

Sheep Farmer

JUNE/JULY 2017

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



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NSA will help members to weather continuing volatility

It seems that each edition of *Sheep Farmer* comes with another surprising incident to report. In less than 12 months we've seen the Brexit decision, the Trump administration in the US, and now after being reassured there would be no general election, that's exactly what there will be on the 8th June. But NSA is still reeling from another completely unpredictable shock that's being felt very close to home – the loss of Sam Wharry, Chairman of our Board of Trustee/Directors.

Sam died doing what he loved, working with his sheep on his farm in Northern Ireland with his share farming partner James. Just 56 years old, the only blessing is that he didn't suffer with any long debilitating illness. Sam was at Malvern on 3rd May and looked the picture of health. He left to speak at the International Wool Congress in Harrogate the following day, talking about the subject he was absolutely passionate about – supporting young people in our industry – and returned home later that day. Just 24 hours later, Sam had left us. His death has been a complete surprise and shock, but he left an incredible legacy to NSA. This includes: a philosophy of acceptance of the value of every different element of our industry; an incredibly progressive approach to farming, but within a deeply rooted traditional system; a passion for new and young entrants; and a way of working that was pleasant, fun, and simply good. We have a lot to be grateful to Sam for and we offer a full tribute to a great man – and a true stalwart of NSA – on page 4 of this issue.

Policy direction

But the world won't stop for anyone and the political theatre marches on, frustratingly giving us no clearer ideas yet as to where we are heading. The election has been called with an expectation of the further strengthening our current party of power. At the time of writing, there is still no manifesto and no detail, at all, of future agricultural policy direction. Unsurprisingly agriculture is featuring more highly in our devolved nations' agendas but they, like us, are heavily dependent on a Westminster lead. Here the contrasting statements made by members within



the same cabinet – about agriculture facing higher welfare and environmental standards and opportunities for British consumers to buy cheaper food – leaves you searching for the sense in a country that seems to go out of its way not to feed itself but, instead, treat its food production purely as a tradeable commodity.

Ups and downs

At farm level it's been another spring of ups and downs. Prices have struggled to reach those seen in 2016 until recently and the spring price peak has been elusive again, leaving little margin for store finishers and little incentive for commercial early lambers, who are targeting the Easter/April new season lamb market. Plenty of lambs reached the end of April without knowing what rain was but the combination of no rain and cold temperatures, with some sharp frosts, put paid to any good grass growth or quality. At least any increases in parasite risk have been well predicted through initiatives like the nematodirus forecasting tool. It's by using tools like these that we can both reduce losses and more effectively target inputs.

Achieving economic viability into the future is going to be our challenge. Profitability will be the cornerstone of the industry's future and its ability to attract and retain young entrants, even though we know that there are many other reasons why people choose to farm sheep. The political uncertainty, at present, gives few clues as to the future of our trade conditions or longer term Treasury support for the industry.

New arrival

NSA Communications Manager and *Sheep Farmer* Editor Joanne Briggs, and her husband Ben, welcomed Jacob William into the world on Wednesday 17th May. NSA sends congratulations to Joanne and Ben and we look forward to meeting baby Jacob very soon.

And while NSA will continue to influence this in every way it can, your sheep farming businesses should do everything they can to understand costs and income opportunities and prepare yourselves for the uncertainty that lies ahead.

Sheep
Farmer



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Contents

- 4 NSA tribute: Sam Wharry
- 5 NSA reports: Devolved nations
- 7 NSA reports: English regions
- 10 NSA Sheep South West preview
- 11 NSA Sheep Northern Ireland preview
- 12 NSA Ram Sales preview
- 13 NSA Breed Society Forum report
- 14 Win an IAE lamb weigh crate
- 16 NSA Welsh Sheep report
- 18 Selling stock: innovative approaches
- 20 Latest NSA activity
- 22 **FARM FEATURE:** NSA Scottish Region Chairman John Fyall
- 24 Planning-permission pitfalls
- 26 NSA Mutton Project update
- 27 Weaning decisions and strategies
- 28 Veterinary surveillance explained
- 30 CT scanning benefits
- 32 Trace-element deficiencies
- 34 Check lamb mineral balance
- 36 Flock health best practice
- 38 Protect your scrapie status
- 40 Responsible anthelmintic use
- 42 Wool price update
- 44 NSA Next Generation blogs

The front page picture was taken by professional photographer John Eveson and features Aberfield cross ewes with commercial lambs pictured in Staffordshire.

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News Update

Sheep Breeders Round Table conference

The biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table will take place from Friday 17th to Sunday 19th November, at Eastwood Hall in Nottingham, and the theme this year will be 'Thinking positively'. A full programme for this year's event can be downloaded at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt. For further information on the conference or for booking details, please contact Clare Medlock on 0247 647 8834 or sheepbreedersrt@ahdb.org.uk.

Give it some welly!

In need of a new pair of Wellingtons? NSA has teamed up with Dunlop to giveaway several pairs during the summer months. So if you are heading to any upcoming NSA events, make sure you visit the NSA stand to enter. You can take your chance to win at: NSA Highland Sheep, Wednesday 31st May; North Sheep, Wednesday 7th June; NSA Sheep South West, Tuesday 20th June; and NSA Sheep Northern Ireland, Monday 3rd July.

Four pairs will be up for grabs at each of these events, as well as an additional four which you can get your hands on by entering in the open draw running on the NSA website and at all non-NSA events that we are attending up until the Welsh Winter Fair in November.

Enter online, and find full terms and conditions, by going to www.nationalsheep.org.uk and clicking on the Dunlop link.



Bluetongue update

NSA is aware that bluetongue (BTV-8) is circulating in France and that it may be a risk to UK flocks later this year. And we are working closely with Defra, APHA, and other farming and veterinary organisations, to monitor the situation and will keep members informed via the NSA e newsletter and Sheep Farmer magazine, of any developments. "NSA's advice remains the same as it was in 2016 – to work closely with your vet to assess and monitor risk," says NSA Chief Executive Phil

Notice of AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 124th Annual General Meeting of National Sheep Association will be held at the Rosspark Hotel, 20 Doagh Road, Kells, Ballymena, Co Antrim BT42 3LZ on Wednesday 9th August 2017 at 10am to transact the following business:

1. To approve the Minutes of the 123rd Annual General Meeting.
2. To receive the Trustees Report to year ended 31st December 2016.
3. To receive the Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2016.
4. To adopt (2) and (3) above.
5. To elect officers for the ensuing year; President and Honorary Treasurer
6. To elect Vice-President(s)
7. To elect auditors.

By order of the Board

Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form, or appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. Proxy forms and all documents referred to will be available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events. Signed and completed proxy forms must be received by post, fax or by attaching a signed scanned copy by email no later than 10am Monday 8th August 2017. For full details of the use and completion of proxy forms please visit the NSA website or call the Head Office.

The meeting will be followed by an update on NSA activity and a tour of CAFRE Glenwherry Hill Farm. Lunch will be provided, so it would be helpful to know if you plan to attend. Please email enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk or call NSA Head Office.

Stocker. "And remember that vaccination is already an option here in the UK, for those farmers who want to take steps to protect their flock should there be a significant risk as the season progresses."

NSA backs calls for raven 'review'

NSA is calling for a review, backed by research and discussions with sheep farmers, into the protected status of ravens and other predatory species. It comes after an increasing number of sheep farmers are reporting that ravens and sea eagles are preying on ewes and young lambs, often killing them or injuring them so severely that euthanasia is the only humane option.

One such shepherd, for Dineley Farming, is NSA South East Region Committee Member Martyn Fletcher, who runs 2,800 breeding ewes near Salisbury. He says that a large group of juvenile ravens – numbering at least 30 – have been attacking his lambing flock this spring. And the results have been devastating, with up to six lambs a day being killed during a two-week period.

In 2016 Mr Fletcher had two pairs of ravens, which attacked between two and three lambs a day during a two-week period. So he contacted Natural England for advice – because the raven has protected species status – and he says that they were helpful and have given the farm a licence to cull eight ravens during a two-year period. "They gave us some good advice and said to try to



shoot one of the pair – as a deterrent to the other bird.

"They are extremely intelligent and I think that approach could work. But because they're so clever, they're also difficult to shoot. I've gone out with the gun to try to pick off one or two of the large mob that's descended on the flock this year, but the moment I stop the ATV engine they're off. They see me coming and they know they're in danger.

He has tried rope bangers, with some success. And he's also spoken to Natural England about diversionary feeding. "But I'm not sure about that. It could just encourage more ravens to come our way.

If the 30-strong mob attacks a ewe, in just a few hours there'll be nothing there – just bones. Little wonder that lambs don't stand a chance once they've been singled out as a target.

Harrowing attacks

The most harrowing attacks are where lambs' tongues are torn out by the ravens or ewes are attacked as they're lambing.

"We need to go back to Natural England before next year and draw up a plan to tackle this problem before it gets even worse. I have heard of people using laser pens to drive them away and protect their flocks. I've even thought about drones. I won't rule anything out."

He adds that there is a fear, among some sheep farmers, that if they contact Natural England about a problem that they, themselves, will be 'under the microscope'. "But that's not been my experience at all. They've offered me good advice and spoke to us about financial losses, due to the ravens. So far this year it's run into thousands. We can't lose that again next

year. And my job, as a shepherd, is to nurture life – not destroy it. So there will be a plan for 2018 and it has to work."

Animal-welfare issue

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker agrees that more has to be done to protect sheep flocks from predators. "And it's just not just about the financial losses incurred. It's also an animal-welfare issue. I've spoken to farmers who've seen stock with eyes and tongues torn out. Understanding how and why ravens gather on some units during lambing time – and how they carry out their attacks – will go some way to finding a solution."

He adds that proposals for releasing Eurasian Lynx, which would also be protected, are expected. "NSA would like to see a debate about how released and protected species are managed once numbers build to a 'safe' level."

Bracken control

The emergency authorisation of 120 days for application of Asulam for the control of bracken has been issued, which means that sale, promotion, storage and transfer of the controlled pesticide can now begin. Application of Asulam is permitted from 1st July 2017.



Samuel Wharry – a tribute

NSA is extremely saddened to report the untimely passing of our Chairman, Sam Wharry. He was a popular figure, highly respected for his passion for the sheep industry, as well as his easy-going and modest approach. Here two NSA colleagues, pay tribute

By Edward Adamson, NSA Northern Ireland Regional Development Officer
If you ever asked Sam Wharry what he did, you'd probably be told: "I'm just a sheep farmer from Carnlough." But Sam was so much more than that.

NSA is always keen to recruit talented young people and after some persuading Samuel agreed to join the NI Committee in the 1990s. Sam's passion for sheep was infectious and he had a great thirst for knowledge – and nowhere more so than in the sheep business.

A true sheep industry stalwart – not just a sheep farmer

He started performance recording his Blackface Sheep to allow better selection of breeding stock to improve the flock. He joined the Blackface Performance Recorded Sire Reference Group, made up of breeders in NI and Scotland. He served as Chairman of this group and after it morphed into the Maternal Sheep Group he chaired that group as well for a term.

When AFBI Hillsborough put together a scheme where they used partner farms as co-researchers to collect data for R&D work, Samuel became involved and Harphall is still working on AFBI trials. He was also invited onto The Agrisearch Sheep Advisory Board, which he also chaired. Samuel did not take these roles of responsibility lightly and it is easiest summed up by a quote from himself: "If it's on my watch it'll be done right".

Obvious choice

Today we hear a lot about succession planning and once again Sam was ahead of the pack. He had the foresight to see that if Harphall was to continue to prosper he would need help. He identified James as his 'mini-me' – a hardworking and ambitious young man. Together they entered a business partnership, which proved successful for both parties.

At the same time, in 2015, the role of UK Chairman of NSA was becoming vacant. Sam had been representing NI on the Trustees Board since 2012 and other members of that board saw him as the obvious choice to take on the position. Only after a lot of persuasion did he accept the role. When discussing the opportunity with me he named a list of previous chairmen and asked: "How could I fill their boots? I'm only a sheep farmer from Carnlough." He finally accepted the position and initially was a bit nervous at some of his early meetings, but was very appreciative of



all the help and advice he got from NSA CEO Phil Stocker.

He soon became comfortable in the role and was enjoying the travelling around the country and meeting new people who talked about sheep.

Fond memories

Sam is no longer physically with us, but we all have our own fond memories. I have had adventures with him throughout the UK and abroad – from the arid limestone sheep farms in the south of France to the vast plains of Russia. His photographic memory could recall these experiences in great detail and, if necessary, add a bit of colour himself (usually at my expense). I will always have these memories for which I am grateful.

So, as I said, Samuel Wharry was so much more than just a sheep farmer from Carnlough.

sisters, you see that same easy manner that Sam portrayed.

The number of NSA members and sheep folk who attended his funeral, despite it being the first day of Balmoral Show, is an indication of the respect in which Sam was held. Many others had not heard of his death and have since expressed their regrets at his passing.

He will be sadly missed by all of us who had the pleasure of knowing him but will be such a loss to his family and young business partner, James.

he and I travelled to the NSA Board meetings, which he chaired. And he was a great travelling companion - witty, considerate and still gave you your own space if you needed it. As Chairman, he was always well prepared for the meeting and could be firm if he needed to, without giving offence. His sudden death at just 56 years old has shocked everyone within NSA and beyond. The wonderful tributes to Sam that I have heard and read are all richly deserved. When you speak to his

A modest man who will be sorely missed

By John Blaney, NSA Northern Ireland Region Trustee
I had got to know Sam during the past 10 years since I joined NSA. The first thing that struck me was his easy-going and modest manner. Having attended many committee meetings that he chaired, I noted his ability to allow everyone to have their say and then deliver his thoughts and even win people over to his considered point of view.

During the past two and a half years,

NSA reports – devolved nations

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Davies, Development Officer



It is with deep sadness that I write this report. None of us can quite believe that our NSA Chairman Sam Wharry has passed away. The thoughts of NSA Cymru/Wales Region are with his family at this difficult time. Sam will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

NSA Welsh Sheep is just around the corner, as I put pen to paper, and I've no doubt that it will prove to be another memorable day. Our thanks go to the hosts, sponsors, exhibitors, judges, regional committee members and not least all the volunteers who give up their time. Without their help, we



NSA Welsh Sheep 2017 was held at Llwyn Bedw Farm, Talybont on Usk, Brecon.



would not have an event.

I hope that members from the region, and from further afield, who attended had an enjoyable and useful day – see page 16.

Quarantine units

Welsh Government has forged ahead with the introduction of quarantine units, despite many attempts by NSA Cymru/Wales Region to delay their introduction. We are waiting for a reply from Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths to see if a delay is still possible.

While we do agree in principle with the idea of quarantining livestock, we are unsure as to how producers will meet the new rules and costs associated with the move. We will update members in the next issue when we have a reply from Lesley Griffiths.

