 (Mirk and Ci, singles)
- Reserve Supreme Championship 2011 and 2014 (Greg, singles)
- Reserve World Championship 2014 (Greg, singles)
- Welsh National Championship 2011 and 2013 (Greg, Jimmy, singles)

Kevin Evans and bitch Ci won the international title in September 2016.

between dog and handler, stresses Kevin. "The dog has to suit your personality and it must want to work for you," he says. "I also like an intelligent dog that shows a natural ability to work sheep, without having to be directed too much. It should also be strong enough to move sheep and to be able to take commands."

Most competitors have a preference when it comes to dogs or bitches, and Kevin usually favours dogs. It is ironic, therefore, that his best competition dog at present is a bitch. Sired by Kemi Ross, Preseli Ci was taken as a service pup from

a litter bred by Arran Games, another trial competition winner.

"In general I prefer males, as they don't need time off because they're in season and it's useful to have a stud dog if it turns out to be a winner," he states. "Preseli Ci is the first bitch I've trialed since I ran Maid, but I could tell that she had something special when I saw her on sheep at eight months old. I have a lot of faith in her and I think she will continue to develop. I tend to concentrate on the singles competitions, although I will run a brace if I have two dogs that work well together."

### Future aspirations

It will come as no surprise to learn that Kevin met his partner, Sophie, on the trials field. She also represented Wales at last year's International and the couple have a three-year-old son called Ellis.

"We're hoping Ellis will show an interest in sheepdog training and he enjoys being around the dogs, although it's much too early to judge and we certainly don't want to push him into it," comments Kevin.

"My own ambition is to win the World Trial. I came second in 2014, losing out to Scotland's Michael Shearer by half a point because one of my sheep didn't go cleanly into the pen. This year's event will be held in the Netherlands for the first time in the competition's history. I definitely plan to be there and to give it my best shot."

# Maximising profit from grass by knowing ewe feed requirements

Kilograms of lamb weaned per hectare is a key driver of profit in sheep systems, according to New Zealand vet and livestock consultant Trevor Cook, speaking at a number of farmer meetings held by Quality Meat Scotland.



Ewe body condition affects scanning, lambing and rearing success.

The meetings were part of QMS's gazing group initiative, aimed at sheep farmers across Scotland keen to learn more about how to improve pasture management and optimise livestock production.

Mr Cook says ewes need to have sufficient high quality feed to drive that production and, when feed is short or nutritional requirements are particularly high, body condition is required to fill any deficit. However, by fully understanding the nutritional requirements of ewes at different points in the production cycle, farmers can maximise the use of grazed grass without compromising ewe output.

"Body condition at key points in the production cycle has an impact on scanning percentage, lamb birthweight, lamb survival, mothering ability, colostrum production and weaning weight," he says. "Using body condition scoring is the best measure to assess whether ewes' fitness is on target to conceive, deliver and wean lambs successfully."

## Condition scoring

"Ideally, condition scoring should take place at two key stages in the production cycle – scanning and post weaning. At both stages, there is an opportunity to identify the ewes that are below target and raise their condition so they can achieve optimum performance."

Mr Cook says condition scoring in-lamb ewes at scanning is a perfect opportunity for drawing out ewes below the target of body condition score (BCS) 3 for preferential feeding. Ewes expecting twins or triplets will struggle to consume their nutritional requirements in late pregnancy so often rely on their body reserves as a buffer. The period between scanning and the five weeks prior to lambing is the last chance to put condition onto thin ewes and hence build them up to BCS3 by lambing time.

Ewe body condition also has a massive impact on lamb survival, says Mr Cook. Research has shown that ewes in optimum condition at lambing (BCS3) give birth to decent-sized

lambs, have increased mothering ability, produce more milk and wean heavier lambs with higher survival rates.

At weaning farmers can draw out ewes with BCS lower than 3. Giving this group the best grass to graze with a minimum of 4cm good quality pasture will more than meet their energy requirements in order to raise their condition to BCS3. The advice is to budget for eight weeks to move up a condition score, but you can do it in six weeks. At this point, ewes with a score of BCS4 can actually be put onto poorer grass or used to tidy up paddocks. This will free up more pasture for the leaner ewes or finishing lambs.

Mr Cook believes reducing the number of very poor condition ewes going to the tup will deliver a big lift in scanning results and even eventual lamb performance. He says: "At both these key points of intervention, the farmer has an opportunity to influence body condition. Make it a target to minimise the number of ewes in your flock with less than BCS3 at tupping and lambing and you can expect to see significant increases in profitability."

Michael Blanche, QMS Knowledge Transfer Specialist, adds: "The correct nutrition of ewes lays the foundation for a successful and profitable flock, and knowing how to condition score is the simplest and most effective way to assess if you are feeding your ewes correctly."

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## Ewe nutrition timeline

To help farmers manage the condition of their ewes throughout the year, QMS has developed a ewe nutrition timeline poster containing a wealth of information about target BCS and feeding levels for ewes throughout the breeding season.

It highlights how maintaining condition score and being aware of the ewe's increasing nutritional requirements are important for production efficiency and, therefore, profitability. It also highlights the 'golden 20 days' around tupping when farmers are encouraged to offer ewes the best quality grass to enhance ovulation rates and embryo survival, and it can help producers select a lambing date to maximise the availability of high-quality spring grass to drive lactation.

The timeline is aimed at pasture-based lowland or upland flocks lambing late-March onwards, and can be viewed and downloaded free of charge at [www.qmscotland.co.uk](http://www.qmscotland.co.uk).

# Getting feeding right pre-lambing

Correct nutrition in the last six weeks before lambing is crucial to achieve peak performance at the best cost, says Nick Berni of For Farmers, and a key part is knowing the nutritional quality of forage.

"We know meeting the nutritional requirements of a ewe in the lead up to lambing ensures strong lambs are born, ready to be finished quickly and cost effectively," he says. "However, formulating a pre-lambing feeding plan is not a case of doing the same thing every year. The nutritional quality

of your forage can significantly vary and this will affect how much and what type of concentrate you need to feed.

## Forage tests

"Take the time to test your forage and calculate your purchased feed requirements carefully. Remember that just as under-feeding can result in losses and weak lambs, feeding unnecessary

concentrate soon eats into profits."

