

Sheep Farmer

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2017



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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Defra is listening – but it's still early days

Each one of this year's six regional NSA sheep events has been a huge success and credit must go to the event organisers and their committees, the armies of volunteers that help in advance and on the day, and – of course – the hosts.

Without sounding like British Rail, one or two events suffered with the weather being too wet and one, in particular, saw conditions that were too hot. But you have to take the rough with the smooth and at least they took place – and were on time!

On a serious note, these events perform a unique function. They are entirely sheep related business-to-business and technically focussed shows. And they also offer an environment that sheep producers are entirely comfortable in – an essential ingredient for success.

Lamb prices

A couple of months of good lamb prices will have helped to put smiles on producers' faces and buoyed enthusiasm. And further good news is that producers responded to these favourable market conditions, with lamb numbers sold being up by some 25% in the period March to end of June.

I always feel nervous about making any predictions, but this may well result in the absence of a sudden flush of lambs during the next month or two and help to keep supply tight – and prices firm. Of course demand is the other side of this equation and the export trade, boosted by a favourable exchange rate, has been the bedrock of recent trade. That export trade is at the top of the list of uncertainties as we look forward during the next few years.

The importance of exports to our industry is a message that's getting through to government ministers and, recently, George Eustice has singled out the sheep industry as the one that is most at risk and in need of special consideration regarding trade deals. At the same time, New Zealand and Australia are also making their case (discussed in more detail on page 19). Both countries are keen to have input in discussions about tariff rate quota volumes.

Greater development of our domestic market, but with the foundation of a strong export pull, must be a general principle worth following. But Defra



ministers are still keen to see our welfare standards go higher, even though there is little evidence that we can use this within WTO rules to keep lower standard products out. And some members of the Cabinet are still saying that Brexit is an opportunity to bring cheaper food to the UK. If we're not careful we will have high-standard products being exported to all sorts of specialist and niche outlets and domestic consumption will be based primarily on imports.

Unintended consequences

Relating to welfare, both George Eustice and Michael Gove have suggested that they may use Brexit as a means to restrict – or even end – live exports. But then we hear that tariff levels would be lower for less processed foods and live animals may even be exempt. Coupled with obstacles to get adequate labour in our meat plants, we could, if the wrong decisions are made, see more interest in exporting live lambs and less ability to add value here and build our quality reputation. It all smacks of the law of unintended consequences and a pretty irrational food and farming policy, if there ever was one.

But at least the new Defra ministerial team are now in place and listening. It is still early days and we must take every opportunity we can, using reason, to get across our needs and the possible effects of making the wrong decisions.

We had the best of starts in early July, when I was invited to take part in a small round table discussion with the entire Defra ministerial team; Michael Gove, Lord Gardiner and George Eustice. Never have I had the opportunity to be in the company of all those post holders together – and for a full two hours – and credit must go to them for wanting to engage in such a refreshing way.

Sheep
Farmer



August/September
2017 edition
Vol. 36, No 4 ISSN 0141-2434
A National Sheep Association publication.

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The front page picture was taken by professional photographer John Evesson and features North Country Cheviot ewes grazing in Edale, Derbyshire.

This NSA magazine is published with design and production services provided by Ladies in Print.

Ladies in Print

Email: ladiesinprint@outlook.com
Tel: 01684 899255

Paper is FSC® certified. It is sourced from responsibly managed forests.



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News Update

Top NSA award for industry stalwart



After being announced as the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award 2016 winner at the beginning of this year, Chris Lloyd was formally presented with his prize the evening before NSA North Sheep. With a career spanning three decades, Chris was nominated and ultimately won the award for his work on behalf of the UK sheep sector. He spent some 16 years at the centre of NSA activity before joining Eblex (now AHDB Beef & Lamb) and he played a key role in the establishment and launch of the Sheep Better Returns Programme (BRP) in 2004.

"Receiving this award is such a proud moment in my life," said Chris. "It is a product of my lifetime's work and I accept it on behalf of a team effort. We must do all we can to make sure this industry keeps making contributions to our society – something that's more important than ever given the current challenges we face. I am deeply honoured – thank you."

NSA event-season round up

Just as this issue of Sheep Farmer went to press, a busy season of regional NSA sheep events came to a close. Come rain, wind or shine, each one offered a fantastic display of information from workshops and demonstrations, through to seminars and competitions, among an impressive range of both trade and breed society stands.

We have full reports from NSA Highland Sheep (page 11), NSA North Sheep (page 12), NSA Sheep South West (page 14) and NSA Sheep Northern Ireland (page 15). NSA would

like to thank all individuals, across the NSA regions, who gave up their time to make sure each event was a resounding success.

Common-land entitlement challenge

Sheep producers would be excused for thinking that the entitlements of rights holders on common land, in England and Wales, were secure. But if a legal case against two rights holders in South Wales succeeds it could cause real problems for this traditional practice upon which many marginal farms rely for viability.

NSA Welsh Commons Forum (WCF) members Nick and Julie Tamplin hold rights to graze livestock on Eglwslilan Common, Caerphilly. Eglwslilan was recently purchased by a private limited company, and the new owners are not only challenging the rights and sending invoices to the couple for grazing, but are also, more widely, claiming that BPS entitlements and agri-environment

scheme income should be in the hands of the owners of commons and not the rights holders.

NSA WCF is in contact with both NFU Cymru and FUV to support the Tamplin's defence and is about to launch an appeal in order to help cover the legal costs of defending a matter that could have wide reaching repercussions if the case were lost.

Notice of annual members meeting

Notice is hereby given that the 2017 annual members meeting of NSA Eastern Region will be held at the Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket in Suffolk, on Wednesday 11th October at 6pm to transact the following business: election/re-approval of the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Treasurer; nomination/re-approval of the regional Trustee Director; election of new committee members; Chairman's report; and Treasurer's report.

Members residing in NSA Eastern

Changes to Red Tractor standards: what you need to know

Red Tractor-assured sheep producers will be receiving a revised set of standards in the post this month (July), ahead of implementation in October.

Few significant changes have been made, but producers are being advised to familiarise themselves with the amendments when their packs arrive.

The process of strengthening the standards happens every three years, with a cross section of the food and farming industry looking at the standards to ensure that they deliver a product that consumers demand.

Standards affecting the use and recording of antibiotics have been bolstered across all livestock sectors, demonstrating the UK farming industry's commitment to playing its part in tackling antimicrobial resistance.

Further changes will be made in 2017, after the RUMA target recommendations and other industry initiatives are published, to ensure the industry is fully aligned.

The main changes that assured farms will be assessed against from 1st October are:

Animal medicines

A recommendation has been added that the highest priority and critically important antibiotics are only used as a last resort under veterinary direction. For farm-to-farm sales, animals under statutory withdrawal periods for medicines must be accompanied by a

withdrawal-period declaration.

Biosecurity

A farm biosecurity plan must be created, implemented and updated in relation to health and performance reviews. Disinfectants used across the farm should be Defra approved.

Silage storage

Silage must be stored in a manner that minimises the risk of contamination and pollution, with particular attention paid to field clamps where they are permitted (not in Scotland).

Water

As well as providing a permanent supply of clean water, members must also ensure that troughs are kept clean.

Environment

The environmental protection section has no significant changes, but it is now more appropriate for livestock farmers and has been divided into two areas – the responsible use of agri-chemicals and nutrient management.

Rodenticide use

Permanent baiting must not be routinely undertaken and baits can only be sited where evidence shows that they are being continuously effective. A site survey and risk assessment of watercourses and populations of non-target species should also be carried out and recorded before treatment.

Farm map

A map should show the unit's buildings, fields, watercourses and high-pollution-risk areas.

NSA AGM

As detailed in the previous issue of Sheep Farmer, the 124th NSA AGM will be held on Wednesday 9th August, at 10am, at Rosspark Hotel near Ballymena in County Antrim. The AGM will be followed by a tour of the excellent facilities at CAFRE's new Hill Farm Development Centre, at Glenwherry, which is a 1,040-hectare (2,568-acre) hill farm comprising 110 suckler cows and 1,100 ewes.

Find information about the meeting agenda, proxy votes or minutes at: www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or by calling NSA Head Office.

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

Sheep Breeders Round Table

Online bookings are now being taken for the biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table (SBRT), taking place Friday 17th to Sunday 19th November 2017, at Eastwood Hall, Eastwood in Nottinghamshire. The theme this year is 'thinking positively'. Find booking forms and a full event programme at: www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt.

Could you be a 'Welly winner'?

NSA still has four pairs of Wellingtons to give away before the end of this year. So make sure that you visit us at upcoming agricultural shows and events to be in with your chance of winning. Our congratulations to each of the winners so far, four from several NSA events this summer including NSA Highland Sheep, NSA North Sheep, NSA Sheep South West and NSA Sheep Northern Ireland. And a big thank you to Dunlop for providing Wellingtons for the draw, running at the NSA stand at all non-NSA events through until the Welsh Winter Fair in November and online at: www.nationalsheep.org.uk.



NSA reports – devolved nations

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Davies, Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region has had a busy couple of months attending many stakeholder meetings and discussing topics including: light lambs, smokies, the CPH review, and quarantine units. The region



has played a significant role in the latter, getting the start postponed from June until 11th September. And we will continue to lobby for a review of the rules to try and make them more practical for individuals to take advantage of the best practise quarantining incoming stock can achieve.

The lamb price has held steady during the past few months, which bodes well for the breeding sales ahead. I do hope all sheep producers will be able to take advantage of the better prices we are seeing this year, as feed and other input prices do continue to rise.

The Royal Welsh Show saw many members actively showing or promoting the sheep industry, through helping on the NSA stand or on the many breed society stands in the pavilion. See the full report on page 16.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region members and friends are invited to visit Ben Anthony and Diana Fairclough for a farm walk on Tuesday 3rd October. It starts at 3pm at their farm in Whitland, Carmarthenshire. Anthony and Diana won the Sheep Innovator of the Year category at the British Farming Awards in 2016. In 2010, the couple entered a joint venture agreement with Diana's parents and decided to pursue the finished lamb market. The farm comprises 59 hectares (145 acres), including: 14 hectares (35 acres) of woodland, 36 hectares (90 acres) of land adjoining the family farm; and a further eight hectares (20 acres) situated five miles away to achieve economies of scale. Ben and Diana run 300 Aberfield cross Tregaron Welsh ewes, together with 230 Texel cross Suffolk ewes. The entire flock is crossed to Abermax and Primera rams. Look out for details in the NSA Weekly Email Update as the date draws nearer.

The next NSA Cymru/Wales Region Committee Meeting is on Tuesday 22nd August, at 2pm in Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Show Ground.



From left to right: Coed Cymru's Gareth Davies, Bradley Welch of the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership with Environment Secretary Lesley Griffiths, Alun Davies of Fferm Ifan, and NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



NSA Sheep Northern Ireland, held at the beginning of July, was once again well received by exhibitors and attended by a strong crowd of sheep producers.



Lamb prices have been a bit of a roller coaster, particularly around Easter time. We expected a good trade but, instead, prices were not covering costs. Late May and June saw a high, with producers pleasantly pleased before July, when we always see a fall.

As I write this in mid-July, though, prices are still around 30p/kg higher than they were in 2016. The de-valued pound is useful when we are exporting product, although what we purchase is moving upwards.

With an increase in throughput and the average carcase weight, the volume of lamb handled by local processors has recorded a 15% year-on-year increase. It is pleasing to see lamb imports falling and several supermarkets committing to British lamb in recent months.

The year so far in Northern Ireland has been promising, both weather wise and in terms of grass production. This has increased some 25% above the average. Winter forage stocks are looking plentiful, so let's just hope that the second half of the year is as good as the first.

Political parties in the region seem to be playing games with each other at the moment, with no regard for, or interest in doing, what they receive a salary for. Northern Ireland needs a strong voice as Brexit draws closer. Fighting for a good trade deal with the EU is critical for the survival of both the North and South of Ireland. We do notice things are less than bright in terms of trade in other parts of the UK too, with no sign of any big hitters appearing on our side.