As many will be aware, Welsh Government and DEFRA have been working together to identify a more pragmatic approach to cross-border livestock movements and reporting. A further update will be given in the next issue of Sheep Farmer. With any aspect of the CPH review and the 10-mile rule, it is business as usual until you are contacted by RPW.

The region now looks forward to the Royal Welsh and I would like to remind members that they are most welcome to come and see us on the NSA's stand or at the reception, planned for the Monday afternoon. I do hope that by the time you read this report that lamb prices have remained strong and the grass has started to grow. The next NSA Cymru/Wales Region committee meeting will be in August.

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NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



I began the regional report for the previous edition of Sheep Farmer with comments about us having the driest winter we'd seen for many years.

But now, two months later, we still have had very little rain and some areas actually need a day of wet weather. No doubt it will come soon.

New season lamb prices are, once again, not covering the cost of producing spring lambs. Industry needs to start talking to processors and retailers about these prices and establish if there is a viable market for this high-quality, high-cost product.

The Royal Ulster Agricultural Show, at Balmoral Park, was well supported by the industry in the NSA Sheep Centre. And we had a busy and useful four days at the show in early May. I say four days with tongue in cheek as most exhibitors, both livestock and trade, have indicated they would have preferred for it to remain as a three-day show. We will see how it goes, time will tell.

Terrific ambassador

As I write this we have just received devastating news of the sudden death of NSA Northern Ireland Region Committee Member and NSA Chairman Samuel Wharry. History will show that 1992 was a landmark year for NSA in Northern Ireland. It was the year that a young, enthusiastic 31-year-old sheep farmer – Sam Wharry from Carnlough in County Antrim, won

NSA Scottish Region

By George Milne, Development Officer



It's all go for NSA Scottish Region with several meetings already taking place for our recently appointed regional Chairman and

Vice Chairman John Fyall and Kathy Peebles. Together with John and Kathy, I recently attended a meeting with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing in Parliament, to discuss several issues that came up at our most recent committee meeting.

On the agenda was the 'Complementary role of sheep in upland and hill areas' report, launched by NSA in 2016 and one we intend to officially present it to Mr Ewing in the near future. The report highlights the many public benefits that come from sheep farming across Scotland and the UK, particularly in the uplands. If you want to read more, you can find a copy on the NSA website.

We also discussed putting together a 10-year plan for the sheep industry and how best we can maintain breeding ewe numbers in a profitable way to reach this stage. This could include things like the need for continued support payments and how we could increase promotion and consumption of lamb.

It is essential that we continue to lobby for more funding to increase promotion of Scotch Lamb, particularly when there is clear evidence that shows that retail sales increase when QMS run a promotional campaign.

Forestry issues

Issues around forestry boundaries, maintaining fences and dealing with stray sheep in forestry areas was also discussed, with both the Cabinet Secretary and the Forestry Commission. Many of the issues around tree planting and problems with Forestry Commission ground had previously been tabled at a hill farming summit, held by the Scottish Government, earlier



NSA Northern Ireland Region Member Eileen McCloskey, talking with sheep farmers in the NSA Sheep Centre at the Royal Ulster Agricultural Show 2017.

the Andrews Milling/NSA Northern Ireland Sheep Farmer of the Year award, supported by his parents William and Anna May. Back then NSA officials could easily see the potential of this modest young man and eventually persuaded him to join the regional committee shortly afterwards. The rest, as they say, is history. Samuel had an infectious passion for sheep. In his role as NSA Chairman he was a terrific ambassador and tireless worker for the UK sheep sector. Northern Ireland is proud to have produced such a knowledgeable and diplomatic stalwart to represent our industry.



Lamb tasting proved to be a big hit in the NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre marquee, at the Royal Highland Show 2016.

in the month. Several NSA committee representatives were present, including NSA Next Generation Ambassador Jen Craig, who delivered a talk on hill farming to the gathered audience at the meeting in Lanark.

It is our intention to hold meetings on a regular basis with Mr Ewing to make sure sheep farmers' voices and concerns are being heard and considered as the country goes forward into Brexit discussions.

NSA Scottish Region is also represented in a UK livestock Brexit group, which meets every month to discuss issues and concerns around Brexit. The group is made up of several livestock representative bodies and, so far, has met with both Defra Minister George Eustice and Mr Ewing to reiterate the importance of trade, markets for lamb outside the EU, and the need for continued support payments and overseas labour – particularly in the abattoir sector.

We are looking forward to NSA Highland Sheep on Wednesday 31st May, which is being held this year at Kinnahaird Farm at Strathpeffer, and NSA Scottish Region will be running the Sheep Centre marquee at the Royal Highland Show in June. We look forward to catching up and discussing any issues that members might have at these events and more in the coming months.

NSA reports – English regions

Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

Like many other regions, the long spell of dry weather has had a mixture of consequences.

For those with late or outdoor lambing flocks it has been ideal, but now farmers are struggling with no grass for the sheep to move onto. Some are even eating into cutting pasture and others are reporting that it has been too dry for tillage.

Vets in our region are also warning that blow flies are already numerous, so if this dry spell is followed by a warm and damp spell then strike will come early. There is already some concern, also, about the prospects for the store sheep trade this autumn, which may also be related to the lower returns for hoggets this spring.

At the beginning of May, the NSA Breed Society Forum came to NSA Central Region and those attending had the benefit of a packed programme of speakers and presentations on a wide variety of interesting topics. I know many were both surprised and impressed at how much NSA is doing for the industry. There followed a 'breezy' and informative farm walk by kind permission of one of our committee members Charles Sercombe – see page 13 of this issue.

On a different note, the Tour de Yorkshire came to our area at the end of April, passing at speed twice down our lane. Although there were not the same opportunities for farmers to make some money out of car parking and camping facilities as there was three years ago during the Tour de France, it was still great fun seeing the crowds come out and enjoy the carnival atmosphere with bunting and blue and yellow bikes everywhere. Our sheep on the local reservoir banking were treated to some land-art of a fox on a bike (pictured), because the race ended in Fox Valley. This was the winning design in the local schools' competition.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

Why has some of the best land in the UK got sheep on it? This was the question

posed to farm owner Richard Thompson at a recent NSA Eastern Region farm walk, held at The Grove, Holbeach Hurn, Lincolnshire. A group of more than 30 farmers enjoyed a look at the flock of 500 Lleyen ewes with Charollais sired lambs, which graze one-year leys as part of the farms seven-year rotational grazing system. The land is top grade one agricultural quality and the flock achieves top performance results. Lambing takes place inside in March with turnout when



More than 30 farmers enjoyed NSA Eastern Region's farm walk in Lincolnshire.



Land art can be seen in Fox Valley, as part of the Tour de Yorkshire which passed through NSA Central Region.

the lambs are a few days old. Once out onto fresh leys no additional feed is offered and lambs are away by the beginning of June. Richard supports Thame Market, where the lambs are sold and attract premium prices. The sheep certainly looked a picture of good health and quality during our visit and gave a fascinating insight into running a flock of sheep in this arable context.

Marches

By Antony Spencer, Chairman

What a spring for lambing it has been. I can't remember such a run of dry weather at this time of year for a long time. It was certainly different for us in April 2016, sloshing around the lambing fields in wellies and leggings. This year you could have nipped across the field in your best shoes if you'd had to.

Our NSA Marches Region Next Generation Training Day in May was a success. It is always a pleasure to see enthusiastic young people who are keen to have a go and get involved in events like this and I hope those who attended took something away with them. A huge thanks to the NSA Marches Region Committee who were involved in organising the day, to the Carter family for kindly hosting, and to several local businesses for their generous sponsorship.

Back at home and the vast majority of our flock lambed to the first tupping cycle, so we're down to the final six 'hangers on'. I always find having decent bunches of similar age lambs to work with sets us up nicely for grassland and worm management. It definitely lessens the coccidiosis risk by not running younger lambs in with older ones. We sold the first few springers off the February lambers at the beginning of May and I was pleasantly surprised at what they came back at. Looking over the hedges on my travels, it looks as if most of the lambs in the region seem to be doing quite well. So it will be interesting to see how the markets will cope with the summer glut of sheep meat. I am a great believer in getting lambs away as soon as they hit the right specification for their market. If we don't get that all-important rain to keep the grass moving then every mouth sent off the farm will be a good thing this summer. NSA Marches Region is likely to be holding a farm walk in the autumn and members and friends are always welcome. So look out for updates in the coming months.

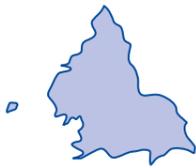
Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manger
NSA Northern Region is busy

preparing for NSA North Sheep on Wednesday 7th June. Great support has already been shown with sponsorship and stands from many local and national companies and fingers are now crossed for the weather to work with us. Gates open at 9am and there is much to see and do with a lamb festival and sheep dog handling, as well as a lamb dressing demonstration. There will also be a NSA Next Generation competition and a shearing relay competition. And there will be a chance for everyone to take part in a stock judging competition with local Buttsfield Young Farmers.

Several seminars and workshops will be run, covering topics including Brexit, upland farming, wool grading, health, and genetics. A group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors will also be giving presentations on their career paths.

Members are reminded that NSA Northern Region will once again be hosting in its usual position at the Great Yorkshire Show. NSA Membership Recruitment Officer Abi Swaffield will be



there for the three days, 11th to 13th July, so please do call in for a catch up.

It was extremely sad to hear of the death of NSA Chairman Sam Wharry. Sam was always very welcome here in the north. He was a genuine gentleman who always had a smile. Sam's family and friends are in the thoughts of the NSA Northern Region Committee.

South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

NSA South East Region Committee met at the beginning of May and made several important decisions. One was that the region is to continue to sponsor two young people, aged between 18 and 26, to attend the Sheep Breeders Roundtable (17th to 19th November). Any young people in our region interested in this opportunity are asked to write up to 200 words explaining why they think they would benefit from attending the conference.

Applications should be sent to myself for consideration by Monday 31st July, before being put to the committee. One stipulation this year is that successful applicants will be required to give a presentation at our Annual Regional Members Meeting in early 2018.

We are, once again, sponsoring the junior class at Southern Shears on Sunday 16th July, which is being held at Holmbush Farm in Sussex. It promises to be a worthwhile day out with plenty of classes for shearing enthusiasts.

Regional members will find a survey enclosed in this edition of Sheep Farmer, asking for opinions and views on what activities they would like NSA South East Region to organise. Please assist us by completing and returning the survey so we know what you would like to attend in terms of workshops and visits. Rams Fit for Purpose meetings and a visit to the Isle of Purbeck, similar to the visit to the



Isle of Wight visit made two years ago, are two ideas up for consideration at the moment.

South West

By Alan Derryman, Chairman

NSA South West Region Committee is pleased to announce that it has elected a new Vice Chairman, Peter Derryman, who is looking forward to taking on the role. Peter is a steady, approachable and enthusiastic individual and I am sure he is looking forward to listening to any thoughts or views from you during the coming months. Peter and I are looking forward to catching up with members at NSA Sheep South West on Tuesday 20th June. It will be held at Ayshford, near Westleigh, close to junction 27 of the M5. Visit www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk to find out more.

NSA South West Region Committee met recently and discussions centred on several topics, particularly antibiotic resistance. The take-home message was the importance of evidencing our usage of antibiotics as sheep farmers, in order to create data and provide an accurate picture.

We need to work with our vets and ensure that the highest animal welfare standards are maintained. In turn this will lead to reduced reliance on antibiotics.

Following a particularly dry spring and a good lambing for many farmers the season ahead is looking promising, although the weather is bound to change. The political weather could also change, following the general election on 8th June. And who knows what impact this may have on us.

Finally, NSA South West Region would like to pass its deepest sympathy to Sam Wharry's family after hearing the tragic news of his sudden death.



ATV handling



Competitors tackled an ATV course, alongside several other elements, at NSA Marches Region Next Generation Training Day.

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Elanco

Tackling challenges at NSA Sheep South West host farm

During a lifetime as custodian of his land, a farmer's mark of success is to hand over a healthy business to the next generation. Brexit has created an unstable agricultural business environment and, so far, the industry has no indication as to where future market opportunities lie. This uncertainty is forcing many farmers to reconsider their enterprises, not to mention their future role as food producers.

Nineteen years ago, Devon-based sheep farmers David and Janet Disney, hosts of this year's NSA Sheep South West, faced a similar situation when Lloyd Maunder lost its contract to supply Sainsbury's with pork. Mr Disney was finishing 2,000 heavy cutters a year for the company and the price dropped, overnight, from 100p/kg to 55p/kg. It then took a further six months to wind down this unprofitable enterprise. With five years left on a mortgage, he had to think quickly if he was to retain his farm and a relationship with his bank manager.

"The situation we suddenly found ourselves in was awful," remembers Mr Disney. "At that time, as a farmer, I was performing well."

Mr Disney and his brother Tony had been in a family business with their father James as tenants of two 49ha (120 acre) farms, which were managed as one unit. His father had taken on the Jersey Farm tenancy in 1939 and the adjoining Ayshford Farm, a dairy unit, in 1962.

In 1976 the M5 motorway divided Jersey Farm. Two years later the farms were purchased separately from the landowner. With Tony concentrating on dairy, this left David to develop a 110-sow pig unit, some laying poultry, and a flock of 120 Suffolk Mules.

By the mid-1980s, Mr Disney was one of the country's largest Vendean breeders and had embraced performance recording through the Sire Reference Group. Despite managing 200 pedigree ewes, Mr Disney turned his interest to Meatline sheep and after researching the opportunities, he became a franchise breeder of Meatline sheep.

"This was a tremendous experience and taught me many breeding disciplines," he says.

During the same period, he was also involved in the Sheep Improvement Group for performance recorded Suffolk, Texel and Charollais terminal sires. "Again, this was an invaluable experience because these sales attracted a different type of customer. You had to learn how to sell these sheep, which were marketed through their Best Linear Unbiased Prediction (BLUP) figures rather than on their looks," adds Mr Disney.

It was during this period he faced financial ruin when the pig contract was suddenly terminated. The stark choice was selling the family farm and finding a different job or making what he owned work for him. It was Philip Kerr, a specialist land agent based in Taunton, who hit the jackpot.

"He said that the best option was to convert some farm buildings, situated next to the M5, to create office space. Research showed that there was market for this in our area."

In 2002 the first tenant moved in. There are now 10 companies based at Swallow Court (the renamed Jersey Farm buildings) renting 18 offices. The resulting business is a partnership between David, his wife Janet, their daughter Karen who manages the enterprise, and son Martin.

So despite the changes in farming, Mr Disney (70) will hand over a successful business to the next generation while still living in the house where he was born.

He also retains an active interest in agriculture, with a directorship within Sheep Improved Genetics – which produces the wool-shedding Exlana sheep – along with day-to-day farm duties.