Mr Berni gives big bale grass silage as an example, as the huge variation in quality (see table) means the concentrate requirement of a ewe being fed bales in the top 25% can be 0.1kg less per day in the sixth week prior to lambing than one being fed bottom 25% quality, increasing to 0.2kg per ewe per day in the final week. Not only do poorer quality forages require more concentrate

Average big bale silage samples 2016		
	Top 25%	Bottom 25%
Dry matter (DM)	57%	34%
Protein	13.7% DM	10% DM
Energy	10.6MJ/kg DM	9.5MJ/kg DM
Fibre (NDF)	51% DM	61% DM

to be fed but, potentially, a higher protein product too.

Home-mixing cereals can be a good way to reduce feed costs, but Mr Berni warns again that getting the diet wrong can be costly if it doesn't meet nutritional requirements. He recommends rations are well balanced and supplemented with additional protein and digestible fibre, as well as vitamins and minerals.

Vitamin E is important for lamb vigour, calcium can help prevent hypocalcaemia and magnesium will reduce incidences



Ensure post-lambing success with pre-lambing nutrition.

of hypomagnesaemia at grass. Trace elements such as selenium, cobalt, and iodine are important to help improve lamb health, while zinc supplementation will reduce the risk of mastitis and lameness in ewes.

# New Products

## Animal nutrition guide

Limagrain has published its Monarch Ley Mixture 2017 brochure with the inclusion of a new LG Animal Nutrition (LGAN) accreditation on a selection of the mixtures being sold. The company says the LGAN mixtures have delivered more energy in trials than conventional mixtures, through a combination of high sugar, protein and digestible fibre levels.

The brochure includes LGAN-accredited intensive and extended grazing mixtures and cutting mixtures. Some now include two new grass varieties, Pensel and Timing, which were developed to improve yield, disease resistance and forage quality.

Request a copy on 01472 370117 or [sophie.li@limagrain.co.uk](mailto:sophie.li@limagrain.co.uk), or view it online at [www.lgseeds.co.uk/monarch](http://www.lgseeds.co.uk/monarch).

## UK launch for USA app

An American company called EDJE had made its 'Sheep Book' smart phone app available to producers in the UK. Available for iPhone and Android devices, it allows farmers to input data even when phone signal is not available, and can be set up so one account can be used by more than one person

working with a flock. Lambing, breeding and health data imputed directly into the phone can then be accessed and used on a computer via [www.sheepbook.net](http://www.sheepbook.net). A free 30-day trial is available.

Download the app at the Apple App Store or via Google Play.

## Scottish picture book

A wonderful new book is available with photographs of 300 Scottish farmers and interviews with 200 of them. *300 Farmers of Scotland* (pictured) covers everything Scottish agriculture has to offer, from the Highlands to the lowlands, and includes owner-occupiers, tenant farmers, share farmers, crofters, farm managers, starter farmers and new entrants. There are systems from 10 acres to 31,000 acres with people as diverse as the landscapes and environment in which they work. It has been compiled by Eilidh



MacPherson, who run a hill sheep farmer with her husband while also publishing the Farming Country magazine.

Copies available for £25 by emailing [editor@farmingscotland.com](mailto:editor@farmingscotland.com).

## Practical guides

Two new books are available from 5M Publishing. *Sheep and Goat Diseases*, written by veterinary specialist Dr Johannes Winkelmann, provides an overview of diseases of veterinary importance, including emerging diseases. Each disease comes with clear illustrations and preventative medicine is also extensively discussed with practical tips for good husbandry techniques.

*A Practical Guide to the Feeding of Organic Farm Animals*, written by animal scientist Robert Blair, distils the science of feeding organic livestock into practical guidance. It has sections for sheep, poultry, pigs, cattle and goats, reviewing the nutritional requirements of each and covering the relationship to a preventative approach to health.

Order copies at [www.5mbooks.com](http://www.5mbooks.com) for £24.95 each.

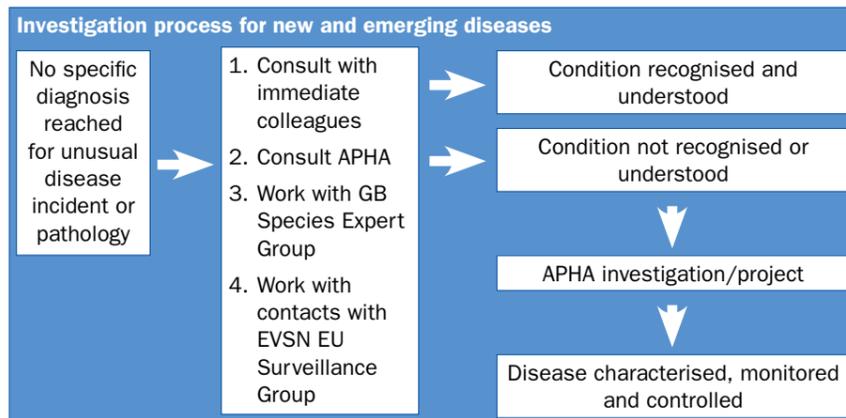
# Free carcase collection services available for post mortem cases

By Amanda Carson, Animal Plant and Health Agency

Following a review of contracts held by non-APHA surveillance partners to provide post mortem examination services, a free carcase collection service has been rolled out to more areas in England.

While surveillance services available in Wales remain the same, the changes in England from 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2017 mean more farmers will benefit from carcase collection services where a vet has recommended a post mortem should be carried out for disease surveillance and diagnostic purposes.

Scanning surveillance post mortem examination services in England are currently provided through a mixture of APHA's own Veterinary Investigation Centres (VICs) and a number of non-APHA partners – see list on page 25. Post mortems have also been provided through the use of fallen stock sites in some areas of England, but the use of sites under contract to APHA will now



cease.

Within the catchment area of the APHA and non-APHA facilities, usually around an hour's drive time from the centre, farmers are asked to transport their own carcasses. However, outside these catchment areas, there is a network of contractors who can collect and transport livestock carcasses for investigation. While there is a charge

for the post mortem service, carcase collection is provided free of charge to farmers, although only where a post mortem is required; the services are not provided for the purposes of general carcase disposal.