Early August will see the NSA AGM take place in the NSA Northern Ireland Region for the first time. This is a fitting legacy from former NSA Chairman Samuel Wharry's era, before his tragic passing earlier this year. On behalf of our regional committee, I hope some members from the mainland can find the time to visit us for the occasion and maybe stay a few days longer to look around. Anyone needing advice on visiting to Northern Ireland is welcome to contact me (details on page two).



Crowds gathered in Ballymena Livestock Market to enjoy NSA Sheep Northern Ireland (see full report on page 15).

NSA Scottish Region report

By George Milne, Development Officer



NSA Scottish Region has been busy recently with two major events. NSA Highland Sheep, held at the end of May, was an excellent day followed



by the Royal Highland Show (see the full report on page 16).

Organising and hosting these events means that the past few months have been extremely busy, with other meetings to attend and presenting the views of the sheep industry to Ministers and Government officials. In early June, we met with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing, on farm, to present NSA's publication of *The Complementary role of sheep in upland and hill areas*. This was followed by a hill farming summit in Inverness, where we took another opportunity to emphasise the importance of hill farming to the Minister and Government officials.

It is encouraging to see that Aldi has made the commitment to buying Scottish lamb all year round, only putting Scotch or British lamb on its shelves in Scottish stores. NSA Scottish Region took the opportunity to congratulate the supermarket chain at a supplier conference in Glasgow recently. Comments from Aldi product buyers outlined that the store finds it difficult to source certain cuts of Scotch Lamb during spring. This is something that we will need to discuss as an industry because we should be in an ideal position to make sure that hill lambs are readily available during these months.

Brexit meetings are well underway and rightly so as negotiations continue to move forward. We need to engage



Lamb butchery and cooking demonstrations at the Royal Highland Show proved a hit with those visiting the NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre marquee.

at every level and take all the opportunities presented to us to make sure the voice of the sheep industry is heard, loud and clear. NSA Scottish Region is working to do this as part of the UK Livestock Brexit Group and is in constant contact with Government officials to ensure that the sheep industry's views are well represented.

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NSA reports – English regions

Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

In most parts of the region it has been a good hay and silage making season, although we know that other regions haven't been so fortunate.

We are still getting reports of sheep worrying incidents. In the Peak District, in particular, it is worse at this time of year due to the high numbers of visitors to the National Park.

On a sheep-health note, our resident vet Chris Lewis says that, so far, no cases of Schmallenberg have been diagnosed in sheep since May. But he's warning producers about the possibility of Haemonchus in sheep, if the hot weather we've been experiencing is followed by hot, wet stormy conditions. Chris says that sheep do not scour but, instead, become anaemic and, often, the first indication of disease in the flock is a death. A classic symptom to look for is a white membrane in the sheep's eye.

At a recent NSA Central Region Committee Meeting, we looked at the possibilities of holding meetings in different parts of the region. We are aware that the geography of the region does not encourage members to come to meetings in the centre and we are in discussions with several people to try to arrange some alternatives across the region. To kick off, we are trying to arrange a farm walk in Cheshire during October and hope that other events may follow. Meanwhile, if members have any suggestions for venues or topics, particularly in the west and east of the region, please get in touch.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

What a fantastic day we had at our Youthful Shepherds Day on 10th June. I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who was involved with the event and to all who came along on the day – particularly the young competitors who took part in the NSA Next Generation Shepherds Competition.

A huge effort was made to bring it all together on the day and we should also thank the sponsors, including Randall Parker Foods.

The NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition element was run by Reaseheath College's James Bickerton, his wife Sue and their daughters Zoe and Holly. They kept the whole competition 'tight' and this meant the day ran as



NSA Eastern Region's Youthful Shepherds Day achieved its objective of engaging young people.

smoothly as possible. Well done to all involved in the competitions and congratulations to Robert Spink on winning. He goes forward to represent NSA Eastern Region at the competition's national final, to be held at NSA Sheep 2018.

The children's activity corner was also a great success and constantly busy. The farm walk also proved popular. By the end of the day we had achieved our objective of engaging young people with an interest in the industry. Look out for details of an autumn event in the region, as well as our Annual Regional Members Meeting on Wednesday 11th October, to which all regional members are invited.

Marches

By Hannah Park, Secretary

Our NSA Next Generation Shepherd's Training Day, back in May, was a huge success. A huge thank you goes to: the committee members, who gave up their time to make sure it could go ahead this year; to the competitors and the sponsors; but mostly to the Carter family for kindly hosting the event.

Although a competitive element was an option, the focus of the day was about providing a learning platform for young shepherds and this went down well on the day. I'm confident that those who took part took something away with them and it is definitely a format that we'll be repeating in the future.

Mid-July saw the NSA Next Generation Ambassador group meet for their third delivery session this year, held in Worcestershire. Being in our region, it was great to have former and current Regional Chairmen Kevin Harrison and Antony Spencer involved. Both kindly gave up their time and led a session each with the group. Looking ahead, NSA Marches Region is looking to host a farm walk in the autumn, which is likely to be in the centre of the region. Our Annual Regional Members meeting will also be held later in the year. Regional members, family and friends are all welcome, so look out for updates.

Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

NSA North Sheep 2017 has now been and gone. Thank you to our hosts, the Smith Family and thank you to all our sponsors and stand holders. And thank you to all the volunteers who helped both before, during and after the event.

A big thank you must also go to our dedicated and enthusiastic organising committee. And, finally, thank you to all of you who attended on the day. I hope you found the event useful and enjoyable. And we look forward to welcoming you back to North Sheep in 2019.

The Great Yorkshire Show took place a few weeks ago. I hope anyone who attended got a chance to catch up with NSA Membership Recruitment Officer Abi Swaffield or some of our regional committee at the NSA gazebo.

We are keeping a watchful eye on the proposals to introduce lynx to Kielder Forest, Northumberland. NSA Northern Region Committee Members will continue to monitor news on the subject and would appreciate any news or comments from NSA members on the situation. A meeting, hosted by the region, is planned during August. Look out for updates on this in the coming weeks. Love Lamb Week is also on the horizon, held annually from 1st to 7th September. We would love to hear of any planned activities in our region in the lead up to, or during, the initiative.

South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

Firstly, may I say a big 'thank you' to the 62 members from our region who returned the survey enclosed in the previous issue of Sheep Farmer. Secondly, congratulations to Heidi Upton, of Broadchalke in Wiltshire, who was successful in the draw for returning the survey and wins a £50 voucher to spend at AP Farm Supplies.

And thank you to Andrew Petch for generously supporting our region. The results of the survey have helped us to plan for the future and we hope to be able to announce some decisions on NSA South Sheep 2018 in the next edition of the Sheep Farmer.

We are, again, planning to hold three 'Rams Fit for Purpose' meetings, along with mini farm walks, at host farms. The meetings will be held jointly with AHDB Beef & Lamb and will follow our attendance at the Edenbridge and Oxted Show on Sunday 27th and Monday 28th August, where we will have a stand. Please come along for a chat if you're visiting.

The first meeting will be on Tuesday 29th August at Dom and Bethan Klinkenberg's Manor Farm, at East Marden near Chichester in West Sussex. The following day, Wednesday 30th August, Hugh and Pauline Skinner's Aragon Farm, at Sissinghurst near Cranbrook in Kent, will host the second. The third will be on Thursday 31st August at Perin Dineley's Red House Farm, at Swallowcliffe near Salisbury in Wiltshire. All three meetings will begin at 2pm. Please contact me to register so we have an idea of expected numbers (*contact details are on page two*).

After our successful inaugural Health and Welfare Conference in February 2016, we have decided to repeat it this year on Wednesday 22nd November at the Surry University's School of Veterinary Medicine in Guildford. The title will be 'Sheep health, wealth and production'. The full programme is yet to be finalised, but further details will be published in the next edition of Sheep Farmer and the NSA Weekly Email Update.

South West

By Alan Derryman, Chairman

We hope everyone who attended enjoyed NSA Sheep South West this year. A huge thank you must go to Sue Martyn and Dave Gregory for all their hard work in pulling the event together. Without their expertise and hard work, we would not be able to put on such a successful event.

Thank you also to Joe Farren, British Wool Marketing Board Chief Executive, for taking the time to open the event. And a special thank you to our hosts, David and Janet Disney, for their support and flexibility in the run up to and throughout the event. There are many more people who should be individually named and thanked, but the word count rather limits us, so a very big thank you to everyone who helped before, during, and after the event.



Crowds gathered, despite the heat, at NSA Sheep South West 2017.

NSA Sheep South West 2017 was probably one of the hottest ever, but everyone seemed very pleased and we have received many positive comments. Before we know it, two years will have passed and we'll be talking about Sheep South West 2019.

On the farming front, the sheep trade in general has been very strong both for breeding and finished stock. It is good to see that there is confidence within the industry despite all the uncertainty of Brexit. And long may it continue.

We must also report that NSA South West Region Secretary Kate White has decided to stand down, because she is expecting her second child. If anyone is interested in taking on the role of NSA South West Regional Secretary, please contact Sue Martyn (*contact details on page two*).



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Two eagerly anticipated sales in NSA Eastern Region

NSA Eastern Region will be offering two excellent venues again this year for ram buyers and sellers. Rugby Farmers Auction Mart will be the venue for the first NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale, on Friday 25th August, and Melton Mowbray Market will host the second on Friday 15th September.

Both sales have a solid reputation for top quality stock at reasonable prices and give vendors the opportunity to enjoy excellent clearance rates. With rams at both sales inspected for the three Ts – teeth, toes and testicles – buyers can be reassured that they are bidding on correct animals of good quality, safe in the knowledge they will do a first-class job.

Spacious venue

The Rugby sale is aimed at early lambing flocks and those who want to settle in rams well ahead of the breeding season. More than 120 rams are anticipated to enter and will include Charollais, Texel, Suffolk and Beltex. Penning facilities at Rugby are perfect for a ram sale, with easy unloading and plenty of space to present animals to potential customers.



Entries of between 250 and 270 terminal sire breeds are expected at NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale.

Top quality facilities will also be available at Melton Mowbray for the second sale, with major re-building work

having been recently completed. Average prices have risen during the past few years and clearance rates for correct, well-fleshed rams are very high. As ever, vendors can expect a strong and loyal group of buyers to be present on the day.

NSA Eastern Region Ram Sales is greatly indebted to Melton Mowbray Council, which supports the show classes at this sale. For those who may not know the venue, Friday has the added attraction of the farmers' market, which will be open on the day of the sale. Entries of between 250 and 270 terminal sire breeds are expected, with quality continuing to improve year on year.

Entry deadline

Entries for the Rugby sale are now closed. The closing date for Melton Mowbray entries is Monday 14th August. More information can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events. Entry forms for the Melton Mowbray sale and catalogues for both are available from Jonathan and Carroll Barber on 01953 607860 or jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk.

NSA offers largest multi-breed sale in South West

The 29th NSA South West Region Ram Sale is being held on Wednesday 16th August at Exeter Livestock Centre, Devon. With some breeds holding their shows on the concourse the evening before, the event offers a chance to see some of the high-quality stock out of their pens.

The sale is known for the very high standards it demands and all sheep must pass a rigorous inspection before they are allowed through the sale ring. This, coupled with the usual auctioneers' conditions and the NSA South West Region Ram Sale bye laws, means that sheep producers can buy with confidence.

Multi-breed sale

With 13 breeds represented, including some Dorset Downs this year, and 612 rams entered, this is the largest multi-breed sale in the South West. This total includes 148 Charollais and 148 Texels along with 95 Suffolks. There are some performance-recorded animals entered and their figures will be available on the day. The growing demand for crossbred rams should be met with an increased entry this year. For anyone considering starting a pedigree flock or looking to add to one, there are 126 females on offer, including 80 Charollais.