"I had a terrible situation to deal with in the late 1990s. It was a very difficult time and, as a farmer, I felt an awful loss of pride," says Mr Disney. "Brexit is going to throw some other farmers into the same scenario. However, I do think it could also be quite exciting. Farmers will have to find ways to target production, discover their own markets and then have an influence over them. But it will be difficult."

Visit www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk

Highlights

Competitions

- Gift of the gavel. All monies raised to be donated to the Farming Community Network (FCN).
- NSA Next Generation Shepherd. Open class open to a young shepherd, aged under 27 years, living or working in Cornwall, Devon, Somerset or Dorset. Student class is open to students aged under 22 years and attending agricultural college. Sponsored by Mole Valley and Volac respectively.
- Sheep dog sale.
- Lamb selection.
- Fleece competition – qualifier for the BWMB Golden Fleece final.

Demonstrations

- Shearing.
- Sheep handling.
- Incorporating electric fencing into grazing systems.



NSA Sheep South West 2017
National Sheep Association Organised by NSA South West Region

Tuesday 20th June 9.30am - 5pm
By kind permission of David & Janet Disney
Ayshford, Westleigh, Tiverton. EX16 7HL




- * Workshops
- * Competitions
- * Demonstrations
- * Sheepdog Sale
- * Shepherd of the Future - £1,000 prize fund
- * Student Shepherd of the Future - £500 prize fund

- * Trade & Breed Society Stands
- * Auctioneering Competition
- * Fleece Competitions

No Dogs on Site except Assistance dogs & those entered in the sale.
Admission - £12 Non NSA Members.
NSA Members - Free on production of card & subject to conditions.
YFC members/Students £6 with current card.
Under 16 - Free.

Further information from Sue Martyn.
Tel: 01409 271385. Mob: 07967 512660.
Email: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk
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New workshop area and seminars at NSA Northern Ireland event

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2017 will be held at the usual venue, Ballymena Livestock Market, on Monday 3rd July. The event, which runs from 9.30am until 6pm, promises a packed programme of competitions, attractions, workshops and demonstrations. There will also be trade and breed society stands, with plenty of representatives on-hand to speak to visitors throughout the day.

Since the previous NSA Sheep Northern Ireland, the livestock market has built a large extension and this has created a lot more indoor space and made way for a new demonstration and workshop area.

Practical sessions

Morning and afternoon sessions held here will include practical, hands-on advice on ewe body condition scoring with CAFRE and an update from AHDB's Liz Genever on the organisation's on-going RamCompare project.

Competitions running throughout the day including the British Wool Marketing Board's fleece competition and entries for this are encouraged. The NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition, sponsored





NSA Sheep Northern Ireland
www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sheepni

Monday 3rd July 2017
Ballymena Livestock Mart, Woodside Road, Ballymena

EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

- Commercial sheep stockjudging competition
- Open fleece competition
- Sheep display
- Trade stands
- Seminars
- The Next Generation Young Shepherds Competition
- Working sheepdog and puppy sale





Further details from Edward Adamson on 07711 071290
or edward.adamson1@gmail.com

Speaker programme should spark lively debate

This year's seminar programme is expected to be well attended, covering a range of subjects that are at the forefront of everyone's mind. The first, which will focus on health plans and the responsible use of antibiotics, will be presented by John Grant, Partner in Parklands Veterinary Group. The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance (RUMA) has played a vital role in the promotion of the responsible use of antibiotics, developing a series of guidelines designed for farmers and vets that will be explored during this session. The use of vaccines, where available, are a key preventative health tool to reduce the incidence or severity of disease, as well as the need to treat infections with antibiotics.

Reducing the need to use antibiotics in the first instance can be achieved by developing and implementing herd and flock health plans in partnership with your vet. These bespoke plans take individual factors on farm and animal health history into account and focus on preventative health measures, such as biosecurity, hygiene and nutrition.

Following this will be Justin McCarthy, Irish Farmers Journal Editor, who will be speaking during the second seminar of the day. Farming is a business that now requires a much more astute planning attitude, rather than a 'muddle through' approach. Mr McCarthy examine this concept, highlighting how important it is to have a business plan in place.

The next speaker to take the podium will be Phelim O'Neill, who spends some of his time in Europe, and will be sharing his views on Brexit, from both sides of the debate. Up for discussion will be the mutual reliance that Southern and Northern Ireland have on one another in terms of imports and exports.

Murray Rohloff, a well-known sheep consultant from New Zealand, will speak in the final seminar He'll offer a Kiwi perspective of what farming without subsidies meant for farmers in the country during the 1984 reforms. Are there are certain similarities on the horizon in the UK and might we be able to avoid the harsh times experienced by New Zealand's farmers during that time? Mr Rohloff will examine this in what is sure to be a thought-provoking discussion to round off the days' seminar programme.

by CEVA Animal Health, is also sure to draw a keen interest. A new format this year will allow competitors to choose five out of six tasks to complete, rather than having to do five compulsory ones.

Tasty dishes

Cooking demonstrations will see a variety of dishes taking shape throughout the day, providing visitors with tips on cooking lamb and giving those who may not be so familiar with modern lamb dishes a taste of why it is such a special product.

And visitors will also be able to enjoy a visit to the sheepdog sale. Whether it is to purchase a dog or just admire the skill and bond between a good shepherd and their dog, this attraction is always a crowd pleaser at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland.

Visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sheepni for more information.

NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale

Setting the standard and the price in August will be the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale. It's traditionally the first NSA sale of the year and will take place on Monday 7th August, 2017, at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells.



It is easier than ever to sell at the early sale – simply fill in an online entry form on the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales website, where the catalogue can also be downloaded. It's worth remembering that once the purchase is made, the catering is good too.

NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman John Owens, Vice Chairman Richard Gwilliam and Treasurer Jeff Chilman were re-elected, unopposed, at the organisation's May meeting.

Leominster-based breeder Mr Owens acknowledged that the sheep industry is facing 'uncertain times' and says: "Hopefully farming is in a reasonable state. Sheep are selling quite well, but farming isn't too high on the Government's agenda at the moment. It hasn't given us any indication of what might happen. People need to know what the future holds."

"Quality does sell at the end of the day. Better sheep are clearly more easily sold and NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales has established a reputation for supplying quality rams. The early sale provides the benchmark and sets the trade for the coming year."

At the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale in 2016, 390 sheep sold in total and the gross sale figure was £213,615 – considerably more than the previous year's £195,000. Headline prices at the Royal Welsh Showground were also up on 2016.

The highest priced ram was a Texel shearling sold for 3,350gns. The second highest price this year was also for a Texel, the breed champion yearling, which sold for 2,100gns

Entries for the NSA Wales & Border Early Sale close on Wednesday 12th July 2017. More at www.nsaramsales.co.uk or from Executive Director Jane Smith on 01291 673939 or jane@nsaramsales.co.uk.

NSA Eastern Region summer sales

NSA Eastern Region will be offering two excellent ram sale venues again this year. The Rugby sale will be held on Friday 25th August at Rugby Farmers Mart, Warwickshire. Entries of more than 120 rams are expected to include Charollais, Texel, Suffolk and Beltex. The Melton Mowbray sale will be held on Friday 15th September at Melton Mowbray Market. Average prices have risen during the past few years and clearance rates for correct, well-fleshed tups are very high. This sale typically attracts between 250 and 270 rams of various terminal sire breeds and the quality continues to improve year on year.

Ram are inspected on teeth, toes and testicles at both sales, so buyers can be reassured that they are bidding on correct animals of good quality. Entry forms and catalogues for both sales are available from Jonathan and Carroll Barber on 01953 607860 or jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk.



NSA South West Region Ram Sale

NSA South West Region Ram Sale is being held on Wednesday 16th August at Exeter Livestock Centre. Breed Societies with official sales will hold their shows the evening before the sale, Tuesday 15th August, giving buyers the opportunity to see rams out of their pens ahead of the sale.

Once again, entries from any breed are welcome and there is also opportunity for additional Breed Societies to hold an official sale. Organisers would like to see pedigree or pure-bred females forward for the sale, to make it even more attractive to prospective purchasers.

As in previous years, vendors must be NSA members to be able to put forward entries. Entries for the sale close on Monday 3rd July, with entry forms being sent to anyone who has sold at NSA South West Region Ram Sale during the past three years.

Entry forms can be downloaded from the NSA website or directly – details below. The ballot will be held one week after the closing date and catalogues will be available from early August. These will be available via email and will be automatically mailed to vendors and previous purchasers. NSA South West Region Ram Sale Committee is having a stand at NSA Sheep South West on Tuesday 20th June and



will be pleased to see vendors and purchasers, both previous and prospective. More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or from NSA South West Region Ram Sale Secretary Sue Martyn on 01409 271385 or 07967 512660, or email suem@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Easier than ever to submit entries

It's easier than ever to sell at the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale, which is being held at the Royal Welsh Showground a week later than usual this year on Monday 25th September.

Buyers can find an online entry form, alongside a sales catalogue, on the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales website and, once purchases are made, tups taxis will be on hand to take rams to buyers' transport.

NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman and Leominster-based sheep breeder John Owens acknowledged that the sheep industry is facing uncertain times. "But better sheep are clearly more easily sold and the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales has established a reputation for supplying quality rams."

The main sale in 2016 achieved a record price of 18,000 guineas for a Texel. Turnover was up on the previous year at £2.2 million, with 85% of sheep forward sold. And the average prices paid held up or increased across the breeds.

Entries for the NSA Wales and Border Main Sale close on Wednesday 9th August. More information can be found at www.nsaramsales.co.uk or from Executive Director Jane Smith on 01291 673939 or email jane@nsaramsales.co.uk.



Breed societies come together

Providing an effective information network for the UK's numerous breed societies is a major remit for NSA and many of them came together at the annual NSA Breed Society Forum, which was held in Melton Mowbray in Leicestershire, in May.

With the theme of 'Future-proofing the sheep industry as we prepare to leave the EU', the day provided affiliated breed society representatives with key updates on a number of topical issues. The day started with an update from NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, who brought delegates up to date on some of NSAs current and ongoing work. He was followed by NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Executive Director Jane Smith, who highlighted some of the services NSA ram sales provide for buyers and sellers.

Farm Animal Genetic Resources (FAnGR) committee member Marcus Bates continued by giving an update on new EU zootechnical legislation for registering breed societies and how leaving the EU will affect these. He explained the purpose of zootechnical legislation and explored why breed societies may want to consider applying for recognition. Recognition allows any pedigree animal entered into the flock book of a recognised breed society, in one member state, to be entered into the flock book of the same society in other member states.

Emma Steele of Signet discussed updates to the service it is offering producers, including a new fee structure that rewards sheep breeders who record online. She also explained that flocks of more than 250 ewes can no longer record manually.

Updates on several new EBVs becoming available were also



Farm walk was hosted by Charles Sercombe.

discussed, including Saliva IgA, FEC and lamb survival EBV. Ms Steele also outlined new point-of-sale identifiers that Signet is now producing to demonstrate rams that are in the top 10% or 25% for their breed.

Delegates then heard that the first phase of the RamCompare project has now been completed. There were five breeds in the first stage and this will be extended to include more terminal breeds in phase two.

Marcus Bates continued with an update on the importance of international trade and this concluded the morning session, before a farm walk kindly hosted by NSA Central Region Committee Member Charles Sercombe in the afternoon. More detail from the NSA Breed Society Forum has been sent directly to NSA-affiliated societies. Find a copy in the members-only area of the NSA website.



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IAE weigh crate put straight to work, thanks to NSA win

Lucky NSA member Andrew Pendrick is the proud owner of an IAE lamb weigh crate after winning NSA's membership recruitment prize draw just a few months after signing up to join the organisation earlier this year. Andrew established his commercial flock almost 25 years ago, which he now runs alongside a flock of pedigree Charollais on his farm at Buckfastleigh in Devon.



during 2017, as part of its membership recruitment campaign. New NSA members are automatically entered into the draw, as well as existing members who recommend a friend or neighbour to sign up to NSA. With no limit to the number of entries that existing members can have, the more people you recommend the more chances you have to win. Write your membership details on the form opposite and pass it to a friend or neighbour.

Andrew says he re-joined NSA this year ahead of NSA Sheep South West and says he is looking forward to

enjoying free entry as a result. "The event at Tiverton is a highlight on my calendar and being able to get in for free, as an NSA member, is an added bonus. I've also sold males and females at the NSA South West Region Ram Sale in previous years, so I may well do that again this year."

Timely replacement

Andrew says he will be wasting no time in putting the weigh crate to good use, adding that his current one is 'on its last legs'. "This new kit could not have come at a better time. It will hopefully help us effectively weigh lambs before getting them away to prime lamb markets in the local area and I'm thrilled we've been lucky enough to win it."

NSA is giving away a total of four IAE lamb weigh crates between 1st December 2016 and 2nd November 2017. More information, terms and conditions can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.



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Supplying a mobile phone number will allow us to send you occasional text messages about NSA events in your area.

Email:

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

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

Your Sheep Enterprise

No of commercial breeding females?

No of pedigree breeding females?

No of bought-in store lambs finished per year?

SF



Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit

Please fill in the form and send to:
The National Sheep Association, The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH

Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

Service user number

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Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Branch sort code

Bank/building society account number

Reference

Instruction to your bank or building society

Please pay National Sheep Association Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with National Sheep Association and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Date

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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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Upbeat industry atmosphere at NSA Welsh Sheep 2017

Thousands of visitors flocked to a hugely successful and upbeat NSA Welsh Sheep 2017 and returned home well briefed to meet future challenges. Seminars, workshops and a supportive opening speech from Brecon Beacons National Park Chairman Melanie Doel inspired sheep farmers facing difficult and challenging times.

NSA Welsh Sheep 2017 – held at Llwyn Bedw Farm, Talybont on Usk, Brecon – presented an opportunity for sheep farmers to be proud. It was a day to showcase the industry and was a strong reminder to decision makers just how much sheep farming means to Welsh communities.

Local communities

Mrs Doel added: "As a National Park Authority we recognise the importance of the farming industry in shaping the National Park and supporting its local communities. We fully appreciate and applaud the work farmers put in to shaping these special landscapes in the Brecon Beacons and across Wales. "I've worked and lived for much of my life in this beautiful park and I know how passionate and devoted farmers are to keeping it special. We are keen to work with bodies, such as NSA, on a day-to-day basis and more strategically in helping to shape policies post-Brexit."

Mrs Doel recognised that, with the financing of economic development in many parts of Wales having been



largely driven by EU funding, there is real uncertainty about future funding.

Welsh Government Agriculture Director Andrew Slade told the Brexit seminar that during his 25-year career in agricultural policy he had never known such uncertain and challenging times. He added that 'so many things are potentially up in the air' and that there were risks but also potential opportunities down the line.

He continued by saying that he thought there was a bright future ahead for agriculture in the UK, particularly in Wales, if risks were minimised and opportunities grabbed. "It is important to get the approach to Brexit correct across the whole of Wales and the mission is to make the best of Brexit for Wales," Mr Slade concluded.