Carcase collection contractors will deliver carcasses to a VIC or non-APHA partner site to carry out the post mortem. But please note, arrangements

## Examples of unusual diseases investigated

- Agalactiae in ewes
- Anaemia secondary to administration of cow colostrum
- Anthelmintic resistance monitoring
- Epidermolysis bullosae
- Ethylene glycol poisoning
- Microphthalmia in Texels
- Oxytetracycline toxicity
- Schmallenberg resurgence
- Suspected contagious agalactia
- Tay Sachs disease in Jacob sheep
- Vitamin A toxicity in milk powder



Coverage is a combination of APHA services and non-APHA partners.

can only be made between the post mortem site and your private vet; please do not try to make your own arrangements.

APHA works with these partners to provide post mortem services, as this is a vital part of disease surveillance activity to detect and investigate new and re-emerging animal diseases. It also helps us understand disease patterns and trends. The Government subsidises some

diagnostic services, so we can provide information and intelligence to Ministers, vets and farmers to help reduce disease impacts.

We use a standard investigation procedure to look for the unusual – see diagram on page 24. This includes:-

- Unresponsive diseases, including antimicrobial resistance or anthelmintic resistance. We perform research to develop new tests to help us detect changes.
- Specific conditions, such as notifiable diseases including bluetongue, contagious agalactia and Schmallenberg.
- Severe manifestations of diseases, such as where many animals are affected and/or have died. We perform farm visits to help identify what the problem is and if it is something new.
- Infections and diseases in animals that can affect people (zoonoses) like salmonella, as well as incidents where toxins or poisonings of livestock threaten food safety.

All the data collected from the diagnostic services provided by APHA, SAC and non-APHA partners is used to monitor national livestock disease patterns and trends, and support early warning surveillance for the detection of new, re-emerging and unusual diseases.

### APHA VICs

- Bury St Edmunds
- Carmarthen
- Penrith
- Shrewsbury
- Starcross
- Thirsk
- Lasswade (Birds)

### Non-APHA Partners

- Bristol University
- Royal Veterinary College
- SAC St Boswells
- Surrey University
- Wales Veterinary Science Centre



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# Avoid Johne's management crisis by keeping your flock disease-free

By Ed Hill, Thrums Veterinary Group, Angus



**Johne's disease is well recognised in cattle, however in sheep it often goes undiagnosed and can have a serious impact on flock health and welfare, as well as farm profits.**

It is unknown what percentage of flocks are infected with Johne's in the UK and any approximations are likely to be grossly underestimated due to widespread under-reporting. For those living with the disease there are a number of management actions to reduce its impact, and for those who believe their flock is unaffected active monitoring and sound biosecurity is crucial.

## Symptoms

Johne's disease is caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium avium paratuberculosis* (MAP). It invades the cells of the intestine, where it causes severe thickening of the tissues resulting in sheep being unable to effectively utilise the nutrients provided by the diet.

Diagnostic options available		
Test	Pros	Cons
Blood: antibodies	Cheap	Only useful in advanced cases
Blood: proteins	Cheap. Can support a diagnosis	Not specific
Dung: microscopy	Cheap and quick	Only useful in advanced cases
Dung: PCR	Very sensitive and can pick up earlier cases	Expensive
Dung: culture	Highly sensitive and can pick up earlier cases. Can be pooled to save costs	Can take 1-2 months for a result
Cull ewe screen (PM of 3-4 cull ewes at vet investigation lab)	Best screening method with a full range of follow up tests. Can detect other diseases	Moderately expensive and cull value of ewes foregone

This leads to the clinical picture most commonly seen with Johne's disease, of progressive weight loss and ultimately death despite having a good appetite. A swelling under the jaw may be present and dung may become soft; unlike with cattle, profuse diarrhoea is not a common feature.

MAP is shed in large numbers in the dung of affected sheep. It is also shed in milk. It is likely that sheep shed the bacteria in advance of showing signs of ill thrift. This means lambs can ingest the bacteria when suckling, from dirt around the udder or directly from milk

and colostrum. Sheep can also get the bacteria from dung in their environment, where it is very resistant and can survive for 12 months or longer.

Sheep can be infected with Johne's at any stage in their life, but infection usually needs to occur before four months of age for clinical disease to develop. The course of the disease is very long and sheep may live for years with the condition, as the bacteria slowly replicates in the gut before the animal loses condition and dies.

## Iceberg disease

Ewe deaths are the most obvious effect of Johne's, estimated at 1-5% but sometimes as high as 10%. This clearly impacts heavily on profits, with increased replacement costs and fallen stock disposal charges. However, Johne's disease is often referred to as an 'iceberg disease' where the greater losses may be not be immediately obvious but are hiding just below the surface. For Johne's this is ewes having a poorer body condition score (BCS), leading to poorer fertility and lower scanning percentages. Poor BCS will also lead to low lamb birth weights, poor colostrum production (quality and quantity) and reduced milk production, impacting on lamb mortality and growth rates for those that survive.

There are a number of tests available to determine if you have Johne's disease in your flock. None of them are perfect but they can be very useful if used in the correct way. If total ewe deaths across the flock exceed 5-7% per annum, or concern exists about poor body condition despite adequate nutrition, contact your vet to select the most appropriate diagnostic tests – see table. The saying that sheep like to die for no reason other than to frustrate their shepherd is often not true. Any unexplained deaths should

be checked out with a post mortem examination by your vet or local veterinary investigation laboratory.

Most flocks will find themselves in the fortunate position of not being infected with Johne's disease, which is important to maintain, as it is far easier to keep it out than control it once it's established. The difficulty comes from the fact none of the available tests are effective at picking up Johne's disease in its early stages. Culture of dung is the most reliable of the tests available for early detection so consider getting your vet to take samples from purchased animals during the quarantine period. No accreditation scheme exists for Johne's disease in sheep so where possible buy from as few and well trusted sources as possible. Active surveillance for the disease (and others) through regular post mortem examination of fallen stock is important to catch the disease early, should it enter the flock.



Take care when buying in stock. This ram is showing ill thrift and soft dung.

## Controlling Johne's disease in infected flocks

Total eradication of Johne's is not likely to be a realistic goal in flocks that are endemically – but much can be done to limit its effects.

- Maintain good hygiene at lambing time by keeping lambing pens clean and crutching ewes to avoid faecal contamination. Where possible, consider lambing outdoors.
- Provide mains water and drain wet areas where possible.
- Avoid co-grazing, as the disease spreads between sheep and cattle.
- Control rabbits and deer, which can also spread the disease. Because of the involvement of wildlife, total de-stocking and repopulation is not a viable option.