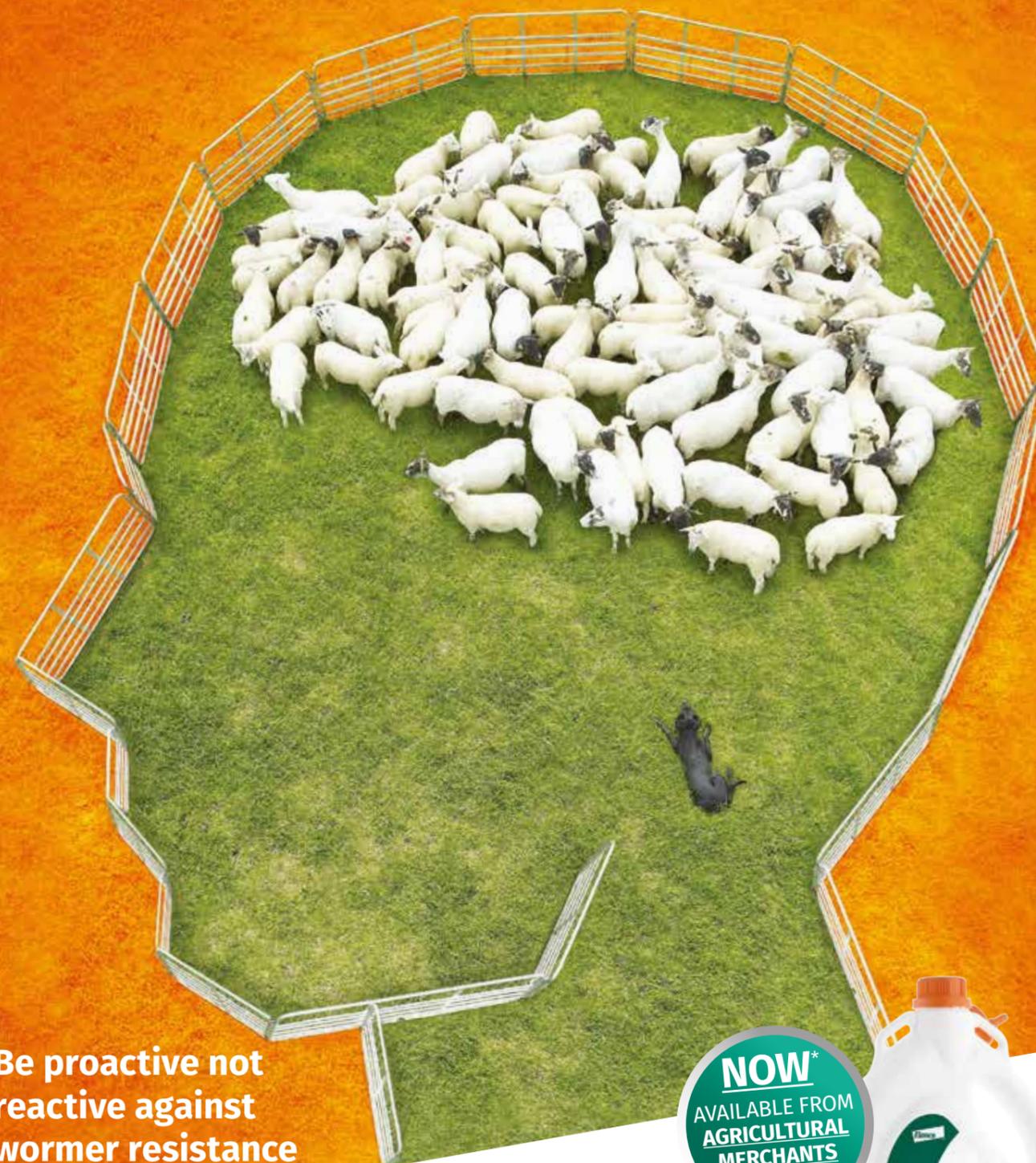
More information and catalogues from www.nationalsheep.org.



Some 612 rams are entered for NSA South West Region Ram Sale, with 13 breeds being represented.

www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or Sue Martyn, NSA South West Region Ram Sale Secretary, on suem@nationalsheep.org.uk or 01409 271385.

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Strong trade predicted at NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale

All roads will lead to Builth Wells for the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale on Monday 25th September, which will be held at the Royal Welsh Showground. The event is expected to attract some of the industry's best rams, with thousands going under the hammer on the day. It also attracts buyers from as far afield as the Orkneys and the Isle of Man to the South West of England. Charollais breeder Harry de Vlieghe, who has been making the 48-hour trip from the Netherlands for the past eight years, is just one of several international visitors expected.

NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Executive Director Jane Smith is expecting another good sale. "Although there has been so much concern about the outcome of Brexit and the impact on farming, the lamb trade seems to be strong," she says. "I'm confident that people will be looking for quality rams to bring that extra touch of class to their flocks and we're looking forward to a good sale."

The sale is an important economic driver in Mid-Wales and in 2016 the NSA Wales & Border Main Sale grossed more than £2.2 million, with 85% of sheep forward sold and a record price of 18,000gns.

Buoyant market

NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Committee Chairman John Owens adds: "I'm pleased to say that there are a few rays of sunshine breaking through the black clouds of Brexit. We have a prime lamb market that is more buoyant than many of us would have dared to predict, together with a kind spring that has reduced feed input costs. "It is with increased confidence in the sheep industry that we enter the autumn breeding ewe and ram sales."

This year's sale date is a week later than usual and the organising committee are confident that this is good for buyers, vendors and for the planning of the event.

There are now seven weeks between



A record price of 18,000gns was paid for a Texel at the 2016 sale.

the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale on Monday 7th August and the Main Sale on Monday 25th September. For more information visit www.nsaramsales.org.uk or contact Jane Smith, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Executive Director, on 01291 673939.

Superb venue for NSA Highland Sheep

An appeal to Scottish sheep producers to work with butchers and supermarkets, in a bid to promote domestic consumption of lamb, was made by former Scottish Sheep Farmer of the Year Joyce Campbell when she officially opened NSA Highland Sheep at Kinnahaird Farm near Strathpeffer in Ross-shire. The event was hosted by mother and daughter, Dorothy Clark and Amy Grant, who run a flock of 350 Texel cross ewes and 160 suckler cows.

Ms Campbell, who runs a flock of 780 Laird-type North Country Cheviot ewes on her 2,267-hectare (5,600-acre) hill farm at Armadale in Sutherland, deprecated the abysmally low consumption of lamb in Scotland at between 2kg and 2.5kg per head, compared with 7.5kg south of the border.

"Everyone needs to work together to encourage shoppers to eat more lamb," she said. "Let's take ownership of our industry for ourselves. Let's not just accept surviving or just getting by. Let's go for a brighter sheep industry in Scotland with a positive future."

She called on butchers' shops and supermarkets to display recipes outlining how to cook different cuts of fresh lamb.

Ms Campbell has emerged as a champion of the sheep industry in Scotland since winning Sheep Farmer of the Year 2015 and makes wide use of social media to promote the merits of sheep farming and encourage lamb consumption.

Her efforts were further recognised at NSA Highland Sheep when she and her team, which includes husband Ian Macleay and her niece and nephew Frances and Mure Grant, were presented with NSA Scottish Region's Silver Salver – one of the Scottish sheep industries highest accolades that is awarded in

recognition of outstanding contribution to the sheep industry.

Ms Campbell's comments were strongly supported by NSA Scottish Region Chairman John Fyall, who said that the public needed to be made aware that the sheep industry is worth protecting and expanding.

"It's up to us to promote the industry," he said. "Nobody else is going to help us. Brexit will give us the opportunity to create a new policy appropriate to the UK and NSA Scottish Region will be making sure that politicians know what the priorities should be."

Features of the event included a farm tour and ewe hogg show and sale, conducted by Dingwall and Highland Marts. The first-prize pair of Blackface ewe hogs sold for the top price of 700gns each. Second top price was 550gns each for the winning pair of Suffolk hogs, by Essie Ugie and Essie Ulysses, from Irene Fowlie, who is based in Strichen, and bought by Louise McAuley, from Fochabers.

Top award

Judge Robert Paterson, from Dunblane, awarded the championship to Jim Simmons, from Ballindalloch, for a pair of Mule hogs that sold for 160gns to Derek Campbell, from the Isle of Harris. Former world champion sheep dog handler Michael Shearer, from Lythmore near Thurso in Caithness, won the invitation sheepdog trial at NSA Highland Sheep in competition with 30 handlers from Caithness, Sutherland, Ross-shire, Inverness-shire, Lochaber and Aberdeenshire.

Mr Shearer, who won the world championship when it was held at Fearn Farm in 2014, took top place

Fact file

Host farm: Kinnahaird Farm, Strathpeffer, Ross-shire

Date: Wednesday 31st May

Ewe hogg show and sale: Mules: 1, Jim Simmons, Ballindalloch; 2, Archie MacGregor, Kylesyth; 3, David and Susan Johnstone, Ballindalloch. North Country Cheviot (Park): 1, Charlie and Isobel Angus, Thurso. Blackface: 1, Archie MacGregor; 2, Archie MacGregor. Suffolk: 1, Irene Fowlie, Strichen. Any other native breed: 1, Smallburn Farms, Duffus (Polled Dorset); 2, Smallburn Farms, Duffus (Polled Dorset); 3, Greenlands Farm Partnership, Nigg Station (Polled Dorset). Any other continental breed: 1, John S Fleming, Newton Stewart (Roussin). Cross: 1, David and Susan Johnstone; 2, Robert Mack, Urray; 3, Cath Urquhart, North Kessock.

Sheepdog handling: 1, Michael Shearer with Roy, Caithness; 2, J Sutherland with Jan; 3, W Davidson with Mona. Under 21; 1, Joe Mackenzie.

Stock judging: Open: 1, Sandy McCarthy, Caithness; 2, Dora Smith; 3, Dorothy Edward, D Budge and John Swanson. Young Farmers: 1, Emily Stephen; 3, William Moir and Ellis Mutch. Under 18: 1, Jamie MacKinnon; 2, Stephen Forbes; 3, Reece MacLeod. **NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year:** 1, Ryan Maclean, Poolewe. 2, Jamie Laurie, Lockerbie, Farquhar Renwick, Ullapool

Breed society stand: 1, North Country Cheviot; 2, Blackface Sheep Breeders Association; 3, Beltex Sheep Society

Indoor trade stand: 1, Harbro; 2, Logie Durno Sheep; 3, NSA Scottish Region

Outdoor trade stand: 1, Scotpen; 2, Trailer Solution; 3, Niall Bowser Livestock Equipment

with his dog, Roy. The five leading dogs in the competition during the morning competed in a novel double lift in the afternoon – a contest usually held only in international competitions – to decide the overall winner. Schoolboy phenomenon Joe Mackenzie, from Turriff, was placed fourth overall and won the under-21 section. The NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition winner was Ryan Maclean, from Poolewe. He was presented with the NSA Highland Sheep rose bowl and a cash prize of £300. Ryan will represent NSA Scottish Region in the competition final at NSA Sheep 2018, which will be held at Malvern in Worcestershire.

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 SKIPTON - (Shearling ewes only) Tuesday 12th September
 BRECON - Thursday 14th September
 BLESSINGTON (SI) - Saturday 16th September
 CARLISLE - Thursday 21st September
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From left to right: NSA Scottish Region Chairman John Fyall, host producers Dorothy Clark and her daughter Amy Grant (with her three sons in front), Event Chairman Brenda Macintyre, and sheep producer Joyce Campbell.

Future firmly on the agenda at NSA North Sheep

NSA North Sheep 2017, held at West Shields Farm in County Durham, has been hailed a huge success. The sun shone and thousands of visitors flocked to the event to glean the latest information about the sheep industry and what its future holds.

The aim of the day was to provide a platform for knowledge sharing, with discussions focused on the future of the sheep industry and what it holds for today's sheep producers as well as the next generation. Brexit was also a hot topic.

Opening the event, NSA President His Grace the Duke of Montrose emphasised the contribution that sheep farming makes to the ecology and economy of the countryside. He talked about the uncertain times that lay ahead and said that the key to managing this is to understand how to avoid disruption to sheep export markets.

Shepherding skills

A highlight of the event was the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. Sponsored by Rumenco and Nettex, this multi-skilled competition challenged entrants to demonstrate their skills in five areas. First prize was awarded to Rob Walker, from Dunsopbridge near Clitheroe, who took home the Ali Johnson Perpetual Trophy.