Trade and market access, particularly with red meat, means access to the Single Market is important. Around 90% of the 40% of Welsh Lamb that's exported goes to the Single Market.

Huge crowds

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman Llew Thomas said that, despite the wet weather, visitors had come in huge numbers. The event had been an undoubted success for all concerned and he was grateful to everyone who had worked hard to make it happen, particularly Event Organiser Helen Davies.

He thanked more than 150 trade stands, organisations and breed societies who supported the event

and also extended his gratitude to the sponsors.

The venue, a traditional hill farm rented from Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water, lies in the heart of the Brecon Beacons, with grazing stretching towards Pen y Fan and extending to 405 hectares (1,000 acres). It has been home to five generations of the Williams family and supports a closed flock of 3,500 sheep and a herd of 70 suckler cows.

In his welcome address, Mr Thomas said the Brecon Beacons was celebrating 60 years as a National Park. The beauty of the landscape was the result of grazing by sheep and cattle.

Popular seminars

Llew Thomas added: "Once again we thank everyone, particularly the stewards and the host family Stephen and Lisa Williams, and their son Luke and Stephen's father Godfrey, and also visitors for their patience in getting here. The atmosphere has been upbeat. The information and knowledge gained seems to have given people hope for the future of the sheep industry in these difficult and uncertain times."

Seminars on topics including Brexit, the future funding of farming and antibiotic resistance were informative. And two workshops – 'planning for a healthy flock' and 'how trees and woodland can help you', which was run by the Woodland Trust – also proved popular. The farm tours, running throughout the day, also drew plenty of visitors.

NSA Welsh Sheep 2017 fact file

Host farm: Llwyn Bedw Farm, Talybont on Usk, Brecon, Powys

Date: Tuesday 16th May

NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year: 1, Ben Hamner, Wrexham; 2, Tomos Owen and Dafydd Davies; 4, Lisa Davies

Outdoor trade stand: Field Options

Indoor trade stand: Shearwell Data

Breed Society Stand: Blackface Sheep Breeders' Association

Ewe hogg show and sale: Native upland: W Morgan (Llandoverly Whiteface); Continental: A Owen (Roussin)

Shearing: 1, Eifion Morgan and Will Workman; 2, Tudor Roderick and Huw Morgan; 3, Gwilym Williams and Howell

Best sheared sheep: Ian Mathers

Wool on the Hoof: Bluefaced Leicester

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Innovative selling options for pedigree stock

New selling systems and the latest marketing tools are being put to the test by some pedigree sheep breeders to complement the more traditional ram sales. Here breeders explain why they have looked at doing things differently and share the success they've experienced so far.

Tim White is a member of Sheep Improved Genetics (SIG), a Devon-based company that breeds and sells Exlana sheep. About 100 rams are now sold through SIG's annual sale using what Tim describes as a transparent and buyer-easy system. In effect, they 'front load' potential buyers with extensive genetic and performance information and a realistic starting price.

Technologically advanced

"The whole remit behind the Exlana – a composite breed – is to breed sustainable sheep for the market," he says, adding that the Exlana breeding programme is scientifically driven and technologically advanced. "And, thanks to rigorous recording and breeding evaluation, we have bred sheep with high health status and the genetic potential to perform in grass-based systems.

"We want to make sure that we pass this on to our buyers. We sell our rams 100% on their records – how they perform and their ancestry and progeny, using predictions through BLUP."

The data is used ahead of the sale to set a price for each ram, and rams are grouped for sale day depending on their price. Potential buyers mark their



Tim White sells stock using extensive genetic and performance information.

favoured ram on a card and hold this up when the ram goes into the ring. If there's only one bidder, then they get the ram. If there are two or more bidders they can decide to progress a regular bidding system or put names in a hat – in practice potential buyers start bidding, but the price generally only goes

up by 5 or 10%. "There are exceptions. For example, one or two rams may catch the eye and bids can go up to four figures," adds Tim.

He admits that the Exlana sheep market is a specialist niche, but popularity is growing. They attract about 150 people to the sale, which is in its third year. The sale system has gone down well with buyers and it is a good marketing tool for the breed. "Buyers know what they're getting and how much it's costing. It means they can budget – they know roughly how much each ram will cost and they can study the records ahead of sale day. They then get chance to see the rams on the day. And, as breeders, by providing all this information, and setting prices and streamlining the selling process, we have more control than we would through traditional ram sales."

Helmsman sale

Lleyn breeders Marcus and Kathryn Bullock have been selling their pedigree rams off their Worcestershire-based farm for the past decade. "The latest foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2007 was a turning point for us," says Marcus, who runs an equipment business alongside his sheep flock at Abberley.

"We preferred to keep the stock on the farm and get buyers to visit us – we're fairly central so this has worked well, until numbers increased and selling to one buyer at a time got too time consuming.

"We were open all hours and three years ago we had 90 rams to sell and averaged two-and-a-half rams per person. And setting prices was hard – we felt we may have been under-selling some of our better animals."

With around 100 rams for sale annually, Marcus and Kathryn decided to take a different approach in 2016. "Our buyers liked to buy off farm as it was less pressurised. So, working with our local auctioneer Clive Roads from McCartneys, we tried a Helmsman sale.

Rams were penned in small groups on sale day and a reserve was set for each



Marcus Bullock and his Bank Farm Lleyns.

Show-stand approach works

Sheep breeding in more remote areas does have some advantages, but not when it comes to on farm sales. So says Suffolk breeder Irene Fowle who farms in the extreme north east of Scotland. "Although I am encouraged by many to have an on-farm sale, I am not prepared to take that risk," she says. "I only have one breed of sheep – so for many I'm not a one-stop-shop when it comes to buying pedigree stock and I'm not really en route to anywhere either."

Winning edge

But Irene – who owns the award-winning Essie flock – is keen to promote her 'winning edge', which reflects 30 years of hard work, to prospective buyers – and she needs more of these now that the number of shearlings for sale each year has topped 80.

"I've carefully selected for fast growth, conformation, ease of lambing and vigorous lambs that finish off grass," adds Irene. "I want to pass this information, along with top UK performance recording and health status, to prospective buyers as directly as possible and without them necessarily being on the farm to see the flock."

Generating sales

So for the past three years Irene has taken her own stand at key sheep events, including the NSA National and NSA Scotland. "We still have pedigree breeders from the UK, Europe and Canada buying off-farm, but our presence at the events is proving successful in spreading the word and generating sales."

And the proof of the pudding is in the

eating. Irene's 30 shearlings reached the second highest price of £840 at Kelso ram sales in 2016 and her 30 shearlings at Dingwall auction mart – the largest group at the sale – made the top average price.

This year Irene is 'upping' her game with new display boards and additional sales material plus the performance recording cards. "We also have two shearlings on our stand and two ewe hogs for the Highland Sheep Show and Sale. Essie gimmers have taken first prize and top prices at the past two events, and this is very valuable marketing for us. It demonstrates that the top performance records for both terminal and maternal traits are reflected in our sheep."

Customer demand

Show stands provide Irene with an opportunity to catch up with regular buyers and attract news ones. She is keen to continue meeting customer demand with her stock and to see the progeny of her rams in buyers' flocks. An Essie ram has been used in the AHDB RamCompare project for the past two years. He and his progeny will be on show at the Bowhill Estate open day this summer where the progeny of five different breed sires in six commercial flocks will be compared.

On-line marketing is also important. "Many of our international contacts are made online and at sale time a catalogue is published with details of rams and their individual performance records. Photos of rams are also put up on Facebook. "I work hard throughout the year to keep Facebook active with news about the flock, invitations and sale news. Videos and photos of flock events, like lambing, shearing, farm visits and shows get lots of hits."



Irene Fowle and her award-winning Essie flock.

lot. Buyers at the sale had a bidding card and, after looking around the rams, they could put a bid against any they were interested in. A bell signalled the start of the sale for each pen, when bids were chalked up next to each ram's number on the pen. Bidding lasted for 20 minutes per pen.

Resounding success

"Clive, or one of his colleagues, managed the bids, which kept the sale independent and left me free to talk to buyers," says Marcus, adding that the highest bidder got the ram unless bids went above 1,000 guineas. At this point they were auctioned. Seven rams fell

into this category, with a large number attracting the eye of commercial sheep breeders and selling for good prices. The event was deemed a resounding success and will be continued this year.

"It was a leap of faith," adds Marcus. "But buyers liked the simplicity and transparency of the system and the fact that it was a one-stop-shop for buying rams. Some bought foundation stock and a lot bought – with confidence – rams for commercial grass-based flocks, having seen our system and high health status first-hand."

And making it even simpler for buyers was Marcus' decision to deliver all the rams to their new homes. "This

made the day easier, less stressful for the stock and it also protected the unit's health status. Being based in Worcestershire, and being able to combine ram and equipment deliveries around the country, made sure that this part wasn't too onerous."

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "These innovative approaches to selling rams are interesting and I think that they complement traditional ram sales. They give a particular type of buyer what they are looking for and they also challenge the norm and encourage everyone to look at whether there is more that we can do to help sellers and buyers to get what they want."

The return of 'the golden hoof'

By Phil Stocker, NSA

NSA has published a new report, primarily for arable farmers who are thinking about introducing sheep into their arable fields. The document, 'The Benefits of Sheep in Arable Rotations', discusses the many advantages of sheep – either grazing short-term crops, such as stubble turnips or swedes, or longer term grass and clover leys, which may be growing for two or more years.

But it's not a new idea. Talk about integrating grassland and sheep within arable farming systems and there are many older generation shepherds and farmers whose eyes light up and they tell you that sheep used to be termed as 'the golden hoof'. Indeed, it's only 50 years ago that it was commonplace for sheep to be considered highly useful on arable farms. They supported a rotation that helped to keep weeds and cereal pests at bay and they had the ability to 'break up' long-term permanent pasture to allow the plough to do its job. The sheep, and the grass and roots they fed on, also released essential plant nutrients for the following cash crops.

Soil quality

The reasons for the dramatic decline in this practice are well documented and include the availability and cost effectiveness of artificial fertilisers, herbicides and plant protection products, and specialisation in arable farming. Then there's the 'hassle factor' of livestock and mixed farming, and a reservoir of soil quality and fertility left over from previous decades.

Fast forward to more recent times and, like so many examples of over reliance on inputs and the convenience of not having to worry about 'management system solutions', the specialist arable and cropping farm

is recognising the need to improve soil conditions and the fact that problem weeds cannot forever be controlled by the sprayer tank.

These may be the driving factors behind a growing interest in the reintroduction of grass and fodder breaks and livestock into arable rotations, but there are other reasons too. Margins in arable farming are tight and reductions in production and area-based payments mean the fields with below average performance bring the whole enterprise down.

Mixed farming

Improving the production of fields comes down to improving soil quality and well-run sheep enterprises can return better margins than below-par cereal performance. The ongoing march of environmental interests on arable farms also shows no sign of abating and the environmental movement and policy makers have long called for more mixed farming – crops, grassland, and livestock, to support increases in invertebrates, pollinators, and farmland birds.

And, finally, there are the farming based rural communities. With fewer and fewer people farming more and more acres, some farmers want to help bring more people back to working on farms. This would make them busier places – having more people on site improves security and ensures a reliable supply of labour during busier times – and would allow farms to gain financially from alternative income sources and to spread the risk.

If grassland and livestock are to make a comeback, sheep are ideally placed to be the animal of choice. Sheep require relatively low capital requirements and low or no building and machinery needs. Modern efficient temporary fencing

Available now

The NSA booklet offers practical guidance to arable farmers on the different types of crop and infrastructure such as fencing and water needed. There are also additional rules and regulations that come with keeping animals.

It ends with a useful checklist of questions that they should ask themselves to see whether sheep really are the answer to their arable problems. These include what type of sheep will they be? Will they be, for example, store lambs or a breeding flock? And will the sheep enterprise detract or add value to the arable enterprise?

'The Benefits of Sheep in Arable Rotations' is available to read or download from the Policy Section of the NSA website, or farmers can request a printed copy by emailing enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk

and watering options mean that sheep farming is a mobile enterprise that can be moved around easily, and offers a range of business set up options. Managed well, sheep can provide positive financial margins as well as improve the soil and break the lifecycles of cereal weeds, pests and diseases.

There are benefits for sheep management too with rotational grass providing clean, parasite free grazing. Nitrogen fixing and fertility building clover leys also offer good nutrition, efficient productivity, and fast growth rates.

This may be a return to a traditional practice but technology in grass, clover, herbs, and forage crops has moved on just as it has with sheep breeding and management techniques. The reintroduction of sheep to arable farms could be 'renewable technology' within farming at its best.

And, if arable farmers want to welcome livestock onto the farm but do not wish to manage animals themselves, there are opportunities to work with new entrants who are keen to take the first step onto the sheep farming ladder.

I hope this guide offers inspiration, ideas, and guidance to arable farmers who may be starting to think their farms would benefit from livestock and additional enterprises. I will also help shepherds and sheep farmers who are looking for new opportunities. The contributors and case study farmers have made it possible and my thanks and appreciation go to them for their willingness to share their experiences and knowledge.



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1. The BRP Cattle and Sheep Parasite Control Product Guide, 2016, AHDB Beef & Lamb. * *Dictyocaulus filaria*, ** *Oestrus ovis*



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Passion for farming drives flock expansion in Aberdeenshire

By Hannah Park, NSA

A determination to make a living from farming is what drives sheep farmer John Fyall, who manages his flock at Sittyton near Newmachar in Aberdeenshire. And juggling the day-to-day running of his flock alongside his role as a rural valuer, as well as various other commitments to the local community, most recently his appointment as NSA Scottish Region Chairman, means there is never a dull moment. John took over the role in February 2017, soon after he took on employment as a land agent for a local contractor based on nearby. This allows him to do much of his professional work from home and to devote days away to his new role, to get stuck into issues he is passionate about. Securing the future of agriculture in Scotland for the next generation is high on the agenda.

Eye opening

A former auctioneer at Thainstone, and later Dingwall & Highland Marts, John remains involved behind the scenes at several livestock markets on larger sale days and says that the falling number of sheep coming through the market is eye-opening. "I am really concerned about the future of the sheep industry," he says. "You can see just how much sheep numbers coming through the market have come down. There are only two shepherds, that I know of, who are

Farm facts

- John is half way through a 15-year tenancy at Sittyton
- Farm sits in 35 hectares (87 acres) of organic permanent pasture and John takes rest of his ground on long-term and seasonal grazing lets
- Buys in 900 ewe lambs annually and sells as gimmers between August and October, made up of hill type North Country Cheviots, Mules and Texel crosses
- Aiming to build the pedigree Beef Shorthorn flock from 22 to between 40 and 50 head.

that means for the future of the industry.



Mules and Texel cross ewe lambs returning to Sittyton.

selling through Lairg and making a full-time living off sheep who are under 40 years old.