**Culling:** While a 'test and cull' policy can be used in cattle it is rarely practical in sheep, due to the nature of the tests, the large numbers of animals involved and associated costs. Therefore consider these actions instead:-

- Promptly cull ill thriven ewes, to realise some cull value before they die and reduce bacteria spread on pasture.
- Maintain a young flock with an

aggressive culling policy to remove ewe four years of age and older, if finances and replacement policy allow.

- Keep good records to ensure you do not keep ewe lamb replacements from affected ewes.

**Vaccination:** A very effective vaccine exists for the control of Johne's disease. It does not prevent sheep becoming infected with the disease but significantly reduces clinical signs of weight loss and death and minimises shedding of the bacteria in the dung. Culling of ewes due to Johne's needs to exceed approximately 4% for vaccination to be considered cost-effective and, if you go down that route, consider these actions:-

- Vaccinate all breeding stock, plus ewe lamb replacements at 4-16 weeks of age if homebred or immediately after purchase. One dose lasts the lifetime of the sheep.
- Be aware the vaccine can cause large lumps in sheep and self-injection can be dangerous.
- Remember vaccination is not a silver bullet and needs to be done in conjunction with good management.

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# Tackling endemic sheep diseases to cut greenhouse gas emissions

By Dr Philip Skuce, Moredun

**Grazing ruminants are responsible for a significant proportion of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with agriculture. For example, it is calculated they contribute around 50% of total agricultural emissions in Scotland.**



This is mainly through methane emissions as a natural by-product of the rumination process and nitrous oxide associated with manure. Reducing the emissions of ruminants is, therefore, central to reducing agricultural emissions, a key requirement for the UK Government to meet internationally agreed reduction targets.

Endemic, production-limiting diseases are a significant constraint on efficient and sustainable livestock production in the UK and beyond. Dealing effectively with endemic livestock diseases represents an opportunity to reduce emissions from the livestock sector, ideally without compromising productivity or farm economics.

Last year, researchers at Moredun were tasked by the Scottish Government to collaborate with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to deliver a rapid evidence assessment of the potential contribution that could be made towards reducing the intensity of greenhouse gas emissions from Scottish animal agriculture by eradicating or controlling livestock diseases, focusing on the main livestock species, cattle and sheep. A similar study into the carbon footprint associated with 10 major cattle health conditions was carried out by Adas in 2014.

## Reducing disease

Our assessment provided a comparative analysis of the available evidence for the control or eradication of 12 of the major livestock diseases in Scotland in terms of greenhouse gas abatement potential, cost-effectiveness and feasibility. This was based on qualitative analysis of the published and grey literature and expert opinion on disease prevalence, impacts on productivity and current control options. The assessment was further underpinned by quantifying the impacts of selected diseases on emissions and production using established greenhouse gas modelling methods. Overall, the evidence suggests that reductions in emissions intensity could be achieved through the implementation of cost-effective control measures that impact on the parameters that emissions intensity is particularly sensitive to. These include

- Ewe and cow fertility and abortion rates in beef and sheep systems
- Lamb and calf mortality and growth rates in beef and sheep systems
- Milk yield and cow fertility rates in dairy systems
- Feed conversion ratios in all systems

Both studies showed that greenhouse gas emission savings could be identified for all endemic production diseases

## The NSA view

NSA has been promoting the idea of Government-incentivised flock health schemes for a number of years now, seeing it as a sensible use of RDP-style funds. NSA recognises the positive potential impact on greenhouse gas emissions, as well as animal health and welfare, food production and farm profitability.

A pilot scheme in Wales, where farmers could work with a vet to prioritise disease concerns particular to their farm, worked well – and funding is anticipated to be available in England this year, albeit with a 'scab gateway' where farmers have to prioritise the control of sheep scab mites before any other disease.

NSA will continue to push for these types of schemes, particularly given the wholesale review of farm support that is due to take place post-Brexit.

*Lamb mortality and growth rates are just two impacts of endemic disease.*

to be more tractable than others in terms of the availability of practical diagnostic and control options.

In subsequent discussions with key livestock industry stakeholders it was felt that selecting one major disease to attempt to eradicate (e.g. Johne's Disease or liver fluke) would be difficult, given the nature of some of these diseases, the heterogeneity across the livestock sector and the different livestock species involved. Rather, it was felt that more could be achieved at a national level through an accumulation of 'marginal gains' by encouraging farmers to investigate the specific livestock health issues on their own farms and to implement best practice towards their control. This would include improved diagnosis, monitoring and biosecurity.

This could be incentivised, for example, by the Government through a national Health Planning Scheme, involving improved engagement with veterinary services. Discussions are ongoing with industry stakeholders and Government policy teams on how best to progress.

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# From South Wales to New South Wales - a genetic quest for Huw

**The new mantra for Huw Williams of Llandeilo, Carmarthenshire, is that the successful ram breeder knows exactly the genetic background of each and every sheep on the farm.**



He came to this conclusion following a six-week visit to see recording systems in operation in New Zealand and Australia, sponsored by Hybu Cig Cymru (Meat Promotion Wales). He applied for the scholarship because he wanted to learn more about the effectiveness of different technologies on extensive farms to determine parentage in stud flocks.

## Accurate ID

"I learnt that the best way to improve the flock is to take out the bottom third – but you have to be able to identify them accurately for that to be effective," he says. "I wanted to find out how different systems worked, how reliable they were, their suitability to Welsh hill farms and the cost of introducing and running them."

Huw learned his trade by helping his father on the 160ha (400-acre) family farm but, while he became keen to introduce different innovations, his father felt the traditional way of farming had produced results and did not warrant a change. He therefore supported Huw to rent 80ha (200 acres) and start to build his own business alongside the family farm. Together the farms hold 1,250 breeding ewes, mostly improved Welsh, while Huw also works for Innovis.

Through the scholarship, Huw studied DNA Shepherding in New Zealand and EID Tracking in Australia, as well as more traditional methods in both countries. "These countries are at the forefront of the technology," he says. "There are extensive systems in use, operating in



*Typical improved Welsh ewes in Huw Williams' flock.*



*Huw Williams with sheepdogs Fly and Meg.*

similar environments to our large hill farms in Wales.