A first this year for NSA North Sheep was the lamb festival, to celebrate the extremely high quality and diversity of British lamb. Visitors were given an insight into what today's consumers are looking for when buying lamb, with a series of butchery and cookery demonstrations. Representing all sectors



NSA President His Grace The Duke of Montrose welcomes visitors to NSA North Sheep 2017.



Chef Simon Hicks demonstrates various lamb dishes in the lamb festival area.

of the sheep industry were more than 200 trade and 37 breed society stands, to which awards were given for the best at the event.

Best individual breed stand was awarded to James Whiteford and the accolade for the best breed society stand went to the Scotch Blackface. The best indoor trade stand went to Hexham and Northern Marts and best outdoor trade stand to Vickers & Barrass.

During the farm tours around West Shields Farm, host John Smith and his two sons David and Alan were proud to show off their 365-hectare (900-acre) traditional mixed farm. Visitors viewed their flock of commercial sheep, comprising 1,350 Mules and Texels, and their 300-head commercial suckler beef herd. The family also demonstrated how it has utilised the farm's natural resources to produce renewable energy. The unit has a 12.5-kilowatt wind turbine, which was installed in 2012, alongside solar panels and a biomass boiler, which powers three houses.

Topical debate

NSA North Sheep Organiser Heather Stoney-Grayshon said: "We have had a tremendous day with much being debated and discussed. Everyone was delighted that the sun shone, which was a bonus. Today would have not been possible without the support we have received from the Smith family, the local farming community, the NSA, local young

Seminar highlights

Balancing upland farming and the environment

The National Trust's Patrick Begg said: "The biggest problem for the industry is that we don't eat as much lamb as we used to, particularly the under 30s. Trends are also favouring higher welfare standards. Upland producers play a vital role in looking after public needs and resources like water, carbon capture and emissions, keystone species and habitats, and the landscape for recreation and tourism. The landscape needs people and animals in it, but change is inevitable. As an industry, we shouldn't be thinking about how we can keep the subsidies that we have now. We should have the confidence to do something different to increase sustainability."

Sheep meat exports post Brexit

Remi Fourier of AHDB's French office told delegates: "When the UK is out of the EU, it will give us the flexibility to control our market and standards. When you look at the EU, there is no other country that does things better than the UK in terms of animal welfare and product quality. For example, French lamb is poor quality and usually a by-product of the sheep dairy industry. These lambs are reared indoors and, as such, butchers do not like them. It is important to remember that UK lamb has a strong brand and quality standard across the EU and worldwide."

Next generation, next chapter

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Thomas Carrick was keen to highlight that the sheep industry needs new ideas and energy coming into the industry. The young farmers who made presentations during this seminar were eager to stress that, although the future is uncertain, there are opportunities. Determination, a willingness to learn and flexibility are key to being successful within the industry.

farmers and the event sponsors. I would like to thank them all very much indeed."

For the sheep farming community across Northern England, gathering information was a focus at this year's event. Seminars were specifically chosen to address issues that producers will need to consider going forward – see panel for seminar highlights.

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Record year for NSA Sheep SW

NSA Sheep South West was held on the hottest day of the year so far and visitors were greeted by a record number of trade and breed society exhibitors.

British Wool Marketing Board (BWMB) Chief Executive Joe Farren opened the event and spoke of how impressed he was with NSA and the work it does. He added that BWMB is proud to work with the association on initiatives, like the NSA Next Generation programme, and at regional events. He also explained how BWMB is running its depots more efficiently with the aim of reducing costs, and focussing on marketing British Wool as a quality fibre: "And this can only be good news for producers."

Winning shepherd

The NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition ran throughout the day at the event and was won by James Westcott, who will go on to represent the NSA South West region in the national final at NSA Sheep 2018 in Malvern, Worcestershire. The student section was

Fact file

Host farm: Ayshford, Westleigh, Tiverton, Devon EX16 7HL

Date: Tuesday 20th June

NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year: Open (sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers): 1, James Westcott; 2, Matthew Crooke; 3, Sam Edwards. Student (sponsored by Volac): 1, Andrew Stanbury; 2, Ben Creed; 3, Cathy Daniells

Gift of the Gavel: Over 26: 1, Melvyn Britton; 2, Philip Derryman. Under 26: 1, Lewis Martin; 2, William Hopper.

Fleece competitions: Fine: 1, RJ Harding; 2, R&D Huxter; 3, RJ Harding. Cross & Lustre: 1, L Perrett; 2, D Bawden; 3, J Richardson. Hill & Mountain: 1, RJ Harding; 2, RJ Harding; 3, D Bawden. Naturally Coloured: 1, T Franklin; 2, Mrs J Ayres; 3, Mrs J Ayres. Overall champion: T Franklin; Reserve champion, Mrs J Ayres. Example of a woven fabric: 1, Monika Pun, Winchester; 2, Jodie Copley, Falmouth; 3, Emma Hacket, Winchester

Outdoor trade stand: 1, Harpers Feeds; 2, John Bright Fencing; 3, Barkers Animal Health

Indoor trade stand: 1, Fernhill Farm; 2, Bentham Auction Mart; 3, British Wool Marketing Board

Breed society stand: 1, Texel; 2, Lleyn; 3, Welsh Mules.



NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition prize winners.

sponsored by Volac and had a record number of entries. The winner was Andrew Stanbury from Lackham College.

The 'Gift of the Gavel' was a fun auctioneering competition, sponsored by Kivells. Melvyn Britton showed great enthusiasm and humour to claim the senior title and Lewis Martin, who had come all the way from Kent to take part, showed he was equally enthusiastic and won the junior class.

Auctioneering skills

From judging this contest, Russell Steel then had to demonstrate his own auctioneering skills to sell a Charollais shearing ram. The ram had been purchased by the NSA Sheep South West's event committee with contributions from the NSA South West Region Ram Sale committee and Charollais Society.

The ram sold for £550, with all the proceeds going to the Farming



Show and sale of sheepdogs saw a top price of £2,000 for a four-year-old bitch from R Edwards.

Community Network. Russell went on to sell the sheepdogs. Trade was little slow to start with but soon improved to top at £2,000 for a four-year-old bitch from R Edwards of Chulmleigh. R Williams of Postbridge sold at £1,700 and TJ Nicholls from Buckland Brewer sold Sam at £1,500. The working dogs sold averaged £1,440, part trained dogs averaged £500 with a top of £700 for Tracey Peat. Six puppies sold at an average of £228.

One hundred children from a primary school in Tiverton spent the day at the event and NSA is extremely grateful to all exhibitors who gave their time to these youngsters. Another party from the local pre-school also came and were enthralled by everything they saw.

Successful event

NSA Sheep South West Organising Committee Chairman Alan Derryman said: "Despite the extreme heat, this has been a successful event with trade exhibitors seeing a steady flow of visitors. This is in no small way due to the input of hosts David and Janet Disney and I would like to thank them, as well as the sponsors for their continued support, exhibitors, advertisers in the event guide, companies who have lent equipment, the event organising committee, the NSA South West Region Committee and anyone else who has helped in any way. As always, we relish the challenge of the next NSA Sheep South West event and already some of the committee have been discussing how some things can be improved in 2019. We look forward to seeing you all again next time."

Seminars and sheepdog sale draw crowds to Northern Ireland event

After months of planning and organising, NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2017 took place on Monday 3rd July in Ballymena Livestock Market, County Antrim. Attracting more visitors than the previous event, in 2015, trade-stand holders were pleased with the amount of potential business generated.

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chairman Campbell Tweed accompanied Daera Permanent Secretary Noel Lavery around some of the exhibitor stands. Mr Lavery showed a great interest and thoroughly enjoyed his task of judging each one. Competition for the best stand has become increasingly fierce, during the past few years, and a lot of hard work had gone into designing and displaying some of the breed society stands (see panel for results).

The NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition, sponsored by Ceva Animal



A strong crowd at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland made the most of everything the event had to offer.

Results

Sheep breed stand: 1, Lleyn; 2, Texel; 3, Beltex

Indoor trade stand: 1, Ceva Animal Health; 2, Animax-Vet; 3, Parkland Vet Group

Outdoor trade stands: 1, Ritchie; 2, George Hamilton Machinery; 3, GH Best Shepherds Mate

NSA Next Generation Shepherd (sponsored by Ceva): 1, Russell Smyth, Coleraine; 2, Iain Wilson, Islandmagee; 3, 3rd Mark Hamilton, Castlederg

Stock judging: Over 25: 1, 1st Mark Scott, Gortin; 2, Timothy Rea, Larne; 3, 3rd Crosby Cleland, Saintfield. Under 25: 1, Joe Milligan, Castlewellan; 2, Ashleigh Cupples, Broughshane; 3, 3rd David Thompson, Ballymena

Fleece: Coloured Wool: 1, Freda Magill, Rathfriland; Short Wool: 1, 1st Robbie Morrow, Whitehead; Lustre Wool: 1, Freda Magill, Rathfriland



From left to right: Ceva's Frank McCrystal congratulates NSA Next Generation Shepherd winner Russell Smyth, alongside NSA Sheep NI organiser Edward Adamson.

Health, featured a series of six sections including: shearing, lamb selection, ATV handling, veterinary knowledge, body condition scoring and a written quiz. The top two competitors will now represent NSA Northern Ireland Region at national and European level for the next two years. This includes the competition final, which will be held at NSA Sheep 2018 on 18th July, 2018.

The sheepdog sale saw more than 40 lots coming forward, with Michael McAllister, from Glenariffe, topping the sale at 1,600gns. He was followed by L. McKee, from Kilkeel, who received 920 gns. Several other dogs with good ability sold well.

Topical seminars

Seminars saw Parklands Vet Group's John Grant explain the various reasons why antibiotic resistance is high on the Government agenda. He spoke about the danger to human health if indiscriminate use of antimicrobials compromised their ability to be effective in human medicine, adding that the phrase to remember, when treating all animals, is 'as little as possible but as much as is necessary'. He advised sheep producers to make themselves familiar with all vaccines and use them where applicable.

The second seminar was delivered by Irish Farmers Journal Editor Justin McCarthy and he focused on business and budgetary management. High income from quality stock and high numbers were of no value, said Mr McCarthy, if the cost to produce them was more than the returns generated.

He stressed that, for farm businesses to prosper, the focus needed to be on net farm income.

Another speaker from the Irish Farmers Journal, Phelim O'Neill, then gave his views on Brexit and the impact for farmers in Northern and Southern Ireland. He took great care not to speculate on any outcome from the forthcoming Brexit talks, but outlined several possible scenarios with some unpleasant possibilities that could not be ruled out.

Increase efficiency

Kiwi Murray Rohloff, a frequent visitor to the UK, finished the seminars with a brief explanation of how sheep farmers in New Zealand coped when all subsidies were removed in the 1980s. "There was no warning and it happened with immediate effect," he said. "This left many farmers with high debts and little ability to pay them off. Those who survived and eventually prospered were those who could grow more high-quality grass and increase efficiency with as few input costs as possible. "However, Northern Ireland is not New Zealand and I am not advocating that the UK copies the New Zealand system. But we need to learn the lessons about high output potential when quality grass is grazed to maximum benefit, reducing the reliance on concentrate feeding."

Overall it was an extremely busy and enjoyable day at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland and, unbelievably, Ballymena Livestock Market was back selling cattle the next morning.

Weigh-crate win for Surrey-based sheep producer

With a busy mixed farming enterprise to run, Hugh Broom and his family couldn't be more thrilled to have won a new piece of kit that offers the potential to save time and improve accuracies when working with their flock.

Based in Dorking, Surrey, Hugh is a fourth-generation sheep producer in the family-run business, which reintroduced sheep, alongside cattle and arable enterprises, in 1997. "We run a closed flock of 350 Highlander cross ewes just below the North Downs and breed our own replacements alongside Texel crosses for the prime lamb market," he says. "It is a fairly extensive system, with minimal creep given to the lambs or ewes other than concentrates in the lead-up to lambing time."

Efficiency is key to flock management,



which Hugh says is essential to make the enterprise viable. "We have a robust vaccination policy against clostridial diseases and lameness. That's been

in place for almost nine years now and we try to intervene as little as possible other than to give fly and worm control treatments. It's cost effective, as well as time efficient, to run the flock like this. And it's a 'no brainer' when managing a small flock alongside other enterprises."