"It's sobering to think about what

Young people, who want to get into farming in Scotland, are struggling to get anywhere with issues around historic subsidies, a lack of people who want to let land and barrier after barrier when approaching the banks to get a loan.

"I don't think that we will ever get trust back in the letting market, so I think we'll either have to accept that we're working with seasonal lets or we'll have to try and buy somewhere."

Farm tenancy

John's desire to make a living from farming began at a young age when, during lambing and shearing times, he helped out on farms near to where he grew up in East Lothian. He applied for farm tenancies of his own in Northern England and Scotland before moving to Sittyton in 2008. The tenanted farm sits in 35 hectares (87 acres) of organic permanent pasture at 26m (250ft) above sea level.

An additional 97 hectares (240 acres) of seasonal ground is also rented, predominantly on a week-by-

week basis, as well as another 12 hectares (30 acres) on a five-year lease. John explains that his herd of 22 pedigree beef Shorthorn cattle run on the land surrounding Sittyton, calving from the end of March onwards, while the seasonal grazing is devoted to the sheep.

"It has taken me a few years to build up the pedigree beef herd, which I'm hoping to get to around 30 cows next year. Around 40 or 50 is, ultimately, what I'm aiming for. This will keep the grass as I want it," says John.

Selling stock

The sheep enterprise has seen some changes during the past two years. After the subsidy rebase in 2015, which meant that landowners kept any subsidies that he had budgeted on receiving on several large areas of ground he was renting, he decided it was no longer worth taking on that ground as seasonal lets. And John took the decision to sell the remainder of his breeding ewes.

He explains: "With the organic land at Sittyton, I've always kept the cattle

separate to give me the option to sell organic. The ewes began creating complications when I lost a lot of my long-term ground lets because I couldn't have anything seasonal 'in conversion'.

"When the AWPR job came up, I decided to cut my losses. I sold all the breeding sheep, rather than carry on with just 150 head – the number the flock would have to have been reduced to if I was to keep running them on the available organic ground I had left.

"I've always run ewe lambs on the non-subsidised, seasonal lets so it seemed like a logical move to focus on what we could do with them, rather than the breeding side of things. If we can get ground on a long enough tenure, we'll go back up in numbers. But I'm not going to lamb sheep until I get up to 600 ewes, to make it worthwhile."

Ewe lambs

Currently, John is buying in around 900 ewe lambs, from both Lairg and Huntly and, also, privately, in August and September when the gate is closed and all sheep are dipped. Up to 500 hill-type North Country Cheviot, 150 Mule and 150 Texel crosses are grazed through the summer and sold as gimmers between August and October.

John explains: "I mainly buy in Cheviots because there is a lot of interest in the breed, with buyers coming up to the sales from the north of England and hill folk restocking. I wanted to keep a bit of variety though, to try and cater for several different markets. But it can be more difficult to buy in Mules at a price that means that I can resell for a profit.

"Demand for Texel crosses will always be there, particularly in this area. Aberdeenshire-based farmers seem to



John Fyall.

like the stronger ewe. And a lot of people here are also cattle farmers, who keep sheep to keep the place tidy. They have a sheep in mind and are prepared to pay a price to get that. In 2016 I didn't see a Texel gimmer sold for under £140.

Industry commitment

"Because I rely on such a lot of week-to-week seasonal grazing lets, I've got to have a flock that I can just sell at prime price tomorrow if I needed to. The good thing about the ewe-lamb job is that the work starts now, with longer summer nights, and it gives me a bit more time to manage the flock alongside my other commitments. It also means that I can concentrate on the cattle in the winter.

"My aim is to carry on building up cattle and sheep numbers, without debt, so I can get to a point where I can farm on a full-time basis. But I'm not sure that is ever going to happen in my lifetime. I just hope I can make the most of my position to help and encourage young people coming into the sheep industry – and that it is able to support them."



The majority of the ewe lambs at Sittyton are Cheviots.



A pedigree Beef Shorthorn herd runs alongside the sheep enterprise.

Avoid planning-consent pitfalls

By Tim Russ, Roythornes Solicitors
We are regularly consulted by farmers and landowners who are using some of their buildings, or part of their land, for a use different from the planning consent that they have.



A typical example is the use of a house, where there is an agricultural tying condition on the planning consent that requires the house to be used only for accommodating agricultural employees, for housing non-agricultural workers. In such cases, unless there was a section 106 agreement in force, it was possible to obtain a certificate of lawful use that legalised the otherwise illegal use after either four or 10 years of the breach of the planning consent.

This is not possible in the case of an agreement embodied in a section 106 agreement, because this amounts to a binding agreement between the land owner and the council. A certificate of lawful use cannot help here. This issue often arises on a sale or purchase of rural land where the illegal uses of land, during many years, must be disclosed as part of the sale process.

Deliberately concealed

Things have, however, now fundamentally changed in respect of the things that need to be done to regularise such breaches. The principal change that farmers need to be aware of is that even where the time limit for taking enforcement action has expired, in other words the four- or 10-year period set out in the Town and Country Planning Act, the council, as the planning

authority, can still take enforcement action if that breach of planning control has been deliberately concealed. This is due to section 124 of the Localism Act 2011, which came into force on 6th April 2012.

In such cases the council can apply to the magistrate's court for a planning enforcement order at any time within six months of a breach of planning control coming to their attention. The order, if granted, will give the council a further period of one year during which they can take enforcement action. The order can only be granted if, to quote for the statute: "The court is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the apparent breach, or any of the matters constituting the apparent breach, has (to any extent) been deliberately concealed by any person or persons."

Notorious case

The term 'deliberately concealed' is not defined in the legislation. This provision was brought in to try to stop people, like the notorious case of Robert Fidler, from building houses that were then concealed by hay bales or within barns. But the term 'deliberate concealment' could feasibly be applied to situations where the person did not take active steps to draw the breach to the council's attention.

Until lawyers have some case law on this there is no way landowners can be sure how the provision will be applied and so, in my view and that of other land agents and lawyers, we need to be warning clients about this issue to discharge their duties to their clients.

So, where a farmer is purchasing property that includes a development for which planning permission was not obtained, they cannot now simply rely on the four- or 10-year rule. Similarly, if a buyer is getting a statutory declaration sworn to evidence the long-term use of the unauthorised development, it is, in my view, worth including wording along the lines that 'at no point was the development concealed from the Local Planning Authority' and 'the development was openly carried out and would have been easily discoverable' in the declaration.

I would now recommend that if there is evidence of the way in which it would have been easily discoverable, such as the payment of council tax, owners should make sure that is appended to the declaration.

Enforcement notice

Farmers should also be aware that the ability to obtain retrospective planning permission has been curtailed where an enforcement notice has been served. The ability to appeal against an enforcement notice on the grounds that planning permission should be granted for the development has also been curtailed. This, in conjunction with the Local Planning Authority's increased powers to take enforcement action, could be very problematic for purchasers of property where the planning situation has not been regularised.

Landowners who believe that they may have a problem with a breach of planning in this way need, in my opinion, to urgently take professional advice.

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Thinking of trying quality mutton production?

By Bob Kennard, NSA

There is no doubt that mutton is increasing in popularity. There are more references and articles in the mainstream media (with more on the way) and Twitter ablaze with farm shops, butchers and farmers' markets selling mutton – and photographs of delicious-looking mutton recipes.



Make More of Mutton

The signs are that we are close to a tipping point in public attitudes to eating quality mutton. So, as a sheep producer, maybe now is the time to dip your toe into the mutton market?

If we've whet your appetite, here are a few thoughts to bear in mind. The first is that quality is vital. Mutton is meat from a sheep that are more than two years old. There are two main UK mutton markets. The first is cull ewes and this is based on price and used, generally, by farmers as a way of disposing of poor stock. Most of this ends up in the ethnic market or as processed meat.

Then there is the quality mutton market. Here a good quality animal is the starting point and, although premiums are often paid, it requires some commitment and extra effort to produce the right animal.

The ultimate judgement is made at the point of the eating experience. Its excellence or otherwise depends on everything



being done well, and attention paid to detail, from farm to table.

While the two mutton markets do overlap to some extent, the last thing the quality market wants now is a deluge of scraggy cull ewes being sold off as quality mutton. Quality mutton requires a well-fleshed animal with an appropriate degree of finish. Reliability, continuity of supply and consistency of quality are further essentials if you are to be serious about supplying this market.

The second thought on the list for wannabe mutton producers to consider is a question: what is the market looking for?

Butchers and retailers will be looking, particularly, for a good meat-to-bone ratio (kilogrammes of meat to kilogrammes of carcass) to maximise their return on the animal. This means a good finish and plenty of muscle.

The chef or home cook will be looking for tenderness and flavour. Much of this will depend both on the state of the animal leaving the farm and the quality of handling from there on through to slaughter and beyond.

Product differentiation

Only two supermarket chains (Waitrose and Booths) regularly sell quality mutton, and then only during the winter months and only in certain stores. As yet there is no mass market for quality mutton. Most is sold direct from the farmer through mail order, farm shops or farmers' markets, or via other independent retailers such as butchers and general food shops. The alternative market is caterers, such as hotels, restaurants and pubs.

If a local abattoir with a good reputation also offers a butchery and packaging service, this will enable you to sell direct, without the expense of setting up a separate processing facility.

To stand out from the crowd, it is important to offer and promote your products as unique. So how do you differentiate your mutton? Characteristics such as breed and locality are obviously points of difference. British heritage breeds are a particularly good point of emphasis. Finally, of course, for customers to return time and again, your meat must consistently produce an excellent eating experience.

For more information see the NSA website www.nationalsheep.org.uk, or contact the NSA mutton project at mutton@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Weaning decisions key to current and future lamb crops

By Emily Grant, Quality Meat Scotland



Weaning lambs is a crucial point in the sheep production calendar. Exactly when farmers decide to wean can have an impact on the future performance of both the lamb and the ewe, so it is a decision that should be made with care. The date is flexible, but deciding when to wean should ideally be based around nutritional feed supply and nutritional demands of both the ewe and the lamb.

Until they are about four weeks old, a lamb's growth is entirely dependent on the ewe's milk. Peak lactation in ewes occurs at between three and four weeks. Lactation sees the highest energy demand on the ewe during her production cycle and, for those rearing twins, it will be about three times her maintenance requirements. Even though her feed intake and conversion efficiency is higher during this lactation period to help compensate, she will need high quality pasture as well as some of her body reserves to meet this energy demand. Ensuring that ewes are at target body condition score (BCS) of 3 at lambing will help her through this demanding time.

Energy demands

Beyond peak lactation, the ewe's milk production begins to fall and lambs will become increasingly reliant on grass to support their rising energy demands for growth. By eight weeks of age, lambs will have consumed approximately two-thirds of their total

milk intake, and will be gaining more of their energy requirements from pasture rather than milk. This is a good point to start thinking about and planning for weaning. By the time lambs are between 90 and 100 days old (between 12 and 14 weeks), the ewe's milk production will be minimal and her contribution to lamb growth will be negligible. For hogs that have reared lambs, this date will be approximately two weeks earlier.

As milk production declines, so does the ewe's energy requirement. And the value in prioritising quality pasture to ewes, to help drive lactation, then starts to shift towards prioritising the lambs. They now have an increasing need for high quality pasture to replace the ewe's milk and support their increasing energy requirements for growth.

Even though the ewe's energy requirements will decline as she dries off, she will still take the opportunity to select the best grass available. Ewes and lambs, essentially, begin to compete for feed and it's likely that the ewe will win. And it is at this point that weaning must be considered.

Key elements

The two key elements that need to be considered are ewe body condition score (BCS) and the quality and quantity of grass available. Once a ewe stops producing milk, two things happen:

- She will eat less and her intake will drop by 20%
- She only needs to maintain herself, so energy can be freed up and allocated to regain any body condition lost during lactation.

The next key point in her production cycle is tugging, and she needs to be at BCS 3 or 3.5 to maximise next year's lamb crop. Ewes at or above the target BCS at weaning can now be viewed as low priority stock. They can be put onto lower quality, rough grazing or put to work tidying up paddocks where grass quality is declining. For ewes below target BCS, weaning lambs at between 12 and 14 weeks offers plenty of time to regain body condition before tugging. As a rule of thumb, it takes between six and eight weeks for ewes to gain 1 BCS on good quality grazing.

Whether selling store or fat lambs, it's the gain in kilogrammes made from birth to sale that holds the profit margin. With grass being the cheapest feed



Timing is everything: check that ewes and lambs are not competing for grazing.

available to add kilogrammes of weight, the lambs must have priority access to high quality pasture to keep production costs as low as possible.

Following weaning, the quality of pasture that lambs are put onto will have a big influence on their growth rates. The weaning decision, therefore, needs to consider how much quality pasture you have available for the lambs. If grass supplies are looking tight, weaning will remove the ewe 'competition' and will benefit the lambs. Assuming parasitic or mineral challenges aren't an issue, if lambs grazing with ewes have growth rates of below 200g per day, it could be assumed that the ewes are competing with the lambs for pasture and weaning might be something you should consider.

Balancing act

But if ewe condition is on target, and grass growth and quality are also good, weaning can be delayed. You may wish to do this for lambs that are within 2kg or 3kg of sale weight.

Deciding when to wean is a balancing act. Much will depend on the season and the supply of grass. Knowing the nutritional needs of both the lambs and the ewes will hopefully make the weaning decision easier. And having the flexibility to alter the date provides an opportunity to help maximise productivity and profitability, both in terms of the current lamb crop and the future one.

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To help sheep farmers manage the condition of their ewes throughout the year, Quality Meat Scotland has developed a 'ewe nutrition timeline' poster, which contains a wealth of information about target BCS and feeding levels for ewes throughout the breeding season. To download your free poster, visit www.qmscotland.co.uk/nutrition

What is veterinary scanning surveillance?

By Amanda Carson, Animal Plant and Health Agency

Veterinary scanning surveillance in Great Britain is the timely detection and investigation of new and re-emerging animal-related 'threats' and taking action as a result of any that are identified. So, what are 'new and re-emerging threats'?

These are made up of several different types of threat to animal and public health and include: new diseases or pathogens; notifiable diseases; exotic diseases, not seen in Great Britain; new strains of an infection, already in Great Britain; new, rare or unusual antimicrobial resistance patterns; disease or infection in animals with a human health concern, such as zoonoses and toxicities; and changes in diseases already in Great Britain.

Safeguarding health

Veterinary scanning surveillance forms part of APHA's work to safeguard animal and plant health for the benefit of people, the environment and the economy.

The organisation collates all the data that comes from the results of post-mortem examinations (PME) performed at the network of APHA Veterinary Investigation Centres (VICs), SAC Disease Investigation Centres and our contracted PME partner providers (universities of Bristol, Surrey, Royal Veterinary College, the Wales Veterinary

Right: *Galega officinalis* cause of copious yellow pleural effusion.

Below: Swollen head associated with oxyclozanide toxicity.