"Tagging at birth can create too much work at the point of lambing, and this became evident at the different farms that I visited, but it does allow for the scoring of ewes for mothering ability. They would have a shepherd (roughly one per 400 ewes) going around and checking the flock, tagging at birth and scoring mothering ability. These farms seemed to have better mothering ability because they were able to select ewes that don't run away from lambs when you intervene or handle them."

## Latest technology

DNA Shepherding means tissue samples of ewes and rams are taken prior to tupping and then from their lambs at four weeks of age, allowing multi-sire mating, less intervention at lambing and better utilisation of grass at tupping. With EID Tracking, ewes and lambs walk through panel readers over a four to six-week time period to establish which ewes and lambs belong together. Huw says this allowed the match up 85-93% of lambs with 96% accuracy, while 99% allocations were expected with DNA Shepherding.

He compares the different systems as such: "The DNA Shepherd was the most expensive at £10 per lamb, tagging at birth worked out at £2.33, EID Tracking at £2.08 and mothering-up 50p. "Tagging at birth enables you to

monitor the mothering ability of the ewe. You can also score other traits such as teat placement but it does need extra staff at lambing. DNA Shepherd seemed the most farmer-friendly method, as it was accurate and samples were easily taken, but it is more costly. However, guaranteed parentage is important for stock sires and the production of rams in a commercial environment.

"The EID Tracking I witnessed involved an initial outlay of money but was relatively cheap after that and has a huge potential in commercial enterprises. It helps identify better performing ewes to keep in the flock."

The trip means Huw is already seeking to make changes on his own farm. He says: "These visits demonstrated to me that careful and organised recording will lead to increased performance. The more information that is recorded correctly, the better understanding we can get of performance."

## New approach

"I am now really keen to ensure I know what I'm breeding. I plan to introduce a low input, high output system, keeping an efficient, self-replacing flock. By selecting the best performing ewes over the next couple of years and using DNA Shepherd, I will target a 65kg ewe weaning lambs that equal her tupping weight."

# Role for every sheep farmer in responsible use of antibiotics

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

**There is no getting away from the fact antibiotic resistance is an issue of global importance for human and animal health that requires an internationally-coordinated approach.**

And while scientific evidence is increasingly recognising that the main reason for antibiotic resistance in humans is the over-use and misuse of antibiotics in human medicine, rather than animal medicine, there is a role for every sheep farmer in the responsible use of medicines on-farm. We do not want to risk the use of antibiotics in animals undermining their efficacy in humans, and we do not want to over-use them to the point where they no long treat disease in animals.

That does not mean ignoring an animal that is suffering from an infection or disease, as they should be promptly and appropriately treated, but it does mean avoiding the blanket use of antibiotics for disease prevention (prophylactic use) without an annual risk assessment and close involvement with a vet.

## Low usage sector

The sheep sector is a very low user of antibiotics, a fact that NSA is keen for policy makers to recognise, but that does not mean we support going down the route of zero use of antibiotics in animals going into the food chain. This would reduce the high standard of animal health and welfare that UK agriculture prides itself on, and ignores the fact we already have scientifically validated meat withdrawal periods to prevent medicine residues in meat.

For the same reason, NSA urges extreme caution about 'antibiotic free' marketing messages and does not support UK retailers or food service providers adopting claims that insinuate other foods contain antibiotics. It should also be noted that some countries using 'antibiotic-free' messages



*The blanket use of antibiotics for disease prevention (prophylactic use) is not recommended without an annual risk assessment and close involvement with a vet.*

are referring only to a ban on prophylactic use, which is hugely misleading.

NSA is an active member of RUMA and supports the work this industry group is doing to tackle misinformation. RUMA has recently formed a task force to understanding how much antibiotics the livestock sector is using and how each species should respond to Government reduction targets. However, within this work, NSA believes data on total antibiotic use should be collected at vet level, so farmers are not burdened with additional record keeping requirements.

At farm level, the most important action for NSA members is to engage with a proactive sheep vet, preferably one in the Sheep Veterinary Society, and look at preventative health measure for your flock.

Visit the RUMA website [www.ruma.org.uk](http://www.ruma.org.uk) for more about RUMA and [www.farmantibiotics.org](http://www.farmantibiotics.org) for facts and figures about use of antibiotics on-farm.

## Responsible antibiotic use case studies

### David Howlett

Derbyshire

"I would say my main reason for using antibiotics at the moment is lameness, so I'm looking at a variety of things in order to reduce it. This will include little things like putting lime in gateways to bigger things like how we source our flock replacements. I'd like to source ewe lambs from a smaller number of farms and only use people who are selling stock that is vaccinated or comes with some kind of assurance."

### Charles Sercombe

Leicestershire

"We were treating every lamb as it was born with 1ml of Spectam for watery mouth, but last lambing time we stopped and concentrated on lambs all getting the required amount of colostrum in the first two hours of life. To our amazement, we actually saw a reduction in watery mouth. We

also made sure pens were clean, with plenty of straw, and that there was good hygiene in the lambing yards, but I'm totally convinced the best prevention is adequate colostrum in the first two hours. We're doing the same this lambing time and won't go back to treating every lamb."

### Peter Barlow

Nottinghamshire

"We've always vaccinated for enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis, but we had a break down last lambing time and treated everything with Alamycin to reduce potential losses. We've seen one or two aborting this time too and, as the vet explained it would take this year to get back our flock immunity, we've gone in with antibiotics again. We can justify it because we've diagnosed a problem that needs treating, but we definitely won't do it every year as we don't want the stress on the ewes at lambing

time or the extra work. We've changed vets, which has made a difference, as the medicines are cheaper and we're working more proactively with them."

### Huw Davies

Carmarthenshire

"We've been using the five-point lameness plan to improve our flock and, although we went in hard with antibiotics at the start, we have seen a huge reduction in our usage over the last four years. That's because we use the whole plan and not just some of it. It's not just about treating infected stock, but also preventing infection, quarantining incoming stock, culling persistent offenders and vaccinating to build immunity. I also think genetics is important and look at breed selection too. I absolutely believe in responsible use of all medicines, and the whole family takes the issue of antimicrobial resistance seriously."