Hugh says he is looking forward to putting the weigh crate to good use, describing it as a 'welcome upgrade' to the farm's existing facilities.

NSA is giving away four IAE lamb weigh crates between 1st December 2016 and 2nd November 2017. Full terms and conditions and membership application forms at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw/.



Royal Highland Show

By George Milne, NSA Scottish Region Development Officer
This year's Royal Highland Show proved as popular as ever, with an impressive display in the NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre marquee for the public to get involved in. Attendance was strong, providing an ideal opportunity to connect with visitors through an impressive display of breed and display stands. The wool competition proved particularly interesting for visitors. Lamb tasting and butchery demonstrations during Friday, Saturday and Sunday also drew in the crowds.

Supported by Scottish Craft Butchers, Stewart McClymont butchered a whole lamb and then Chris Trotter cooked several dishes from various cuts for visitors to sample. NSA Scottish Region also cooked up Scotch Lamb leg steaks, kindly donated by Aldi, for sampling during the cooking demonstrations each day. Both activities worked well, with so many of the public amazed at how tasty the variety of lamb cuts were, and how easy they are to cook. The recipe for the lamb burgers on offer was also in high demand.

A seating area in the NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre marquee lent itself to networking opportunities and meetings with various ministers and representatives from the industry. NSA Scottish Region Chairman John Fyall and NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker also had the opportunity to meet with recently appointed Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

The lamb dressing competition, held on Sunday afternoon, proved as successful as it has in previous years, with several young entrants competing for the Michael Dun trophy. Crowds were also drawn in to witness NSA Scottish Region committee member Sybil Macpherson shave off her hair in aid of Cancer Research UK. More than £1,000 has been raised so far. NSA Scottish Region extends its sincere thanks to everyone who made its Sheep Centre marquee a success and to regional committee members who gave up their time to help at this year's show.



Royal Welsh Show

By Helen Davies, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Development Officer

Another year has flown by and another Royal Welsh Show has been and gone. This one seemed busier than ever, with NSA arranging many meetings with several organisations during the week to exchange views on a wide range of topics. Everything from marketing to views on Brexit, as well as climate change and rural crime, were up for discussion. Breed societies and several trade stands provided a warm welcome to NSA members and visitors, and a variety of NSA Cymru/Wales Region committee members welcomed members and non-members to the NSA stand during the four-day event.

It was good to see so many NSA members and familiar faces in the show ring. Congratulations to all who entered. NSA Cymru/Wales was delighted to sponsor the show, providing the parasols in the judging rings and presenting prizes in the interbreed pairs, blade and wool-handing competitions. Receptions taking place on various stands, in the pavilion adjoining the NSA Sheep Centre, proved popular and added to the social atmosphere that only the Royal Welsh Show can offer.

It was a delight to host visits from Royal Welsh Agricultural Society's President Brian Jones and Lady Ambassador Georgina Cornock Evans and it was also an opportunity to offer an insight into the current and ongoing work NSA is doing for the sheep industry.



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Change in the law needed if lynx release were to go ahead

by Hannah Park, NSA

Rumours that an application, from the Lynx UK Trust, to release lynx in Kielder Forest is imminent have been confirmed and the consideration process has begun.

NSA will continue to oppose this proposal and recently highlighted a need recently highlighted a need for a change to the current law if a release were to be approved. More than 12 months ago, the body identified Kielder Forest, in Northumberland, as a suitable release site and undertook a consultation process to support an application. But NSA does not feel Lynx UK Trust has adhered to the necessary requirements during this process, with clouded communication on several occasions meaning local consultation meetings were not publicised well enough to allow all stakeholders to attend.

Breakaway organisation

NSA understands that a recent breakdown in relationships within Lynx UK Trust has led to a formation of a breakaway organisation – the Lynx Project. NSA will be keeping a close eye on this new, rival association as reports of a licence application continue to circulate.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: “It is unclear which body will make the application for a release licence for lynx.

But with our exit from the EU it has become clear that there would need to be a change in current law to keep such a release legal. In my opinion, this is very unlikely to happen in the near future given the raft of legislative work needed to be done following the Great Repeal Bill and the Agriculture Act.

“Current law could be interpreted to allow farmers to legally shoot or harass lynx causing distress to their animals. NSA understands that Lynx UK Trust is working to get this law reverted. This means that the only option for sheep producers whose livestock had been killed or injured by lynx would be to seek compensation from the trust. But this is something that NSA does not agree with.

Mr Stocker added that NSA is confident that current law will not allow a release. “Any appetite for a regulatory change at



Even if compensation were offered, it would not make sheep mortalities acceptable.

a time when there will be so many other important priorities is unjustifiable. Even if compensation were offered, this will not make sheep mortalities acceptable and it would go little way to recompense for any losses experienced.”

Opposition meeting

The next step is a meeting in the Kielder Forest area, to be held in late August, organised by NSA Northern Region. NSA will invite other organisations opposing the release, including the British Deer Society. It will present a chance for those living and working in the Kielder area to air their views one year on from it being announced as the proposed release site.

Read NSA's report 'The wider consequences of the introduction of Eurasian lynx to the UK' at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work

Complex trade deals will require careful decision making

by Phil Stocker, NSA

Since the EU referendum the subject of trade has become the number-one priority for the sheep industry. Between 35% and 40% of UK production is exported, with 96% of this currently going to the EU block, so it's reasonable to assume that any disruption to this trade will have a negative impact on our market. The Brexit deal will affect our trading relationship with the EU and there is no one who thinks that any tariff on sheepmeat will help.

We could end up with a tariff-free quota (TFQ) based on current volumes, similar to the ones that New Zealand and Australia have with the EU, but we are still some way from any firm decisions. If no deal is reached then could be back to WTO rules and a hefty tariff added to all lamb exports – a situation that would cause serious problems for the UK sheep industry. At the recent Anglo/French sheep club meeting, it became clear that they too want to see tariff-free UK lamb continuing to come to France.

Well placed

New markets, in countries such as China and the US, will come about (although not without reciprocal trade) and as the world's third largest exporter of sheepmeat we will be well placed to make the most of these opportunities when they arise. Whether any loss of EU access can be replaced seamlessly by access into other nations is highly unlikely, so disruption and turbulence is very possible and we are right to be

thinking about what can be done to limit any disruption. The answer will not be a 'one size fits all' solution and we are right to be looking for a wide range of viable trade routes.

NSA strongly believes that the industry should be building and strengthening our domestic market. It already accounts for between 60% and 65% of our production. While we might accept that this is then balanced by imports (mainly from NZ) – due to seasonality, carcass balance and cut preference – that's not to say that we couldn't shift this towards between 70% and 75% self sufficiency.

Domestic demand

Although NSA thinks that this could be easy from our domestic position, it would also mean either protecting our retail markets from imports or doing better than we have in encouraging the British shopper to buy UK lamb and mutton out of preference. And neither can be taken for granted.

While much has been said about our future ability to stop imports coming in due to lower standards of production, it is emerging that WTO rules will make it difficult for us to set up barriers based on animal welfare conditions. So if we are not careful we could end up pushing our standards ever higher, based on chasing high value export markets, and feeding our nation with cheaper lower standard products from who knows where.

If this is testing our thinking then its testing the Kiwis and Australians too

and both of their sheep/meat/livestock organisations are gathering around the honeypot to make sure that they retain (in the case of NZ), and potentially build (in the case of the Australians) volumes into the EU and the UK. New Zealand has a TFQ of some 230,000 tonnes a year into the EU – a quota it has not met for a few years now. Australia has just 19,000 tonnes. The Australians would like to see some parity and we just don't know what the end game is for New Zealand's EU quota – a quota that we took into the EU when we joined).

Common aim

NSA is meeting with them on a regular basis to learn more and to see if there are ways we could work together. A common aim, shared by us as well as our Antipodean cousins and our European partners, is to grow overall demand for sheepmeat. In theory if we can do this and we can deal with seasonality then we are all happy. But where the product comes from still matters and the principle of local first and then 'infilling', or adding to volumes by product from elsewhere, is the right one.

Trade deals

It's a complex web of trading networks, trade deals, and even consumer choice – and that's not even considering that trade deals, when done, may not be done with sheepmeat at the forefront of the negotiators mind. Getting decisions wrong could be catastrophic and getting them right will be no mean feat.

NSA continues to support work to promote responsible antibiotic use

by Phil Stocker, NSA

A UK level five-year antimicrobial resistance (AMR) strategy was launched by the Government in September 2013 and RUMA (Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture), of which NSA is a member, was among the organisations who supported the strategy and its aims.

RUMA is charged with setting up 'sector specific task force groups' to come up with action plans for reducing/moving to more responsible use of antibiotics. And

NSA is involved in a working group relating to the use of antibiotics in sheep, within the Sheep Health and Welfare Group (SHAWG), with SHAWG Chairman Charles Sercombe and vet Fiona Lovatt, from of Flock Health Ltd, as its representatives.

Focus areas

In preparation for this NSA, AHDB, and MSD conducted a survey, in summer 2016, to give evidence to where, why, and how sheep producers were using antibiotics in their flocks and this

confirmed suspicions that the main areas in need of focus are: blanket flock treatments to prevent abortion storms; the use of antibiotics for lameness; and 'lambing shed' use to prevent watery mouth and joint-ill.

NSA is committed to encouraging and supporting our sheep industry to reduce antibiotic use where this is possible, and to use these products responsibly so that they continue to be efficacious for many years to come. This won't be achieved by sheep producers alone. It will require vets

to sign up to the same agenda and for the prescription process to involve a closer relationship between the producer and the vet.

Good progress

The sheep task force is making good progress and is working hard to strike the right balance of moving forward without burdening producers with unnecessary red tape. The task force is also keeping in mind that it mustn't become too difficult to get access to antibiotics when they are required, because flock productivity and welfare could suffer.

NSA is playing its part by adding to the debate and providing solutions in the form of case studies, which show how

individuals have successfully reduced antibiotic use with no negative effects. One good example of this is Bryan and Liz Griffiths' flock management (see page 26 of this issue). Other related case studies will also become available on the RUMA web site. We have already started running seminars on AMR and the most recent, held at NSA Sheep NI, was extremely well attended and resulted in a lively debate. You can hear what was said by visiting the NSA website.

Training initiative

Finally, on the subject of AMR, NSA has gone out of its way to get involved in another initiative, driven by the National Office of Animal Health, to develop

education and training for producers using antibiotics. NSA is engaged with this and supportive of the principle of increasing awareness of the issue and to provide solutions. But NSA's approach is to highlight that the sheep sector is quite different to most other livestock sectors in the way it has used antibiotics.

NSA would far rather see more awareness and information, and less training and certificates of competence, for the sector, particularly when you consider that many sheep producers use antibiotics very infrequently. NSA's preference is to do more to strengthen the prescription process and to do more to build that all-important producer/vet relationship.

Drive and determination are key to running a successful farm business

By Sarah Alderton, contributor

Turning challenges into opportunities is what new entrants need to do to build and drive a successful business. So says former NSA chairman John Geldard who believes that, with drive and determination, opportunities are there for everyone.

His family-run enterprise turns over several million pounds, with help from his wife Rachel, sons Charles and Richard, and daughter Victoria. The enterprise comprises 203 hectares (500 acres) of owner-occupied land, plus an additional 80 hectares (200 acres) of rented land, and employs between 25 and 30 people.

Low Foulshaw Farm is home to a 1,000-ewe Lleyn flock and a 120-ewe Charollais flock, both of which supply breeding stock. There's also a 150-cow Stabiliser suckler herd and a free-range egg enterprise and colony unit, with its own packing station.

Local contract egg producers, most of which are also beef and sheep producers, supply Low Foulshaw. They have diversified their businesses to make them more sustainable.

The Geldard family also own Plumgarths Development, along with two partners. This consists of a tea room, farm shop, various other business units, and a local sourcing initiative.

Overcoming challenges

Building such a successful enterprise hasn't been plain sailing, with just as many challenges back when John began farming as there are facing new entrants today. But many of the changes he has made across his business



Stabiliser suckler beef herd.