Some unusual cases investigated by APHA:

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

Science Centre and SAC) and from all the diagnostic tests sent to APHA for investigation.

When a PME is performed, APHA has strict definitions for a diagnosis. This means that the criteria for making a diagnosis are robust and the same definitions are used across the network. For example, a diagnosis of pulpy kidney may be suspected from the history (lack of vaccination, sudden death in rapidly growing lambs and, of course, 'pulpy kidneys') but diagnosis requires confirmation by testing for clostridial toxins in the gut and sometimes histopathology too.

In many cases a lot of laboratory testing is carried out to achieve a diagnosis and some of this testing is subsidised. There



may be occasions when a diagnosis is not reached, such as with some abortion investigations. However, the testing carried out along the way will rule out many potential diseases and provide reassurance that an animal has not died from the diseases tested for.

Post-mortems frequently provide the most information so can be extremely useful to the farmer and to APHA. However, the organisation is also monitoring a variety of other sources of information about animal health.

Detective work

APHA looks for both the usual and the unusual diseases. If it is unable to achieve a diagnosis, and the problem on the farm continues, a veterinary investigation officer may visit the farm to assist the private veterinary surgeon with some detective work and take more samples on the farm. An example of this is Tay Sachs disease in Jacob sheep.

The organisation communicates with other specialists both in the UK, on issues such as Vitamin A toxicity in lambs, and Europe, where Schmallenberg is also a problem. All cases where a diagnosis has not been made are examined, every quarter, to see if a trend is developing.

Sometimes an unresponsive disease is encountered, which can raise suspicions that a disease is 'changing'. Perhaps a new strain of pathogen is emerging or antimicrobial resistance or

anthelmintic resistance is developing. Gut worms and liver fluke are examples of the latter.

There are also specific conditions that APHA looks out for, such as: Schmallenberg virus; exotic notifiable diseases, including contagious agalactia and bluetongue; or notifiable diseases already in Great Britain, such as TB and scrapie.

The organisation is interested in cases where there have been severe manifestations of existing diseases, where many animals have died. And it also keeps a close eye out for diseases that threaten human health, so-called zoonotic diseases that include Q fever

Table 1: Threats raised to the Veterinary Risk Group (shaded in blue are potential risks identified as arising overseas)

- Plant poisoning in ewes, due to Galega or 'Goats rue' (*Galega officinalis*) in France & risk to GB
- Emergence and spread of BTV-1 in Europe & risks to UK
- Re-emergence of Schmallenberg virus in Europe and risk to the UK
- Increased detection of paramphistomosis (rumen fluke) in sheep, Ireland
- BTV8 – risks to UK sheep population and variable immune status nationally
- Suspect macrocyclic lactone (ML) resistant *Psoroptes ovis* (sheep scab)
- Alopecia in lambs, feed related GB
- Epidermolysis bullosae in lambs, GB
- Agalactia in newly-lambing ewes
- Hepatic encephalopathy caused by haemolytic anaemia, GB
- Exposure of ruminants to medicated gamebird feed – accidental toxicity
- Suspect oxyclozanide toxicity
- Unusual presentation of Orf, GB
- Confirmed diagnoses by APHA of SBV in lambs in England and Wales
- *Salmonella* Typhimurium DT104: cluster of cases in Wales

and salmonella), or factors that affect the food chain, such as poisonings (medicated game bird feed).

Surveillance reports

This information is key to useful and clear communication. Every month the APHA Small Ruminant Expert Group (SRSEG) reports threats identified by surveillance to the Veterinary Risk Group. This provides the chief veterinary officers in the UK with information on what the threat is and what action the APHA, or others, are taking. In 2016 the SRSEG raised 17 threats (see Table 1).

The SRSEG provides a monthly surveillance report in the Veterinary Record. And APHA publishes an 'emerging threats quarterly report', which provides a summary of investigations, reviews the data and links to other APHA work areas.

The APHA VICs send a monthly newsletter to all Veterinary practices and the organisation also produces many presentations and individual articles and scientific research papers. These reports and other outputs are produced to help support the main surveillance outcomes (see box).

New web pages for surveillance are

Surveillance outcomes:

- Alerts for major disease or welfare problems
- Alerts for threats to public health
- To improve animal health and welfare status of UK plc
- Reduce disease burdens and, therefore, help reduce antimicrobial/anthelmintic use
- Improve productivity and enable international trade
- Collate and analyse complex animal health data and information to provide insights and intelligence that helps farmers and vets take action
- Sharing this intelligence with farmers and vets to support decision-making and action
- Helping industry to identify, prevent and control sheep health problems
- Government doing the parts that only Government can do

being developed and these will include a 'sheep dashboard' to make this information even more accessible. These will be available in June. APHA also has a stand at the NSA North Sheep Event in June and the Royal Welsh Show in July and invites sheep farmers to come along to find out more about the work it does.

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CT scanning pays genetic dividends for pedigree flock

By Owen Roberts, Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales.



A chance to experiment with CT scanning is paying dividends for a top mid-Wales sheep breeder. In 2014 Cefin Pryce, owner of Caereinion Pedigree Texels and based at Yr Helig farm in north Powys, took advantage of a 50% subsidy offered by Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) – for any breeders wishing to take their ram lambs to the mobile CT scanner that visits Aberystwyth, from Edinburgh, every year. This gave him the opportunity to combine new data with his flock's existing performance recording.



CT scanning is a welfare-friendly way of obtaining key data.

Cefin's Caereinion breeding flock is based near the village of Llanfair Caereinion. The flock was established 23 years ago and has been performance recording for the past five years. The flock is closed with rams only bought in from known sources to reduce the risk of introducing disease to the flock. Lambing begins in March and continues through to mid-April to maximise grass utilisation. The main output of the flock is shearing rams for commercial producers, so choosing the right genetics and type is essential to be successful in a highly competitive market.

Performance recording

"As Texel is the most popular terminal sire breed of choice in the UK, we attempt to set our rams apart from the rest," says Cefin. "I believe that performance recording has given us the opportunity to improve the genetics of our flock while maintaining type to produce the best animals that we can."

When selecting animals for breeding he looks for the right balance of EBV figures, including fat depth, muscle



Cefin Pryce.

depth and scan weight. Muscle depth can give an indication of the conformation of an animal and how much meat it could yield. Scan weight gives an indication of size and how fast it could grow – the bigger they are at 21 weeks the quicker they are likely to finish.

"As well as high figures, it is important that our tups look the part. Our customers look for strong-bodied animals with good conformation, feet and teeth," he adds.

One of the challenges that face any flock that are new to performance recording is accuracy. The more data that is collected the more accurate the figures become. Having information dating back to an animal's ancestry will improve its progeny's information, as well as its own. One of the ways in which this can be overcome is through computed tomography (CT).

Genetically superior

A CT scan is a whole body X-ray image that can identify areas of muscle, bone and fat. Using this technology can help to identify genetically superior animals within a flock and also speed up genetic gain overall.

For CT scanning, three different images are taken from three areas of the carcass – the chest, the loin and the hind leg. By looking at these images, and compiling the information, an accurate measurement of potential meat yield and conformation can be produced. Within Cefin's flock this has proved useful in selecting the most beneficial traits that

will, ultimately, produce finished lambs for his customers.

Cefin's flock has seen immense genetic progress in recent years, due to combining performance recording with CT scanning, to produce rams that will sire high achieving finished progeny. He believes that the chance to scan was an excellent opportunity to discover more about the genetics in his flock. "CT scanning helps improve the accuracies of figures produced by performance recording alone and also increases the buyer's confidence," he adds.

Welfare friendly

HCC continues to work with SRUC to ensure that its mobile CT scanner is brought to Aberystwyth every year – usually in August.

HCC's Industry Development Officer Gwawr Parry says that many breeders see advantages in using the technology. "CT scanning is a welfare-friendly way of obtaining key data to improve estimated breeding values. The scan produces measurements for the weight and the percentage of fat, muscle and bone in the carcass. Data can also be obtained on muscle distribution in the loin, leg and chest.

"With processors paying more for animals with certain characteristics, which aren't always obvious to the naked eye, analysing breeding rams is becoming ever more important for farms' profitability," she adds. "Combining CT data with other forms of performance recording is clearly paying dividends for Cefin Pryce and Caereinion Texels."



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Tackle trace-element deficiencies

By Neil Laing, Clyde Vet Group, Lanark



Trace elements are required by sheep in relatively small quantities, but they are important for good production and health. Typically, animals get trace elements from the forage they eat and the amount in silage and grazing relates to soil levels. Varying soil types in different parts of the UK will mean that varying levels of trace elements will be available to sheep.

Deficiencies in any of them can cause severe production losses but overdosing can also cause problems as well as being unnecessary and, therefore, costly. Soil sampling will give a guide to the background availability of these trace elements, but advice should be sought from your vet or nutritional advisor before supplementation is considered.

Copper deficiency

Copper deficiency can result where there is a lack of copper in the soil but also where there is an excess of iron, sulphur and molybdenum – these elements bind with and 'lock up' copper and prevent it from being 'available' and used in the body.

Copper is required by ewes in mid-pregnancy to facilitate the development of nerves in the unborn lamb or lambs. Any deficiency in ewes during this period can manifest as swayback in lambs, once they are born.

In severe cases, lambs are unable to stand. Hind-leg weakness will be seen in milder cases. As there is no treatment for swayback, making sure that ewes have enough copper mid-pregnancy will prevent it.

In older sheep, copper is needed for

normal growth and a healthy immune system. Deficiency causes poor quality and brittle wool, discolouration of coloured fleece and ill-thrift and anaemia. Treatment – by drench, injection or bolus – typically results in a rapid improvement in the clinical picture.

Copper can be stored in the body in the liver. Some breeds of sheep are better at storing copper than others so care is needed when supplementing rations. Obviously if a diagnosis of deficiency has been made it makes supplementation necessary, but monitoring copper levels post treatment is advised to avoid overdosing. Blood tests can be helpful in diagnosing deficiency, but are not helpful in monitoring overdose. Sampling livers from fallen stock is a useful way to monitor copper requirement.

Copper poisoning can occur in all breeds of sheep and is usually the result of over supplementation during an extended length of time. It is often seen in pedigree sheep that have been fed concentrates for a prolonged period. It presents as an acute, painful condition with associated jaundice. Treatment is difficult and sheep will often die.

Selenium

Selenium deficiency is typically seen in fast growing lambs, up to eight weeks of age, and presents as stiffness and exercise intolerance, but can cause sudden death. It's also known as white muscle disease, nutritional myopathy or stiff lamb disease. It is commonly associated with feeding brassicas or high-grain diets that are poorly mineralised.

Selenium is needed for muscle function and a healthy immune system.

Deficiency has been associated with ill thrift, reduced fertility performance in ewes, and it is also thought to be a cause of lack of vigour in new-born lambs and poor quality colostrum.

Selenium levels in soil are variable throughout the country, which is reflected in how often deficiencies are seen. Diagnosis is usually the result of clinical findings or blood samples. Often response to treatment is used as a diagnostic tool, but care is needed because ill thrift or poor reproductive performance have many causes and not just selenium deficiency.

Treatment can be by oral drench, injection or oral bolus.

Cobalt

Cobalt is needed for the manufacture of Vitamin B12 in the sheep's rumen. Factors that affect the normal digestive process can cause signs of cobalt deficiency because they interfere with the production or absorption of vitamin B12.

Vitamin B12 is needed to convert forage into fat, which is why deficiency can manifest as a failure to thrive. It is more common in post-weaned lambs as the energy from milk is converted to body fat by a slightly different route, so deficiency is often not noticed in lambs still suckling.

Vitamin B12 is a water-soluble vitamin and can't be stored in the body, so sheep need to have a constant supply of cobalt to ensure maximum production levels are maintained.

Deficiency is known as pine, and is associated with ill thrift in growing lambs. Cobalt deficiency in adults may cause poor fertility and mothering ability, but this may be due to poor body condition as well as cobalt deficiency.

Again, there are multiple causes of ill-thrift in growing lambs so careful diagnosis is required. Obviously parasitic gastro-enteritis (PGE) is probably the most likely other cause and this should be ruled out prior to treatment being started. Other trace element deficiencies, as discussed elsewhere in this article, can also cause poor production performance so it is important to get veterinary advice on ill thrift in lambs before treatment is started. Incorrect treatment can be costly, at least, and dangerous or deadly at worst.

Blood samples are a good way of checking vitamin B12 levels. Again, sampling livers from fallen stock can be useful in measuring background cobalt levels, or the success of any



Drenching with trace elements can boost flock health and productivity.

supplementation. Treatment is by oral drench, injection of either vitamin B12 or long-acting cobalt, or oral bolus.

Iodine

Iodine is needed by the body to regulate normal metabolism and deficiency is associated with lethargy, poor growth performance, poor reproductive performance, lack of vigour in new-born lambs, and increased susceptibility to other infections. Iodine can be stored to some extent in the thyroid gland and deficiency is often suspected when the thyroid is enlarged, known as Goitre.

Iodine supplementation has become a 'trendy' topic in recent times. There are no doubts of the benefits of supplementation where deficiency has been identified, particularly in dairy cows in relation to fertility. But the long-term supplementation of high levels of iodine in sheep have not been evaluated. The toxic levels of iodine are not fully understood, but it has a much lower toxicity threshold than other trace elements, so care is needed when considering supplementation.

Over-supplementation of iodine has been associated with increases in neonatal disease in lambs. Higher than normal levels of joint-ill, watery mouth or pneumonia in young lambs are typically seen. Excess iodine in late pregnancy seems to prevent the new-born lamb from absorbing the antibodies produced in colostrum, which means that they are more susceptible to diseases. This appears to be more common where multiple sources of iodine are being fed to ewes via, oral bolusing, drenches and minerals in the diet.

A proper investigation of apparent deficiency is vital before supplementation is given, particularly in late pregnancy. As boluses provide supplementation during several months, it is important that all sources of iodine are considered to ensure that dangerous levels are not being fed. Speak to your vet to work out if the pre-lambing diet will cause problems.

Proper diagnosis

As can be seen from Table 1 it can be difficult to differentiate between the different trace element deficiencies. Proper investigation and diagnosis is vital to avoid unnecessary supplementation. This can become expensive over time without any performance benefits and some of the trace elements can become toxic with over or unnecessary supplementation (copper and iodine).

Using soil and forage samples, and clinical examination of poor performing animals, should form a vital part of any annual flock health plan discussion with your vet in relation to trace elements. And, with timely interventions, they will allow sheep farmers to maximise the health, fertility and productivity of their flock.

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Check the trace-element status of growing lambs

By Rachel Mallet, Bimeda
There's a lot of pressure on producers when trying to finish lambs and there are numerous factors that can result in delays. The trace element status of growing lambs is one aspect that should not be overlooked, not least because deficiencies and toxicities will lead to reduced productivity.