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# Understanding the treatment options for external parasites

By Peter Bates, independent sheep consultant

**The deregulation of scab as a notifiable disease in 1992 and the end of compulsory dipping resulted in an increase in relatively more mobile, labour saving alternatives that are less stressful to the sheep, relatively safe to the operator and environment, and with an apparent ease of use.**

But if we compare these systemic macrocyclic lactone (ML) injections and synthetic pyrethroid (SP) or insect growth regulator (IGR) pour-ons to plunge dipping, most have relatively narrow spectrums of efficacy, some require repeat treatments, others offer no residual protection against re-infestation by scab mites or chewing lice, and some have extremely long meat withdrawal periods.

In addition, the ML injections are also widely used as anthelmintics and the increase in anthelmintic resistance is a serious problem for the sheep industry. The overuse of ML injections for the control of scab could easily select for or augment existing resistance to MLs in non-target internal roundworms.

## Dipping

Only formulations containing the organophosphate (OP) diazinon are currently available as plunge dips in the UK. They continue to be an effective method for the control of scab and other sheep ectoparasites, with no effect on roundworms. There are disadvantages, particularly issues regarding environmental and human safety, but these can be effectively circumvented using a mobile dipping contractor.

When deciding to treat sheep, it is extremely important that an ectoparasite is accurately identified and the correct treatment administered. Incorrect treatment may be ineffective, continuing the suffering of infested sheep. Repeat treatment would be necessary, increasing the time for disease resolution, which together with an additional meat withdrawal period, could affect the financial potential of animals intended for the food chain. And there is the anthelmintic resistance issue when using MLs.

Scab mites and lice are obligate parasites, completing their entire lifecycle on the sheep. If forced off the sheep they cannot survive more than 17 days and will not actively seek a



Full immersion is essential when plunge dipping sheep, and cannot be guaranteed when using a shower instead.

new host. A chemical treatment has to therefore remain active on the sheep longer than 17 days to prevent re-infestation, or treated sheep must be moved to grazing or housing that has not held sheep for at least 28 days.

Field studies have shown that diazinon dipwash made up and replenished according to the label instructions is guaranteed to give 21 days' protection against scab on both unshorn sheep and sheep with 1-1.5cm of fleece. Further work also suggests unshorn sheep and 75% of recently shorn sheep remain protected for eight weeks or more, making it an ideal winter treatment for hill farmers with common grazing. It is essential, for the control of all ectoparasites, that all sheep are immersed for one minute. Immersion for less than a minute can result in a 60% failure to cure active scab.

## Showers

Despite the rise in popularity of shower dipping, there is little verifiable data regarding their efficacy to control scab and currently no product tested or licenced in the UK for use through a shower. Users rely on available diazinon plunge dip formulations, with no instructions regarding timing, depletion and replenishment through a shower, and so showers should not be used for the control of scab or lice.

Scab mites and chewing lice exposed to sub-lethal concentrations of diazinon via ineffective showering (or plunge dipping) will survive, resulting in disease resurgence and ultimately resistance development. If diazinon

resistance becomes widespread only the ML injections would be effective against scab, a major disaster regarding ML resistance in gastro-intestinal roundworms.

## Health plan

A strategic integrated parasite control plan, reducing the use of anti-parasitic medicines, must be adopted and detailed in an effective flock health plan. Scab and lice enter flocks through the introduction of or contact with infested animals. If a flock is not involved in common grazing the risk of introduction can be reduced through good quarantining that makes the assumption that all incoming stock has scab, coupled with adoption of an effective closed flock policy. Effective fencing or walling is an important part of this, to maintain closed flock integrity by preventing straying on/off the holding and contact with neighbouring flocks.

Persistent infestations of scab and chewing lice on common grazing shared by several flocks is a problem usually caused by a small number of recalcitrant flock-owners or contact with feral sheep. Co-operation must be sought with neighbouring properties to attain equal standards of health and, wherever possible, all flocks on the common should be gathered when full fleeced and plunge dipped simultaneously. This will not only provide effective protection against scab mites on untreated sheep and in the environment, but also against chewing lice, blowfly strike, ticks and keds with no problems regarding anthelmintic resistance.

# Hunt for BWMB Golden Fleece results in online charity auction

Anglesey farmers Myrfyn and Jayne Roberts have been revealed as the winners of the British Wool Marketing Board's 2016 Golden Fleece competition, clinching the award with a Bluefaced Leicester fleece they submitted via their wool collection depot at Pormadoc.



Mr Roberts says it was his wife's idea to enter the competition and she picked out some of the shearing ewes from the 45-ewe traditional Bluefaced Leicester flock as potential entries before shearing.

"She felt the even staple and cleanness of the fleeces would make them ideal for the competition," he says, adding that son Gareth, a highly sought after shearing contractor, ensured the fleeces were presented in the best possible condition. "He's won local shearing competitions here on Anglesey. While others may be quicker he's often the cleanest shearer on points. He's so busy during the summer it can be difficult to get him home to shear our own sheep."

## Good breeding

But while correct shearing and presentation is important, so too is breeding and Mr Roberts says in the 45 years the family have been involved with Bluefaced Leicesters they have always gone for sheep with good skins. "Obviously we want sheep with good conformation and structure as well as size, but the fleece is important too, particularly as we're breeding our own Welsh Mules," he says. "A sheep needs a good fleece to thrive and its quality is a reflection of the animal's management over the last 12 months. We always ensure all our sheep are in good order, which helps them produce a good even staple. The group of shearlings the winning fleece came from would have been outside pretty much all the time too, which will have helped the quality."

Alongside the traditional Bluefaced Leicesters, the couple run 40 crossing Bluefaced Leicesters and 1,000 Buelah, Welsh Mule and Texel and Suffolk cross commercial ewes.

Mark Powell, BWMB Chief Operating Officer and judge of the final, says the winning fleece displayed everything he was



## Golden Fleece competition

The BWMB Golden Fleece competition saw entries of fleeces from the network of BWMB depots across the UK and 12 regional agricultural shows, including NSA Sheep 2016.

Mr and Mrs Roberts have asked that the 2016 champion fleece be auctioned for charity. If you are reading this before 10<sup>th</sup> February, you can make a sealed bid at [www.britishwool.org.uk](http://www.britishwool.org.uk). Proceeds will be donated to Ty Gobaith in Conwy and Cancer Research UK.

The 2016 Golden Fleece was from Myrfyn and Jayne Roberts' flock of Bluefaced Leicesters.

looking for. He says: "It had great uniformity of quality, strength of staple, colour and presentation. It was an outstanding entry and clearly from a producer who takes pride in their wool crop."