John Geldard.



Lleyn and Charollais shearling rams.

have been due to the challenges he's faced – he turned them into opportunities.

John's step on the farming ladder came when he and Rachel took on a 90-hectare tenanted Lake District National Trust beef, sheep and dairy unit in 1975. "It was a challenging time,"

recalls John. "Interest rates were up at between 16% and 18%, so we thought that if we were to progress we had to specialise in everything we did."

He replaced dairy cows with Hereford cattle, which was the most popular breed at the time. But soon it became apparent that lean meat was becoming the driver so just two years after establishing the Hereford herd he traded it in for a pedigree Charollais herd. The herd went on to set many top prices at Perth Bull sales and became a vital source of income. "It's really important to keep your eye on the ball and to know what is happening. We are not there to tell consumers what to buy, we are here to furnish them with choice," he explains.

Invested wisely

In the early 1980s, John also took some advice from one of his mentors who suggested he buy some property, either for retirement or as a deposit on a farm. So, in 1982, John and Rachel bought a property in Coniston.

"This proved to be important for us.

We now had a mortgage, so it meant everything had to produce the best return."

In 1987 there was a depression in land prices, which John took advantage of when Foulshaw Estate came on the market. He bought 109 hectares (268 acres), which included a derelict steading. "This was the biggest challenge in my career, but it also became our biggest opportunity.

"I was a tenant farmer with a mortgage on a property and I had just bought a large chunk of land all on borrowed capital. For the next two years I had to run two farms that were 20 miles apart, while establishing a bungalow and

farm buildings, so we could eventually give up the tenancy.

"We had to sell our Charollais herd in 1989 to generate money and because we didn't have the buildings for them. In 1990, we also sold our Bluefaced Leicester flock and invested the capital in our first 92 Lleyn sheep from Wales.

"We invested in the Lleyn because of their high health and durability, and their ability to turn out a considerable weight of lamb. They also offer a rewarding profit base," he says.

Just a year later, in 1991, John and Rachel knew they had to look at generating extra income, so they

established their first free-range unit.

"Free-range eggs were just coming in and only accounted for 3% of the market. We started with 6,000 birds and we were literally knocking on doors to market our eggs. These were hard financial days, but it delivered the cashflow."

John says it's important to maintain cashflow and having diversifications helps. "When we had the tenanted farm, Rachel ran a bed-and-breakfast business from it and marketed it because it was previously owned by Beatrix Potter. This was vital to the farm's cashflow and for our mortgage. The free-range egg enterprise also helped."

Be prepared

John's advice to new entrants is to never become complacent and continually look at what the market is doing and how you can adapt your business to meet demand. For example, in the late 1990s, John was buying store cattle and finishing them. But when headage payments looked like they were going to be scrapped in favour of area-based payments in Agenda 2000, John knew he couldn't continue doing what he was doing.

"It was at this point that we brought my sons Richard and Charles into the farming partnership. We wanted to make them fully integrated and committed."

As a team, they all put their heads together to decide how they would get their business in order so they were not reliant on subsidies.

"At that time, in the early 2000s, our Single Farm

Payment would be more than 50% of the profitability of the farm. Today it's less than 5%," he says.

Together they decided that they had to focus on breeding their own cattle, rather than buying in stores. John had established a Limousin x Holstein suckler herd in the 1990s, but found that they were expensive to manage. They eventually decided to establish a Stabiliser suckler herd, importing embryos from America to get started.

"In the early years of the partnership, we used to sit around the table at 4pm every Monday to catch up. When we expanded the partnership every partner also wrote a five-year plan for the business. We discussed all the ideas and planned a way forward," he says.

Farm facts

- 203 hectares (500 acres) of owner occupied land, plus 80 hectares (200 acres) of rented land
- Two sheep flocks (1,000 Lleyn ewes and 120 Charollais ewes), a 150-cow Stabiliser suckler herd, and a free-range egg and colony unit with egg-packing plant
- John owns Plumgarths Development along with two partners, which includes a farm shop, tea room and local sourcing initiative and business units.
- A family-run business, in partnership with wife Rachel, sons Richard and Charles and daughter Victoria.
- John owns a 75-hectare (187-acre) farm near Carlisle, which is rented out on a 15-year farm business tenancy.
- The business has more than 100 customers, ranging from small independent shops to multiple retailers and food service.



Free-range laying flock.

Now the business is managed so that Richard looks after the staff, HR and poultry enterprises and Charles manages the farming and livestock. Daughter Victoria has recently become involved in the Plumgarths Development and has taken over some of John's responsibilities on that side of the business.

New opportunities

Conscious of where he has come from, John bought another farm near Carlisle two years ago and he decided to offer it out on a 15-year farm business tenancy. "I wanted to give someone the opportunity that I had 42 years ago," he says.

There were a lot of applicants, but he offered it to a local woman, who is now running beef and sheep on the 75-hectare (187-acre) unit.

Although John doesn't work with her directly, he says he has demonstrated to her the importance of adding value to a business. "We are in contact and she knows where I am if she requires help or advice."



Marketing and selling lamb – direct to the customer

By Karen Wright, contributor
Love Lamb Week, which runs from 1st to 7th September, is all about



reaching out to consumers and inviting them to try lamb in its different guises. Some sheep producers have taken up the challenge and are promoting their top quality British lamb and sheep meat to consumers through their own business ventures. While it might not be for everyone, given the extra time and resources required, it brings producers closer to their end market.

Wiltshire-based producer Richard Taylor has a grazing flock of 60 North Country Mules that he crosses with Hampshire Downs, Suffolk or Texel rams. Branded Lanhill Lamb, he looks to sell the majority through restaurants, pubs, farmers' markets and lamb boxes or, in his latest venture, at lamb spit roasts.

"It all started five years ago with the lamb boxes as a way of marketing my eight lambs from five ewes each year. This was relatively easy once I'd got a handful of customers," he says.

Demonstrate versatility

As ewe numbers grew, and he had more lambs to sell, Richard started selling through farmers' markets around Wiltshire, again building up a regular customer base. He also hand-picked restaurants and pubs in and around Bath who valued the premium product and who promoted its quality and provenance.



Richard Taylor and his Lanhill Lamb.



Dan Pritchard's ewes and lambs graze the salt marshes.

"I've even worked with one chef to host a five-course lamb menu to demonstrate the versatility and the taste of lamb.

"This year I've 130 lambs on the ground and I am expecting to sell them all privately, apart from a few ewe lambs. I don't like selling lambs through the market. With relatively small numbers to sell I focus on maximising the return from each lamb."

He has diversified into spit roast lamb this year, and supplies private events such as weddings and parties. "This really brings you close to the end user," he adds. "I cook the lambs slowly over wood to help develop the taste. It takes at least four and a half hours to cook a lamb this way, but it's great to see the reaction when people smell and taste it.

"I don't cut corners – we've all had tasteless meat cooked quickly and on gas burners. This is something very different. People have opted for a premium product and that's what they must get."

Consistent product

Swansea-based sheep producer Dan Pritchard also knows that a consistent product and meeting customer needs and expectations are all essential when you're at the sharp end. The family set up Gower Salt Lamb and they now sell 600 lambs a year through their shop and mail-order packs.

"Customers may have special requests," he explains. "Some want a bit more fat and others want a certain combination of joints. We cater for these as much as possible."

Dan works hard to produce a consistent supply of salt marsh lamb

both for their farm shop, which is conveniently situated close to Weobley Castle, and for lamb packs, which is sold nationally on line. They also supply 400 lambs a year to farm shops and markets close to London, through a retail distributor.

"Our ewes and lambs graze a 1,620-hectare (4,000-acre) common along the coast that floods at high tide about every two weeks," he says. "We bring the sheep off the marsh and the salt water, which includes a natural abundance of samphire, sorrel, sea lavender and thrift, washes all the vegetation. This is what gives the lamb its unique taste that people love."

Dan's brother William promotes the lamb through Facebook and Twitter and manages the shop and on line orders. "This can be very challenging as we aim to balance supply and demand," adds Dan. "If a recipe using lamb shoulder is used by a celebrity chef demand can go through the roof. We then must decide how many extra lambs we need that week. But an order for an extra 10 shoulders provide us with an extra 120 chops to deal with. Fortunately, we can freeze some, and the shop will take up some of the slack."

Selling direct

It's early days for Iona-based producer Andrew Prentice when it comes to marketing, but this dedicated Blackface breeder



is determined to sell all his male lambs and hoggets directly to hotels, restaurants and individuals.

"We're really lucky to have a great abattoir on Mull that will take small numbers of animals and provide the cuts requested by our customers," he says, adding that as his flock size grows he will have to develop more markets.

"I want to stick with the Blackface breed. They are hassle-free, easy-care sheep and provide a high quality, average-sized carcass. I think that selling through an auction is a waste of time, financially, and I don't want to sell through an intermediary. I prefer to be in direct contact with my customers."

To this end, Andrew will set off to Oban in the quieter months and visit restaurants, delivering some samples and speaking to chefs. "I prefer to sell mainly hoggets – I think consumers like to think the animal has had a longer life. But I also supply lambs and mutton so I can meet demand for 10 months of the year."

And while Andrew doesn't think his two or three 'newsy' Tweets a day from the farm have an influence on his market, with 4,000+ followers it is certainly a means of building recognition among current and potential customers. "And with Brexit looming, we all need to

do more self-marketing of lamb, hogget and mutton and working closer with butchers too. It's imperative that we promote home-grown product."

Quality meat

Sheep producer, chef and author Tina Brincknell-Webb is all for promoting home grown, right through the production chain and onto the plate. She runs her own sheep flock and believes that their diet, rearing, slaughter and hanging process are key components in ensuring the best quality meat is served at her Percy's Country Hotel, based in Devon. Her 60 ewes and offspring graze permanent pasture and woodland, living off a diet rich in a variety of forages.

"It's vital that the carcass is hung properly – and in the right conditions. For lamb that's up to three weeks, for hogget up to four or five weeks, and mutton for between eight and 10 weeks to allow the enzymes to break down the collagen.



"The process also allows the water in the meat to evaporate, thereby concentrating the flavour. This gives it a superior taste and texture," explains Tina. "My guests say they have never tasted lamb and mutton like it – feedback is consistently very positive."

When it comes to mutton, Tina dismisses the myth that it must be cooked for a long time and very slowly. "In fact, I cook leg and shoulder joints like rare roast beef," she adds. "And you can do this if it has been hung properly."

Tina has perfected her recipes for mutton and lamb and she promotes these in her award-winning restaurant and Percy's Cookbook.

She has a string of recipes from sausages and burgers to tagines and goulashes, as well as roasting joints. "Nothing is wasted – I use the fifth quarter to make faggots and pates too.

"Producers often feel that their cull ewes are worthless, but this isn't the case," she adds. "There's a lot to do to educate the consumers – and chefs – to create more demand for mutton. But it starts at the grassroots. All parts of the production chain have got to be right to produce the best ewe and it's worth producers striking up relationships with chefs and butchers when it comes to promoting mutton."

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Inheritance tax payments hit record high in 2016

By Natalie Hallett, Old Mill Accountants



In the year to March 2017 HMRC collected more than £5.1 billion in inheritance tax – the largest amount received to date in any one year. This represented a year-on-year increase of 9% and serves to remind us all that inheritance tax remains a key growth area for the Treasury.

With the whispers from HMRC and the Office of Tax Simplification that they may refresh the inheritance tax provisions, the record receipts are a timely reminder to sheep producers and landowners that this tax, or relief from it, should not be underestimated or taken for granted.

We are seeing increased scrutiny from HMRC and the Valuation Office in assessing what property can benefit from agricultural property relief (APR) and also the amount of non-agricultural value present within farms and estates, which arises more often with increased diversification within farming businesses. It is, therefore, as important as ever to underpin any inheritance tax planning

with business property relief (BPR), where this is possible. For example, BPR may be used to make up the value above agricultural value where there is development potential on farmland or buildings.

Asset values

Agricultural asset values have been increasing at a rapid rate during recent years, whereas the inheritance tax allowance (nil-rate band) has been frozen at £325,000 since 2009 and is set to remain so until at least 2021.