Did you know, for example, that an adequate supply of cobalt is critical for lamb growth? After cobalt is consumed by the lamb, it reaches the rumen where bacteria utilise the cobalt to produce Vitamin B12. This Vitamin B12 is integral to glucose synthesis and impacts on how the lamb utilises its feed – or its feed-conversion ratio.

Ruminants have no capacity to store cobalt and so lambs are susceptible to Vitamin B12 deficiency. This is also known as pine and can result in poor growth rates. To tackle a cobalt deficiency a continuous supply of cobalt must be utilised, such as a bolus.

Selenium is required to produce proteins that are integral to the innate

and adaptive immune system, so it plays an important role in disease prevention. A relationship exists between selenium and iodine and so they must always be considered together when investigating suspected deficiencies.

Regulate metabolism

Iodine is integral to the thyroid hormones T3 and T4, which regulate the rate of metabolism and control the rate of absorption of carbohydrate from the gastrointestinal tract. This rate is important in achieving a good feed-conversion ratio. In lambs, for the inactive T4 to be converted into an active T3, an enzyme that contains selenium must be present.

Copper is a component of enzymes that are important for energy metabolism. It is important to remember that copper can be toxic to sheep and copper supplements should only be given if a deficiency has been diagnosed. Bluefaced Leicester and Texel sheep are particularly susceptible to copper toxicity.

Forage is incredibly variable not only between fields on the same unit, but also from year to year. Producers must also consider any other supplementation given, including concentrates, lick buckets and drenches. It's impossible to take a 'one size fits all' approach between different management systems.

Veterinary advice

You should work with your vet to determine which, if any, trace element imbalances are present within your livestock. This is vital because there is no benefit to giving trace element supplementation if no deficiencies exist. And it may even harm the lambs because copper and selenium can be toxic if over supplied.

You could be spending money on trace elements that are not required.

You could be losing animal productivity to sub-clinical disease. Sub-clinical trace element deficiencies are not always severe enough to be seen with the naked eye but they will have an impact on the productivity of livestock.



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Championing 'best practice' and safeguarding flock health

By Ian Duncan Millar, Moredun

I have been fortunate to have been asked to do some interesting things during my career, but by far the most interesting has been to chair The Moredun Foundation. The most unusual has been to write an article about that experience.

Sheep and a life-long interest in farming have never been far from the centre of my career. In the early days, our local sheep health group raised awareness about abortion and scab with Scottish Quality Beef and Lamb Association (SQBLA) followed by Quality Meat Scotland (QMS). This gave us the opportunity to look at sheep farming with a broader perspective.

It was at this point that I realised that the best practice I could muster was closely aligned with good disease management, low mortality and high outputs. So when an invitation came to join the Board of The Moredun Research Institute I jumped at the chance and in 2012 I was given the honour of being appointed as chairman. I was aware, at the time, that it was a position that was further from my comfort zone than anything I had previously filled before, but the experience has, without exception, been one I am delighted to have taken on.

External events

The role is largely 'ceremonial' – I chair board meetings and attend other external events to represent Moredun and its interests across our industry. Occasionally I am asked to host high profile visits to Moredun's campus in the Pentlands Science Park. Recently these included: 'The Big Dutchman'; a German manufacturer of poultry equipment; Tesco's head category manager for poultry products; and, with a much higher profile, the visit of our Patron HRH the Princess Royal.

I don't mind admitting that making the opening address to that conference, in front of HRH and an auditorium full to overflowing, was stressful.

Perhaps the bit that is the most rewarding in my role as chairman is going out to meet fellow farmers and to help make that all important link between our organisation's research output and the use of that information and understanding on farms, like mine.



Ian Duncan Millar (far left), with HRH Princess Royal and Moredun's Director Julie Fitzpatrick, receiving the prestigious Royal Smithfield Club Bicentenary Trophy from Andrew Gilmour (far right).

Photo © Jim Mackintosh Photography

Science at Moredun focuses on the development of diagnostics, vaccines and disease-control strategies for endemic and infectious diseases of livestock. While science is central and all important, we also have a communication team that's dedicated to making sure that the latest information is available and easily understood by farmers and the wider industry. The team is an important knowledge-transfer link between science and on-farm application.

Evening meetings

Moredun has a wide range of activities that the communication team lead and I have found it rewarding to join them, whenever I can, to help in whatever is going on. We hold evening meetings for farmers, with talks from scientists and researchers, and organise day-time farm events that link scientific talks with practical reality. We also have stands at shows and technical events, meet with a whole range of industry bodies – from NSA, NBA, NFUS and RHAS to producer groups aligned to the large buyers and small informal sheep breeding groups.

All are different and equally important when it comes to speaking to as many people as possible. While a large meeting can reach an impressive number of farmers, a smaller one often engenders an enthusiastic discussion and that has a greater influence on those participating.

The highlight for me, so far, has to be the evening meeting in Westray, Orkney. Our North of Scotland Regional Advisory Board Chair, Willie Stewart, had organised the visit through his local contacts and had invited all 42 farmers on Westray and Papa Westray to the meeting in the vestry of the Kirk. We filled the vestry – more than half of all the invited farmers attended – and had a great discussion, which was only cut short by the Papa Westray contingent having to leave to get their taxi (boat) back home.

Health agenda

I am all too aware of the difficulties facing farming at present, particularly hill livestock farming, but I am hugely encouraged so see that there are opportunities out there. The management of the health of our livestock is also high on the agenda, as tools are being developed to reduce the costs associated with disease through lost production, poor production or, indeed, mortality.

As we improve the management of disease, we improve the health and wellbeing of our animals. And we improve the efficiency of the biological system, we reduce our carbon footprint and we optimise our influence on the environment in which we operate. And, importantly, we also improve the financial bottom line of our farm businesses.

Workshop helps to stamp out sheep lameness

More than 30 animal health advisers, from across the north of England and Scotland, are now primed to help sheep farmers tackle flock foot problems after Moredun hosted a practical workshop on reducing lameness.

Held at Pentlands Science Park, and organised by MSD Animal Health, the event trained delegates on how to help sheep farmers implement the industry-accepted five-point lameness reduction plan.

"The five-point plan offers sheep farmers a clear lameness management strategy and a practical protocol for reducing the incidence of this costly problem," says independent sheep vet and developer of the practical workshop Fiona Lovatt, from Flock Health Limited.

"However, many are unsure of exactly how to get started, so by offering this training to vets and the animal health trade we hope that many more sheep farmers will benefit from the helping hand they can provide.

"Implemented correctly, the five-point plan builds flock resilience to disease through culling persistently lame animals, reduces the infection challenge on the farm and establishes immunity through vaccination. Many flocks around the country are seeing the benefits of implementing this plan and sheep lameness, nationally, would be dramatically reduced if more farmers adopted it," adds Dr Lovatt.

Sheep farmers who are interested in implementing the five-point plan on their own unit should contact their local vet or animal health adviser and ask for help from a qualified lameness reduction adviser.



Vet Fiona Lovatt, from Flock Health, says that accurate diagnose of any lameness issue is vital.

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in f t

Protect your flock's status and reap the rewards

Brian Hosie, SAC
Consulting Veterinary
Services

Membership of the scrapie monitoring scheme is beneficial to elite breeders who export breeding sheep (or goats) and/or their semen/embryos within the EU, or further afield. Most of the countries in Europe accept sheep from flocks with controlled risk status, in other words they have complied with the rules of the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme (SMS) for a minimum of three years.

A few EU countries, and several others outside the EU, have rules in place that they will only accept sheep of negligible status – they insist that they have been compliant with the SMS rules for a minimum of seven years.

Sheep with the ARR/ARR scrapie genotype can be readily traded in the EU. But membership of the SMS allows sheep farmers and breeders to export breeding sheep, semen and embryos of any scrapie genotype. Exporting goats requires SMS membership because currently there's no genotyping available for goats.

A flock's SMS status is valuable and members of the SMS must take care to adhere to its rules and conditions, details of which are available at www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk. Sales and the testing of fallen stock are two areas to highlight.

Sales

Sales held in the high-risk period, which runs from 1st September to 30th April and is applicable in England, Scotland and Wales, must follow set rules.

- Sales (either the market, the breed society or the group of breeders selling) need to apply to their local Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) office in advance of the sale for permission (approval) to hold a sale. This can be:



Photo © Moredun Photo Library 2017

- Dedicated – all sheep are from SMS flocks.
- Segregated – SMS and non-SMS sheep are separated as agreed with APHA.
- If the above rule is not complied with, the flocks attending the sale risk losing their SMS status – unless the sheep are ARR/ARR.
- If sheep purchased at a non-approved sale are added to an SMS flock, that flock will lose its status (unless the sheep purchased are ARR/ARR).
- If an SMS member does not sell and takes the sheep home, the flock will lose its status (unless the sheep are ARR/ARR).
- At sales/events, controlled-status flocks (tested for at least three years) need to be segregated from negligible status flocks (tested for more than seven years).
- Purchases should be of the same SMS status, or of higher status, than the purchaser's flock. For example, if your flock is of controlled status for two years then you cannot buy from a flock of a lower status. If you do, your flock then reverts to the lower status.

Scrapie facts

Scrapie is an infectious, wasting disease that affects the nervous system of adult sheep. It is extremely difficult to control.

It has been a notifiable disease in the UK since 1993 and is one of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs). The causal agent is resistant to normal disinfection procedures and the disease has a long incubation period.

There is no cure and no vaccine. The condition is fatal and animals pass on their genetic susceptibility to the next generation.

Testing

Flocks currently not in the SMS could secure a wider marketplace by scrapie genotyping sale animals, such as rams, prior to sale.

SMS members must also submit all fallen stock, older than 18 months of age, for scrapie (TSE) testing on a sample of brain. These fallen stock can be submitted for testing via SAC Consulting Veterinary Services' and APHA's regional surveillance laboratories.

And samples can now be collected from carcasses taken to approved fallen-stock collection centres, which are members of NFSCo, or via individual veterinarians approved by APHA.

A full list of currently approved centres can be found at www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk. (From the

Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme (PSGHS) home page, go to 'Useful Links' at the top right-hand side of the page and click on Scrapie Monitoring Scheme for a list of fallen stock collectors, rules and relevant forms).

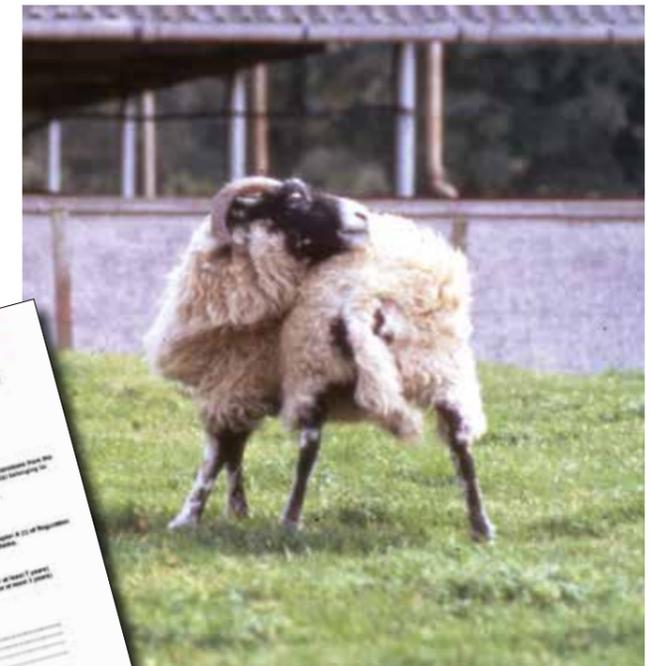
The message is simple – do not gamble with your valued SMS status. If you are unsure of the rules, then please look at them again or contact the team at PSGHS on 01835 822456 or email: psghs@sac.co.uk

Clinical Signs

Clinical signs may be noticed between 18 months and five years after exposure and include progressive weight loss with no concurrent loss in appetite, progressive abnormal limb movement, fine head tremors (most apparent in the ears), and skin hypersensitivity. Itchiness develops in around 70% of cases.

Sheep may assume a vacant, fixed stare or, less often, become suddenly aggressive. Signs of hypersensitivity are often elicited by rubbing or scratching the sheep's back, which induces the sheep to throw its head back, make chewing motions and lick at the air, or compulsively nibble at the limbs below the carpus.

Abnormal limb movement is first detected when sheep are running. The hind limbs appear to be uncoordinated with the fore limbs, and affected animals



adopt a bunny-hopping gait. Sheep often have a high-stepping gait in the fore limbs, resembling a prancing horse. As signs worsen, the hindquarters sway while standing.

For more information about SAC Consulting Veterinary Services Scrapie Genotyping or the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme, please visit www.sheepandgoathealth.co.uk



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Using monepantel responsibly

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

The change in classification of Zolvix means that this group 4 wormer will be available from your animal health supplier* from 1st July, 2017. This brings with it both a great opportunity and an equal measure of responsibility for everyone involved in the sheep industry. The challenge ahead is to make sure that we strike the right balance. On the one hand, farmers and vets need to harness the efficacy of monepantel and its ability to help slow down the development of anthelmintic resistance (AR) to the older products: on the other hand, we must not over-use it because this would result in resistance to monepantel itself.



Drenching lambs will improve performance and help resistance management.

SCOPS has recognised the need to use the new actives (Group 4-AD and 5 SI) as a vital part of worming programmes on all sheep flocks since the launch of Zolvix seven years ago. Unfortunately, and despite our best efforts, the uptake of the new actives has been woefully low and in 2016 they only represented about 1% of total wormer doses in the UK. Now that sheep farmers will be able to access these products via vets, SQPs and pharmacists, SCOPS hopes that the level of use will increase to a point where they have a tangible impact on slowing the speed with which AR develops to the older groups already in use on farms.

Right balance

For the benefits, in terms of lamb performance and slowing AR, to outweigh the risk to the longer-term efficacy of the group 4/5 wormers, the scientific evidence points to just two very specific occasions during the sheep year when farmers should use these newest products.

• Quarantine

The group 4/5 products have a vital role in removing worms that are resistant to one or more of the group 1, 2 and 3 wormers from in-coming sheep. This is an essential part of protecting against bringing in someone else's problems and every flock needs to incorporate this into their health plan. The SCOPS matrix of quarantine options can be found on our website at: <http://www.scops.org.uk/>

• Mid/late season drench for lambs

Most flocks will use a wormer from groups 1, 2 or 3 at some point in the grazing season, probably starting with a 1-BZ if needed for *Nematodirus* and then others as required**. The problem is that because AR to these groups is present on an increasing number of farms, these treatments may not kill all the worms inside the lambs. Any worms that do survive will stay alive in the gut of the lambs for several months. This means that, during the season, there is an accumulation of resistant worms in the lambs.

Using either of these highly effective new wormers as a single 'one-off' dose for all lambs on the farm later in the

grazing season has two important potential benefits:

- Improved lamb performance. Removing the worms that have accumulated in your lambs will help achieve target growth rates.
- Resistance management. Removing a build up of resistant worms means they will not produce any more eggs so will not add their resistant genetics to the farm's worm population. This helps to slow the development of resistance to other wormer groups by minimising the impact of selection for resistance done earlier in the season.