Mark Powell, BWMB Chief

Operating Officer and competition judge, says: "The winning fleece had great uniformity of quality, strength of staple, colour and presentation. It was an outstanding entry and clearly from a producer who takes pride in their wool crop."

## Congratulations

Ian Buchanan, BWMB Chairman, adds that with more than 12m fleeces being presented at BWMB depots every year, the winner was to be congratulated on their success. He says: "The quality of the fleeces and presentation was exceptional with all finalists earning their place. However, there can only be one winner and my congratulations go to the Roberts family on their success."

"We have been highly encouraged by the response to the competition in 2016 and I am sure many more wool producers will take up the mantle of entering in 2017 and helping BWMB promote the exceptional quality of British wool."



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# NSA finds its sheep stars

Thanks to continued funding from NSA regions and ram sales, as well as support from various delivery partners, NSA is very exciting to be embarking on the fourth year of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme.

Another 12 young people have been chosen for the 2017 group, taking the total number of Ambassadors since 2014 to an incredible 46 individuals. The selection process for the group this year was incredibly tough, with some very difficult decisions made by all those involved in the shortlisting process and final interviews.

For the lucky few that made it through to the interview stage this year, they faced a bombardment of questions from four people representing the four UK nations:-

- **Matt Bagley:** NSA Northern Region Committee member and Head of Agriculture at Newton Rigg College, Cumbria.
- **Kate Hovers:** NSA Cymru/Wales Region Committee member and practising vet/sheep consultant in Sennybridge, Brecon.
- **Eileen McCloskey:** NSA Northern Ireland Region Committee member, CAFRE advisor and lecturer at Greenmount College.
- **Jimmy Warnock:** NSA Scottish Region Committee member, Lanarkshire farmer and involved in the Royal Highland Educational Trust.



Given the massive spread of locations for the applications, from every corner of the UK, the interviews were conducted via Skype to find the final 12.

Now the excitement begins, with the first of five delivery sessions for the group planned for mid-February. As well as meeting each other for the first time, the group will focus on flock health and performance, as well as opportunities to add value to wool. Different themes and topics will be covered in other sessions through the year.

Joanne Briggs from NSA says: "Thank you to everyone who applied to be an Ambassador this year. We were overwhelmed by the quantity and quality and some excellent candidates narrowly missed out on getting a place. Although the selection process gets tougher each year, it bodes well for the future of the NSA programme and the health of the sheep sector."

Find profiles of all 46 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk), plus other NSA Next Generation activity.



## 2017 Ambassadors

1. Lisa Adams (33) Suffolk
2. Nicola Drew (33) Powys
3. Alexandria Egan (23) Dorset
4. Rory Gregor (25) Aberdeenshire
5. Matthew Haydon (33) Staffordshire
6. Caryl Hughes (26) Wrexham
7. Toby Lawton (27) Shropshire
8. Joe Milligan (23) County Down
9. Richard Taylor (3) Wiltshire
10. Howard Tratt (26) Somerset
11. Thomas Vickers (22) County Durham
12. Alister Watson (25) Dumfries & Galloway

# Meet the 2017 NSA Ambassadors

## Lisa Adams (32) Suffolk

It was the point when Lisa said she could sell the horns off a Jacob ram for as much as prime lambs from her commercial flock that the selection panel sat up and realised this young shepherd really understood how to make the most from her various enterprises.

Lisa runs her own New Zealand Romneys, Lleys and Jacobs alongside a full-time job on a large farming enterprise at West Harling, Norfolk. At work she manages 570 performance recorded Lleys, as well as being involved in cattle work and a store lamb enterprise.

She plans to keep on working for others, on a self-employed basis in time, while increasing her own sheep numbers to maximise sales of lamb boxes and finished stock, alongside Jacob horns, fleeces and skins.

**Top fact:** As Eastern Region Council member for the Jacob Sheep Society, Lisa has organised open days and regional events for the general public and fellow members. She hopes to use this experience to develop her role as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador.



## Nicola Drew (33) Powys

Having returned to the family farm in recent years, Nicola has gone into partnership with her father and is breathing new life into the 600-ewe sheep flock near Talgarth, Brecon.

She is in the process of rejuvenating the soils and grassland, allowing her to keep more replacements each year and grow numbers. Keen to run a bigger and more profitable flock, Nicola says she applied for the NSA Ambassador programme to learn new skills and ensure she doesn't take her eye off the ball, as it is attention to the finer detail that will ensure a positive future in a post-Brexit world with no guaranteed farm support payments, she says.

**Top fact:** When asked by the selection panel if she thought there were equal opportunities for females in agriculture, Nicola spoke passionately about the need for more role models. "There are opportunities but it is daunting to go for them when all you see around you is males," she said. "We need to give girls the confidence to get out there."



continued on page 36

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## Alexandria Egan (23)

### Dorset

As a contract shepherd with numerous clients in Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset, plus her own flock of Poll Dorsets, there really aren't enough hours in the day for Alexandria. She lambs for a fellow Dorset breeder in September, before doing her own flock ahead of Christmas, and then moving onto more conventional lambing set-ups from February to May.



But she convinced the selection panel she was a long way from being a busy fool, with a clear plan for her future. She has goals in place to allow her to be less reliant on external lambing work and have more of her own sheep. Alexandria also wants to see change in the wider sheep sector, particularly when it comes to marketing UK lamb as a premium product with fantastic taste, environment and welfare credentials.

**Top fact:** Alexandria is excited to have recently secured a contract to supply lamb to Waitrose. She plans to increase numbers and sell 300 finished Dorsets a year by 2021.

## Rory Gregor (25)

### Aberdeenshire

Far from being beaten by a major set-back to his sheep farming business in 2015, Rory is showing real commitment this year by taking a six-month sabbatical from his career in structural engineering to see if he can make a fulltime living in agriculture.

As a passionate Beltex breeder, Rory was personally and financially devastated



when 31 pedigree in-lamb ewes were stolen from land he rents near Thainstone, Inverurie. But he has bounced back and is determined to continue working with his breeding flock while shearing in the summer and scanning in the winter.

Through genetic selection and embryo transfer work, Rory has set himself some tough goals. He wants to increase to 250 ewes in order to set new breed records in the sale ring and develop the 'perfect terminal sire' to work in commercial systems.