An additional allowance (residence nil-rate band) was implemented in April 2016, which should be helpful to many farming and landowning families. Once fully phased in, by 2021, a married couple will have up to a total of £1m in combined allowances.

The new residence nil-rate band will, however, be restricted where the deceased has a net estate (after liabilities, but before relief) of £2m. This means that more thought should now be given to where assets are directed on the death of the first spouse. Considering the increasing value of

land in the UK, this restriction could exclude several sheep producers from being able to take advantage of this new nil-rate band.

The residence nil-rate band only applies to the main residence, so any additional properties owned may also still be subject to inheritance tax. APR or BPR may be available on these depending on their use within the business, for example farm employee cottages.

Early succession planning and passing assets to the next generation during lifetime can be utilised to reduce the value of the death estate, or to pass on those assets not qualifying for relief potentially free of inheritance tax, if the donor survives for seven years following the 'gift'. However, the impact of the other capital taxes such as capital gains tax, stamp duty land tax and VAT should be considered when making lifetime gifts.



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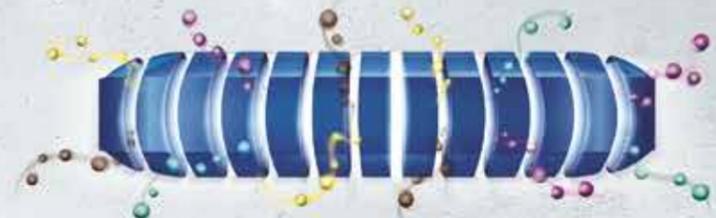
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Proactive approach reduces antibiotic use on Devon-based farm

By Sara Gregson, contributor

Sheep producers

Bryan and Liz Griffiths use antibiotics responsibly with their two flocks, taking positive steps to limit the need for them.

At Southcott Farm, near South Molton in Devon, the husband-and-wife partnership run two flocks as well as 60 head of beef cattle – 12 month continental steers bought in and wintered indoors and finished off grass the following summer. The farm comprises 81 hectares (200 acres), with a further 50 hectares (124 acres) in three parcels two to three miles away.

Three hundred Suffolk-cross mules lamb indoors in February in a tight three-week period. The flock of 400 mules and 170 ewe lambs then lamb, also indoors, in the final week of March and first two weeks of April.

The Suffolk-cross ewes and lambs are turned out onto the lowest lying land, which has been rested for a couple of months, and the mules go out onto higher land once they have lambed.

The early lambs are left entire and creep fed, and then sold off their mothers from 11 weeks of age. The mule lambs are weaned in July and finished off grass and restricted-access finishing pellets if grass is in short supply, between August and Christmas.

Bryan draws 50 lambs each week and takes them to the abattoir – selling them at around 19.6kg deadweight to a high-end supermarket. Between 85% and 90% meet the customer's specification.

Holistic approach

Bryan and Liz say that they do all they can to reduce the need to use antibiotics. "We do not set a target for how much less we will use each year, because we just don't know what conditions and diseases are around the corner," says Bryan, adding that he likes the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) tag line that says: 'use as little as possible but as much as necessary'. "And that's what we try to do."

"Giving every newborn lamb born indoors a shot of antibiotic to try and prevent watery mouth and joint-ill has become the industry norm. But we try and see how far we can get by doing other things right, before we have a problem that needs treatment."



Liz and Bryan Griffiths.

The couple keep the lambing sheds as clean as possible during both lambing periods, spreading antimicrobial powder in the pens between ewes.

But the real difference comes by feeding the ewes for six weeks before they lamb with a high 19% crude protein concentrate, including 9% HiPro soya, with ad-lib silage. The ewes then produce good milk yields and, most importantly, high quality colostrum.

Colostrum quality

"Having plentiful, good colostrum is the best way to give fit, strong lambs a good start in life," says Bryan. "Historically we could have been using 15 bottles of antibiotic during lambing. This year we opened just two, right at the tail end."

They do not treat their ewes prophylactically to prevent abortion storms or clostridial issues and nor do they inject lambs against pneumonia. But they do vaccinate the ewes for enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis.

"Many producers let these diseases 'grumble on' at low levels," says Liz. "But we think that spending £5 for every first-breeding ewe is money well spent. It means we won't have to treat her with antibiotics later in her life."

They take the same approach to footrot and contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD). Continued use of antibiotic spray to treat infected feet does not get on top of the problem, which could carry on for years.

Foot care

"With the help of our vets, we vaccinate for footrot at housing and blitz any outbreak of CODD with targeted



Bryan in the lambing shed.

antibiotics. Then, for the following years, we hopefully only have to use minimal amounts," explains Liz. "We have a low tolerance for lame sheep because we understand the knock-on effects that foot problems have. The ewe won't eat as well as she should, she won't produce good colostrum, and she will have weak lambs."

"We do not routinely trim any feet, but we treat any lame animals as soon as possible."

The weak point in the Griffiths' system is the buying in of North Country mule replacements, which have the potential to bring disease with them. They are quarantined for six months in fields away from the rest of the flock but, with 10 neighbouring sheep farms, achieving complete isolation can be difficult.

"The main thing is that we are not treating healthy sheep," says Bryan. "When we use antibiotics it is because we have a problem and we use the right amount to get on top of it."

"Antibiotic resistance happens when not enough is used to effectively treat the problem. By making sure all aspects of our husbandry are right, we can limit the amount we use in most years."

College unveils new sheep housing and handling facilities

By Eileen McCloskey, CAFRE Hill Farm Centre



Recent investment in sheep housing facilities at College of Agriculture Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) Hill Farm Centre, based at Glenwherry in County Antrim, aims to provide both students and the wider industry with access to a wide range of technologies that can improve sheep health and welfare, technical efficiency, labour efficiency and stock performance. CAFRE has an extensive 1,000-hectare (2,470-acre) unit comprising predominantly unimproved grassland and heather moorland. Livestock enterprises include 1,100 ewes and a 110-cow suckler herd.

Sheep are managed in two flocks, with different breeding goals and levels of output utilising a range of habitats. The hill flock comprises 600 Scottish Blackface and Blackface x Swaledale ewes and the upland flock comprises 500 Texel cross ewes. Prior to the new development, 750 ewes were housed across three sites with facilities dating back to the 1970s. These ewes are now housed in one building, which simplifies logistics. The remaining 350 ewes are still lambed outdoors.

Sheep accommodation

The new house is a portal frame structure, measuring 72m by 26m with a footprint of 1,870m². The building has a fibre-cement roof, four individual slurry tanks and a single five-metre wide feed passage, with access from both ends. It can accommodate 750 ewes pre lambing and includes 84 individual mothering pens. Holding and handling facilities for the entire 1,100 ewe flock are also included.

The house has 17 pens: 15 measuring 6x8 metres, and holding 44 ewes; and a further two pens measure 6x6 metres and hold 33 ewes. This allows a floor space of 1.1m² per ewe, based on an average ewe size of 55kg. Feed space per ewe is 18cm when feeding a TMR, but this can be extended to 36cm if manual feeding is used.

Each pen has an animal-operated drinker, which provides fresh water on demand. All the drinkers in the house are connected in a loop system. This monitors the water temperature and a water heating unit is used to



Handling facilities for sheep at CAFRE's Hill Farm Centre.

safeguard against freezing. Feed rails are adjustable to ensure suitability for all sizes of stock and to allow restricted feeding if required. They can also be closed off completely to allow pens to be used as holding pens as part of the handling system when large batches need to be handled, such as at shearing time. The flooring system is plastic slats for improved comfort. The slats have a textured surface for reduced slip.

The slats are suspended over four separate slurry tanks and they extend 1.5m outside the house to an external mixing point for safety. There is an internal pumping main to aid mixing and total slurry capacity is 990m³.

Lambing facilities

There are 56 permanent lambing pens with water supplied through a 150-mm pipe, which is regulated by a ball valve at one end. A further 28 temporary pens are situated in the handling area during lambing. All lambing pens are straw bedded. An external one-metre wide passage, along the back of the sheep pens, enhances observation and enables the movement of ewes and lambs around the house with minimal assistance.

The 17 pens can act as holding pens and provide enough floor space for the entire flock. The handling facilities incorporate a long and narrow collecting pen, a circular forcing pen, a long handling race to return ewes in the direction they entered, and solid sheeted sides with stock board. The race includes a unit to ease handling, which will reduce stress for both the animal and the operator.

The latest EID technology and

software is used to capture information and aid management, including automated drafting and weighing equipment and precision drenching. A further feature is a self-emptying, custom-made concrete footbath with the capacity to hold between 40 and 50 ewes.

Natural ventilation

The building is naturally ventilated via a combination of space boarding and Yorkshire cladding, with a protected open ridge running the full length of the building. Lighting is provided through low energy LED lights, with a higher percentage above the lambing pens to facilitate better observation. Wireless, high-resolution cameras are also included to aid stock management.

Rain water is harvested from the north side of the building and the collected water can be used to dilute slurry to aid mixing. It can also be used to feed a pressurised volume wash system.

The facilities were first used in October 2016 for student practicals, with ewes being housed from mid December 2016. Ewes settled readily into the new facilities and the first lambing in 2017 was very successful.

The facilities offer sheep producers and students with access to innovative technologies and enable them to learn about the latest sheep rearing and management techniques, which will complement existing skills. A combination of implementing established best practice and embracing new technologies is essential to increase efficiency and secure a successful future for the sheep industry.

Be aware of the risk and signs of notifiable disease

By Amanda Carson, APHA
APHA reported that bluetongue serotype 8 (BTV-8) had re-emerged in France in August 2015. Since then cases of BTV-8 have continued to be detected in France. And other BTV serotypes are also circulating in different parts of Europe.

In the UK, vaccination of livestock and testing of animals led to the eradication of BTV-8 in 2010 after it first appeared in 2007, as the result of infected midges being blown across the channel from Europe.

BTV is a notifiable disease in the UK and Europe and countries must report any BTV cases to the OIE (Office International des Epizooties), the livestock equivalent of the World Health Organisation. As BTV is a notifiable disease in the UK this also means that any suspicion of the disease must be reported immediately to the APHA. (See

box for clinical signs of BTV to look out for in sheep).

APHA produce BTV risk assessments, which are regularly reviewed and updated and are published by GOV.UK at www.gov.uk/government/publications/qualitative-risk-assessment-bluetongue-virus-btv-8-entry-into-the-uk

These risk assessments are based on many groups working together. APHA's International Disease Monitoring team receive daily reports from the OIE for BTV, and other notifiable diseases. The Met Office use its atmospheric dispersion model, called NAME, which is run on a twice-daily basis to estimate the likely transport of any infected midges based on wind direction and temperatures from continental Europe. And experts at the Pirbright Institute monitor midge activity and virus replication, which is temperature dependant in midges.

JAB campaign

Defra communicates with stakeholders at regular BTV meetings and teleconferences, and the NFU plays an important role in communicating with farmers through the Joint Campaign Against Bluetongue (JAB). *To find out more visit: www.nfuonline.com/news/latest-news/bluetongue-what-you-need-to-know*

All animals that come to the UK must be accompanied by a health certificate. This states that the animals have been checked before export by a vet, who

Vaccination

A vaccine to protect against BTV-8 is commercially available in the UK. Sheep producers are advised to discuss vaccination with their vet, as part of their flock health planning. This is particularly important for early breeding flocks.

What to do if you suspect BTV

Bluetongue is a notifiable disease and APHA investigates all suspicions of disease. It is vital that sheep producers immediately notify their vet if they see any signs that may be suspicious of the virus, or notify APHA directly.

Since January 2017, APHA has received seven reports of suspicion of BTV in both cattle and sheep, all of which have been investigated by APHA vets and BTV has been ruled out.



BTV-infected sheep showing depression and nasal crusting.

also carries out any necessary testing for diseases such as brucellosis, contagious agalactia and BTV.

Animals that are vaccinated against BTV may travel if they have been tested to show that they are not carrying the virus (by PCR test). In addition, there must be evidence of application of insecticide treatment during transit.