It is vital that sheep farmers use monepantel on these two occasions but it is also equally important that we do not use it at any other time, unless under veterinary advice. An example may be if you have had triple resistance confirmed on your farm. The need to test how well the other groups of wormers are working remains paramount. Recently published data, from the South West England, shows that the incidence of resistance to groups 1, 2 and 3 is increasing so we must act now.

SCOPS will be working hard to provide the right guidance and support to SQPs, pharmacists and vets to ensure that this group 4 wormer is used responsibly and only in the ways recommended. Advanced training will start before Saturday 1st July, so don't be frightened to ask for help and advice. And, remember, and if they ask for background information about your flock before prescribing a wormer it isn't because they are being awkward – it's to make sure that you get the right product for the job and to make sure that monepantel, and the other wormers, are being used to the best effect.

*To prescribe your supplier must be a vet or SQP (suitably qualified person) or pharmacist

** a faecal egg count should be used to determine the need to treat.

Table 1: There are 5 broad-spectrum wormer groups:

Chemical	Spectrum	Teladorsagia and Trichostrongylus	Haemonchus	Nematodirus	Fluke
1. White Group 1-BZ Benzimidazole	Broad	✓	✓	✓*	✓**
2. Yellow Group 2-LV Levamisole	Broad	✓	✓	✓	✗
3. Clear Group 3-ML Avermectin/moxidectin	Broad	✓	✓	✓	✗
4. Orange Group 4-AD Monepantel	Broad	✓	✓	✓	✗
5. Purple Group 5-SI# Derquantel	Broad	✓	✓	✓	✗

* Still the preferred treatment for *Nematodirus* in young lambs, even where resistance to other worms exists.

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Worldwide pressure impacts British wool prices

With thoughts quickly turning to shearing this year's wool clip, British Wool has issued its latest wool values.

British Wool's chairman Ian Buchanan says that this year's wool values are largely based on prices achieved at auction through the first quarter of 2017, along with market intelligence.

"As producers will notice, unfortunately, that this year's average values are lower than those of 2016. This is the result of reduced competition among buyers, as demand dropped across the world. Both British and New Zealand wool markets have seen prices fall during the past 12 months, with wool values in both countries now in line for the first time in many years," he says.

"And there has been a reduced demand for crossbred wools. These are wools that both the UK and New Zealand produce in significant volumes and this has been reflected in the prices paid at British wool auctions."

He adds that British wool producers can rest assured that British Wool is working hard on their behalf to maximise the market value of their wool and to ensure that global buyers recognise the quality of the clip on offer.

"There are some early signs that demand for crossbred wools may be on the rise again in 2017, particularly from the Chinese market and if the clip colour of British wools improves after a poor year in 2016."

Improving efficiency

British Wool's Chief Executive Joe Farren says that the organisation is working hard to ensure it operates as efficiently as possible at every level. "We are currently bedding down a new productivity approach, including process improvements in the depots, and the early signs are encouraging in terms of the savings we can achieve. We're also looking at the location of our collection centres across the UK to identify gaps in our coverage. And we have just opened two new collection centres in Co Antrim, Northern Ireland.

"We also recognise that we have a quality product, which we must market much more effectively than in the past. And we are going to be smarter, more targeted and remain focused in terms of how we generate consumer and retail interest in British Wool carpets, coverings, bedding and clothing.

"British Wool's business has seen little change during the past 30 years, but we are working hard to modernise the business, introduce a more commercial approach and shape the way we operate to make us fit for the significant industry and competitive challenges that we face.

"Improvements will start to come through and make a visible difference in certain areas in the coming months but we also need producers' continued patience and support to allow us to complete this overhaul during the next three to five years," adds Mr Farren.

Mr Buchanan added that British Wool is committed to working with producers to maximise the value of the 2017 wool clip and that includes helping producers to understand what they can do on-farm to deliver a higher-value clip. "The latest wool values for 2017, based on auction sales through the spring, include Romney wool at £1.00/kg, Texel at £0.90/kg and Mule at £0.85/kg, with Cheviot wool at £1.20/kg," he says.

"At the lower end of the value spectrum, Blackface fleeces

are likely to be worth £0.60/kg, with Swaledale at £0.40/kg and Welsh £0.45/kg, as in 2016. It is important that sheep producers recognise the work that British Wool is doing on their behalf to maximise the value of the clip. This includes shearer training, wool grading and the organisation's competitive auction system," he adds.



Above: British Wool's CEO Joe Farren.

Left: British Wool Electronic Auction.

"No other organisation works as hard for wool producers or puts as much back into the sheep industry as British Wool does. We are committed to the future of the UK sheep sector and are working to deliver better returns wherever possible."



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On my farm...

Follow the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors through their farming year, with monthly blog entry updates. Here's a snapshot of what's going on in their lives and on their farms. And if you want to read more, find them all in the 'Ambassador Blogs' section at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

Howard Tratt (27)

**Direct selling
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Lympham.**

Following lambing I have managed to have a couple of quieter weeks, which have recently seen me spend an afternoon at the North

Somerset Show and head to the Wester Daily Press Food & Farming Awards. A great night was had by all, and it was also great to support a fellow NSA Next Generation Ambassador, who was shortlisted in the Young Farmer of the Year award category. I've also been farm sitting in Devon recently, which is something that I really enjoy.

Back at home the eldest lambs are just tipping 10 weeks old and they are growing well. One of the main groups of twins is on a rotationally set-stocked system, on another farm following the cows several days after they've grazed for between five and seven days. It's clean ground and has worked well. The lambs look bright and are putting on weight.

The second lot of twins are being rotationally grazed on a PRG/white



clover ley. There are 85 ewes with twins on a five hectare (12-acre) field split in to five sections. It's the first time I have grazed like this and I'm pleased with how quickly the grass recovers and regrows after grazing. The stocking rate could probably be increased, but I haven't built up the confidence to do that yet.

The not so exciting news is that the first flies have struck. The onset of wet weather, following a warm dry spell, has created perfect conditions for flies. So once it dries up again it'll be time to give the shearers a call. On the bright side, the weather is also perfect for growing grass and we have it in abundance. Silaging is set to start next week, if the weather is right. We have about 26 hectares (65 acres) of Italian ryegrass leys for clamp silage and following that we shall start on the neighbour's unit.

Toby Lawton (27)

**Increasing
stocking rates on
a mixed system
in Newport,
Shropshire.**

We have now finished lambing, thankfully, and have sold the last of our January-born lambs recently. I'll have the first draw out of the February lambs before long, which at 12-weeks old should be averaging 40kg. All the spring crops are in and we have welcomed the rain of late. At long last the paddock grazing system that we have adopted this year seems to be working well, with worm burden being at a minimum. We are working very closely with our vets



Joe Milligan (23)

**Working
alongside his
father on a
beef and sheep
enterprise in
Castlewellan,
County Down.**

Things have been going well here during the past couple of weeks, with grass growing and stock thriving. The last of the ewes have lambed, leaving a lambing period of exactly five weeks. All lambs have been vaccinated, against clostridial diseases and orf, and tailed. This gave us a great opportunity to see how lambs were doing. I am very pleased with their performance to date. If current grass supplies keep up, hopefully a lot of lambs will be ready for slaughter between 15 and 18 weeks.



The ewes are now being grazed in three batches, two at home and one batch at the other farm where a couple of smaller fields suit sheep rather than cattle. Although bigger batches make grassland management a lot simpler, handling facilities are not big enough to hold them in one batch. This is something we will hopefully address during the coming months.

Although breeding seems a long way off, we are starting to think about ram purchases. Although we may not change breeds, selecting rams on their EBVs is something that will be at the forefront of our decisions. Having seen how genetic progress has improved the profitability of other flocks, it is an area that we believe can keep improving ours.

With Balmoral Show now passed, it's hard to believe how time is flying. Silage leys are progressing nicely and, with high grass growth rates, we are closing off more paddocks for making bales. This high-quality fodder is vital for feeding ewes around lambing time and fattening cattle prior to slaughter.

this year, carrying out faecal egg counts coupled with regularly weighing the lambs to monitor growth rates against worm burden. It will be interesting to assess how this is working through the coming months.



Alister Watson (25)

**Breeding Lleyns
on his family's
farm in Dumfries
& Galloway, as
well as contract
shepherding
and lorry driving
work.**

Lambing has almost finished and summer work is about to start. Lambs are all out in the fields and dosed for coccidiosis and nematodirid. Even with the cold weather there were a few lambs showing early signs of worms. I've started weighing lambs for their eight-week targets and, all things considered, I'm happy with the results.

The top lamb at the moment is a Lleyn achieving 34kg at eight weeks, giving a 0.56kg/day live weight gain. Many have been higher than 0.40kg/day, though there is the odd lamb at 0.25kg/day. I'm happy with the way the lambs are growing, but cannot help feel frustrated that grazing availability hasn't allowed them to achieve their full potential. I feel, as a business, that we need to look closer at grassland management.

I retained 85 ewe lambs in 2016 and have had them in to crutch and dose. I'm happy with how they are growing and the next job is to pick out a couple to show.

Lamb price has risen during the past couple of weeks and to take advantage of this I've selected eight shearlings, which have not made the grade for breeding. I'm now left with six shearing tups, which I believe are the best of the 2016 lamb crop. These will be registered and inspected in the next few months.

Away from the farm I've been busy contracting, spreading a lot of fertiliser on arable crops, grassland, hill and everything in between. Silage making



Networking is vital when looking for keep

Finding, and keeping, grass in arable areas clearly presents its challenges. But young shepherd Robert Spink hasn't let this stop his flock expansion plans.

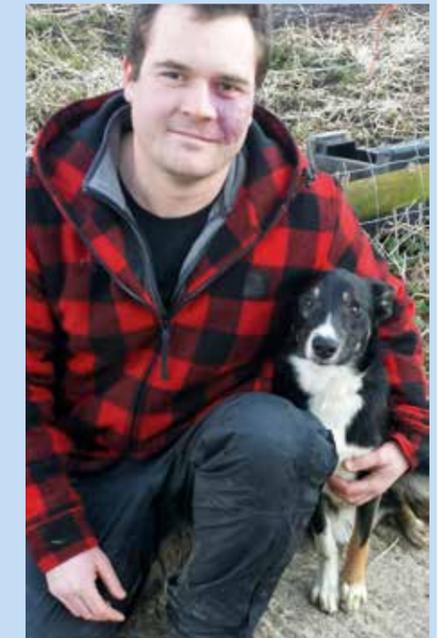
Robert (25) has a family farm at Hepworth on the Norfolk/Suffolk border, but can only run a commercially viable sheep enterprise by renting multiple blocks of land in the area. After taking on the running of the family farm in the arable-dominated area of Diss, Robert has been working to find the right balance between crops and sheep.

With only eight hectares (20-acres) of permeant pasture at home, Robert has built up his flock from 120 to 400 North Country Mule and Suffolk cross Texel Mules, put to the Texel or Southdown tup. With expansion comes the need for additional grazing, something that he has worked hard to find and keep during the past few years.

"Networking is key when you're looking for keep. Tell everyone you can think of that you have sheep and are looking for grass and get yourself into positions where you can talk about it. On shoots, while out and about doing contracting work – just take every opportunity that you can to ask and don't be put off when you're turned away.

"I also found that explaining that I was just starting out has been a good tool to get people interested. If you're working hard to make a go of it then people seem willing to help you out, if they can. If any opportunities come up say 'yes' and make it work, even if the ground is not exactly what you are looking for. It may lead to some that is in the future."

In addition to working hard on his own business, Robert is keen to drive the sheep industry forward. He recently became an NSA Eastern Region Committee Member and, despite his non-shepherding background, Robert is passionate about getting arable farmers



interested in sheep and getting the two sectors to work together.

It is something he has worked hard to get off the ground during the last few years and he says that there is as much effort in keeping ground as finding it in the first place. "Always be polite, enthusiastic and approachable when you see the land owner," says Robert. "If there is a problem, I always drop everything to get it sorted as soon as possible. It makes a huge difference. Being tidy and making sure you arrive and leave when you say you will always makes it more likely that landlords will be interested in letting to you again.

"Paying on time and keeping paperwork up to date are also essential. I take agreements from handshakes to licences, but if you can get terms written down on paper then always do so. You've got to get out and ask for keep, it won't come to you. And, ultimately, it is about making yourself easy to work with so land owners will want to have you back."

has already begun in the area, with some dairy farmers aiming for five cuts this year. In the next week the contracting is going to boom so I've many late nights and early mornings ahead of me.



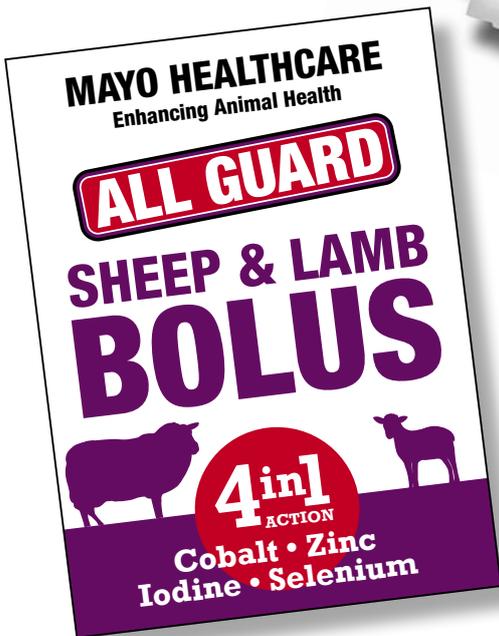
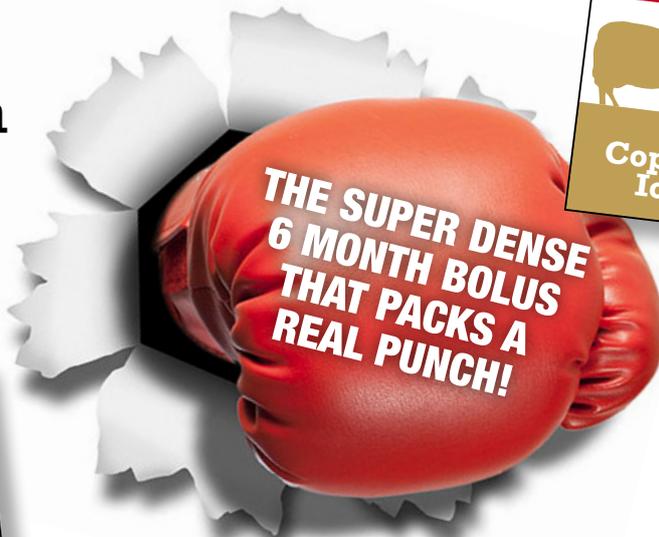
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