**Top fact:** Well on his way to achieving his goals, Rory has already won the Beltex group of three title at the Royal Highland Show and sold a ram lamb for 9,000gns.

## Joe Milligan (23)

### County Down

Such was the strong impression that Joe made on the selection panel, they named him as the next Farming Minister and the next Chancellor!

His passion for the industry and his

## Toby Lawton (27) Shropshire

Having only started lambing on the family farm at Newport eight years ago, Toby has convinced his father of the benefits sheep bring to the mixed enterprise and built up to 650-head.

Purchases, inheritance and rental agreements have added more land to the business and, coupled with ambitions to increase stocking rates and potentially reduce the arable acreage, Toby now has his sights set on 900 ewes in the near future. Such ambition heartily impressed the selection panel,



## Caryl Hughes (26) Wrexham

The opportunity to farm a 600-acre Snowdonia hill farm for 12 months with the National Trust and Wales YFC in 2013/14 (as part of the Lyndy Isaf Scholarship Scheme) was a huge turning point for Caryl.

It was not only an incredible learning opportunity but, coupled with a year in New Zealand as part of her university course, made her realise she definitely wanted to make sheep farming her living. Caryl has since become a partner in the family beef and sheep farm at Llangollen and taken on a tenancy nearby. She also does contract shepherding work in the area as required.

Caryl wants to take more responsibility within the family business and is particularly keen to develop her understanding and use of technology within the family's flocks of Welsh Mountain and Welsh Mule ewes.

**Top fact:** Caryl is a passionate YFC member, currently holding the roles of Dyffryn Tanat YFC Chairman, Montgomery YFC Vice Chairman and Wales YFC Rural Affairs committee member.

grasp on business finances were clear to see, yet Joe still has a long list of things he wants to achieve and repeatedly said during his interview, 'it's not bad but it can still be improved'.

Joe works closely with his father on the sheep and beef farm at Castlewellan, 25 miles south of Belfast, *Continued at top of next page.*

as well as Toby's clear drive to be an active member of NSA and a confident spokesperson for the sector.

He says: "Promoting the sheep sector is close to my heart and I try to get anyone involved and tell everyone about our products as a sheep and beef finisher."

**Top fact:** Toby is employed in two livestock markets, Market Drayton and Ludlow, grading and penning lambs. He says this regular work helps his business, in terms of regularly handling finished lambs and following the trade.



and wants to ensure the business can comfortably support the two of them. With a particular interest in the ewes, he aims to improve prolificacy, milkiness and overall health in order to sell more lambs more quickly.

**Top fact:** Joe's appetite for information is insatiable. He is part-time through a foundation degree in agriculture with plans to upgrade to an honours degree. He and his father are also involved in the NI Sheep Business Development Group, NI Suckler Beef Programme and the Ulster Grassland Society.

## Howard Tratt (26) Somerset

Working on the family farm with his father and brother, Howard has made a niche for himself by taking on sole responsibility for the sheep part of the business at Lymsham.

Not content just with the day-to-day management of the 320 Lleyn cross ewes and 125 replacements, he has also set up a 'Levels Lamb' direct marketing business selling 100% grass-fed Somerset lamb. This is something Howard plans to grow in time, as his initial focus is on building up sheep numbers and improving grassland management through rotational and strip grazing.



## Richard Taylor (30)

### Wiltshire

Richard has achieved something that is often spoken about in the sheep sector but not frequently achieved – offering grassland management in return for rent-free access to land. He does not pay for any grazing in and around his home area of Corsham and takes advantage of local affluence to sell half lambs at £75 each, as well as hogget and mutton.

He started his campaign with his mother-in-law, taking on her unmaintained fields to improve aesthetics and increase sward diversity. Word spread and Richard now runs his entire flock by offering conservation grazing and grassland management to a number of clients.

Currently he puts North County and Welsh Mules to Texel, Suffolk and Hampshire Down rams, but Richard has a growing interest in the Hampshires and is looking to add a pedigree flock to his enterprise.

**Top fact:** As a passionate marketer of British Lamb, Richard threw himself into Love Lamb Week in 2016. He made special sausages for a farmers' market and hosted a five-course lamb and hogget tasting menu in a local restaurant.



**Top fact:** While there is no shortage of sheep in South West England, Howard says there are not a huge number in



## Thomas Vickers (22)

### County Durham

Thomas may be the youngest person on this year's programme but he wowed the selection panel with the maturity of his knowledge and passion for upland sheep farming.

Having graduated from Harper Adams University in the summer, Thomas is working alongside this mother and uncle to produce North of England Mules from a flock of 1,200 Swaledales on the hills of Weardale. He strongly believes in the tradition of the stratified system and hefted hill flocks, but is also embracing new technology, be it genetics/recording

or finding sheep on the hill using his drone.

As well as balancing old and new, Thomas also believes in balancing production and environment and has a real interest in conservation and biodiversity. He takes personal pride in the increase of black grouse on the farm and wants to see the industry benefit from more farm-specific agri-environment schemes in the future.

**Top fact:** Thomas farms less than five miles from the host of NSA North Sheep 2017 and is enjoying being part of the organising committee for this year's event.

his area and he is excited to meet new people through the NSA Ambassador programme. He says: "Sometimes when farming at home, alone a lot of the time, it is easy to feel detached from the wider sheep sector. I'd like to meet new people and make friends and contacts who are likeminded, knowledgeable and enthusiastic."

## Alister Watson (25)

### Dumfries & Galloway

There is no shortage of strings to Alister's bow – he works on the family farm, contract shepherds, shears and drives a lorry for MacTaggart Haulage.

But within all this, his passion is breeding Lleyn sheep. He's not afraid to criticise the breed for being 'a bit pointy a both ends', but sees them an asset on commercial farms when crossed to a terminal sire. He personally chooses New Zealand Suffolks and Beltex to produce prime lambs, but is also hooked on performance recording to produce pure Lleys to potentially sell at society sales.

His plan over time is to spend more time with the pedigree and commercial flocks, exploiting the current understocking of the farm to develop a business that could support him on more of a fulltime basis in the future.

**Top fact:** Having seen a 'pop up' pig roast shop doing a flying trade in Glasgow one evening, Alister is convinced more imaginative lamb sales techniques could benefit the industry. He is even threatening to give it a go himself!





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