Post-import tests

All imported animals are registered on a system called TRACES. APHA uses this system to track the arrival of consignments of imported animals so they can be followed up to check that the importing paperwork is correct, the animals are healthy and post-import tests can be carried out. Information for TRACES shows that during the first six months of 2017 there have been more than 20 registered consignments of sheep arriving in the UK from five different EU countries (see Table 1).

On arrival at their destination in the UK, APHA issues a restriction notice advising owners to isolate these animals from other ruminants, as far as possible, until post import test results are known and, where possible, to house the animals to minimise exposure to midges. The post-import testing for BTV must be undertaken five to seven days after import to allow detection of BTV infection that might have occurred during the time the animal was in transit.

Further information

Find out about the risk of bluetongue disease spreading into the UK in the video at <http://bit.ly/1T24Nfo>

More about bluetongue transmission, clinical signs in the video at <http://bit.ly/1rwWFKz>

And find out more on how to spot the disease on GOV.UK at www.gov.uk/guidance/bluetongue



Reddening around coronary band in BTV-infected sheep.

What are the signs of bluetongue infection?

Think 'fever, face and feet' when looking for signs of BTV. The first sign of the disease is fever. Sheep are depressed, their ears go down and they look sick.

As the virus damages the blood vessels, serum leaks out leading to oedema. Swelling is often seen around the face and there may also be reddening of the gums, small erosions and even bleeding. Oedema and reddening around the skin at the top of the feet may also be seen. Swelling causes pain, the sheep drool and may have difficulty breathing and are often lame.

Secondary infections may cause crusting around the nose. In rare cases oedema in the throat can cut off the blood supply to the tongue causing it to go blue.

Switch to rotational grazing reduces cost of production

Welsh sheep producers are being encouraged to adopt rotational grazing strategies in a bid to grow more grass and lower their cost of production.

Cornwall-based producer and grazing consultant James Daniel is supporting a series of trials at Farming Connect focus sites to help sheep producers to understand how to get more from their grass.

At Penwern Farm, in Cilcennin, Rhun Fychan has switched to outdoor lambing from an indoor system and underpinning this new approach is rotational grazing. This is a system of moving animals to fresh pasture in a planned or managed way every five days, or less.

Rotational grazing allows grass leys to recover and significantly improves utilisation.

Grass quality

With any grazing system, sheep will eat as much as they can in the first two days. In a set-stocking scenario, this means that pasture doesn't have time to regenerate to the detriment of the quantity and quality of grass grown.

By moving stock from that grazing area every two to five days, there will be more grass plant tillering and better ground cover. "You will grow more grass," says James Daniel.

He adds that there were some very 'easy wins' from rotational grazing. "If you are creep feeding, or spreading fertiliser, you can reduce the amount you



Rhun Fychan and Catherine Nakielny at Penwern.

use or even cut them out completely. Rotational grazing may even mean that you can save on rent because you are growing more grass and don't need to take on extra land."

Mr Daniel says that grass is extremely important in outdoor lambing systems. "Ewes need to go out at the right point in time and when grass quality is good."

Business performance

Good grazing management can make a significant difference to business performance. It is also an opportunity to increase stock numbers. "All of these things start to add up," he explains.

Mr Daniel recommends creating a minimum of six paddocks for each

grazing mob, in order for there to be a tangible difference from set stocking.

Post-lambing, ewes can be grazed in mobs of between 40 and 50 head, and this number can be doubled after two weeks. "Ewes and lambs are pretty much paired after two weeks. After three to four weeks the mob size can

be increased to 160, but I wouldn't recommend mobs of more than 200 head, because a group of that size creates a lot of social pressure."

To make the system work, calculate how many sheep to run per acre and how long the rotation will be. "The numbers are not complicated. It is about having the confidence to do something different," adds Mr Daniel.

At Penwern, electric fencing is used to split fields into suitable size blocks for grazing for shorter periods. The amount of grass available in the winter and spring is dependent on how fields are grazed in the autumn.

"The preceding season is key. Graze off what is left and remove the sheep," he advises.

Simple system

Rhun Fychan introduced outdoor lambing in his 250-ewe flock to simplify the system. "Brexit has been the wake-up call. I needed to cut costs and reduce labour," he says.

By working with his vet, Kate Hovers, he has also improved flock health – predominantly by vaccinating ewes, to prevent abortions, and following the industry's five-point plan to reduce the incidence of lameness.

With guidance from Farming Connect's Catherine Nakielny, he has tightened his lambing period, from seven to five weeks, by using teasers rams and ensuring that ewes are at the correct body condition score at tugging.

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Buoyant spring lamb markets point to positive future for the industry

Leading figures from the livestock auctioneer sector suggest that strong spring lamb sales and a positive export market could lead to increasing demand as we lead up to the breeding sales season.



"Up to the end of June spring lamb sales have been very buoyant and there seems to be a number of factors, obviously led by a strong demand," says John Brereton, who is a partner at Jones Peckover and chairman of the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA).

"There have been some suggestions that sheep producers have been lambing a little later in the season due to the disappointing early lamb trade in recent years and, of course, the added expense of producing lambs at that time.

"Spring lambs have done particularly well this year, with favourable weather playing a part, but the strong export demand also seems to have been an important factor."

Greg MacDougall, livestock auctioneer at Lancaster-based Bentham & District Farmers' Auction Mart, echoes Mr Brereton's views. "The spring lamb trade has stayed fairly strong for us, as producers have stayed on top of lambs and have been drawn to the lighter market of between 37kg and 39kg. As a result 44kg or above have been selling well, as the limited availability pushes up value, with sales up to £120 a head."

Mr MacDougall also notes that abattoirs have seen a positive trade in recent months. "They are certainly using lambs and seem to be getting them out quickly with good sales on the lighter lambs. This, in turn, means heavier lambs have been making money and this is, again, due to the limited availability."

Record crops

It is a similar picture in County Durham, as livestock auctioneer at Darlington Farmers Auction Mart Scott Ferrie confirms: "This year provided a dry and warm lambing season, with many farms reporting record crops of lambs and some of the highest survival rates even seen. The pessimists among us feared the worse for the summer values, but July averages have held firm nationwide and are well above 2016 levels – 200 pence per kilogramme is a

Right: Rizvan Khalid, Director of Euro Quality Lambs.
Above right: Muslim celebratory meal
Below: Sheep awaiting sale at Bagshaws.

fine return for the time of year.

"March and April lambs have thrived and they have been appearing in considerable numbers every week. If the ewe has reared twins from grass and her crop reach £160, then it is safe to say that she has earned her keep."

So, what can we look ahead to, perhaps with one eye on the commencement of the Eid al-Adha celebrations among the Muslim community from 1st September? "In August, the run up to the Muslim festival, a strong demand is anticipated for quality lambs and, in particular, ram lambs," says John Brereton. "Again there will be a strong export market, with the main criteria for the sheep that they meet the Qurbani specification."



LAA Chairman John Brereton.

Two markets

"It is important to remember that there are effectively two markets for the Eid al-Adha period," explains Rizvan Khalid, the director of Euro Quality Lambs – the largest Muslim-owned lamb slaughterhouse in Europe. "One is the thanksgiving slaughter of Qurbani animals, which must meet certain criteria and be performed at a certain time, and the other is regular Halal meat for the celebratory family meal.



"The Muslim calendar is based on the moon with Eid al-Adha going back around ten days each year, so this year lambs will need to be born by 1st March to meet



Qurbani specifications.

"Halal butchers will generally stock up on meat for the Eid meal seven to ten days ahead of festivities, but those buying Qurbani animals will be purchasing livestock up to three weeks before 1st September."

No two seasons seem to be the same, but it is pleasing to see the demand so far, and therefore the price for lamb has been strong. "There are clearly opportunities out there for producers paying

particular attention to the developing markets open to them," adds Mr Brereton. "With the majority of sheep meat supplied to the Halal trade being sourced from the auction mart system, the livestock auction industry will play an important role in developing this market."

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Toxoplasma gondii: the world's most 'successful' parasite

By Lee Innes, Moredun Research Institute
The protozoan parasite *Toxoplasma gondii* is known to many sheep producers as one of the most important causes of infectious abortion. The parasite is also a significant human pathogen and can infect all warm-blooded animals, making it one of the most successful parasites on the planet.



Sheep that become infected with toxoplasmosis for the first time during pregnancy may abort their lambs, have a still birth or give birth to a live but weak lamb. Following infection with toxoplasma, sheep develop good immunity that will protect them against disease in a subsequent pregnancy. A live vaccine can be used prior to tupping and will give lifelong protection against toxoplasmosis in sheep.

Disease diagnosis

Diagnosis of toxoplasmosis can be carried out by submitting an aborted foetus and its placenta to a veterinary investigation centre for examination. The diagnosis is usually based on finding evidence of infection in the foetal brain and the placenta. Blood samples from the ewe and the foetus may also be examined for the presence of specific antibodies for *T. gondii*.

Sheep pick up the infection by ingesting infective eggs (oocysts) of *T. gondii* on pasture or in contaminated feed

and water. These eggs are extremely small, about the size of a red blood cell, and cannot be seen in the environment. They have a tough outer shell and can survive and remain infective for several years in moist temperate conditions.

Research at Moredun has shown that it only requires around 200 *T. gondii* eggs to cause infection and disease in a pregnant sheep.



Toxoplasma gondii.

Picture credit: David Ferguson

Life cycle

Cats are also central to the life cycle of the parasite because, interestingly, the parasite can only undergo the sexual phase of its life cycle in the gut of the cat. Following this process, millions of *T. gondii* eggs are shed, in a few weeks, in the faeces of infected cats into the environment where they can lie dormant for long periods of time and remain infective to other animals.

The close relationships between people, livestock and domestic cats, which began around 10 000 years ago, has helped the widespread distribution of the parasite across the world. Its unique biology means that it can establish infection and persist in almost every known mammalian or bird species. The other major route of transmission of this parasite is through a predator-prey cycle where an animal eats another animal infected with *T. gondii* tissue cysts.

Toxoplasmosis is also recognised as a major human pathogen and, similar to the situation described above with pregnant sheep, the parasite can cause serious disease in the developing human foetus if women become infected for the first time during pregnancy. The parasite is also a major cause of eye disease, particularly in some areas of South America, where some strains of *T. gondii* have been found that seem to be much more virulent than those currently found in Europe and North America.

Food-borne pathogen

New research has revealed that *T. gondii* is one of the most important food-borne pathogens worldwide, with people picking up the infection through the consumption of undercooked meat containing *T. gondii* infective cysts or other foodstuffs and water contaminated with the environmentally resistant *T. gondii* eggs.

Recent research at Moredun has shown that vaccinating livestock will significantly reduce *T. gondii* cysts in tissues, resulting in safer meat for human consumption.

Some interesting research in animal behaviour has also shown that rodents infected with *T. gondii* lose their natural fear of cats, making them more likely to be eaten. And this enables the parasites to complete their life cycle in the gut of the cat. This has provoked much interest in whether the parasite may also be affecting the behaviour of other host animals including ourselves.

Further information about *Toxoplasma gondii* and its prevention and control can be found on the Moredun website www.moredun.org.uk and in the newsletter available to Moredun members.

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Protect ewes from toxoplasmosis prior to tugging season

Sheep producers in Great Britain should assume that their flock has been exposed to the parasite that causes toxoplasmosis and aim to protect young ewes well before they go to the ram later this year.

"*Toxoplasma gondii* is apparently the world's most common parasite and it has been estimated that more than 90% of sheep flocks in England, Scotland and Wales have had some exposure to it," says vet Emily Gascoigne, from Synergy Farm Health. "Consequently, sheep producers who are not already vaccinating against toxoplasmosis should probably assume that it's only a matter of time before new ewes succumb to an infection and they should plan ahead accordingly."

Proactive approach

Ms Gascoigne and her colleagues work closely with a progressive group of sheep producers and many of them recognise the value of proactive flock health planning. These new vet-driven flock health services, such as the project co-ordinated by the vet practice, are growing in popularity across the country. As a consequence, many sheep producers are starting to appreciate the benefits of learning from each other in an informal discussion group environment – moderated by an enthusiastic and experienced vet with a keen interest in sheep.

"Many of our sheep-producer clients understand that to make effective and sustainable change they must target health and welfare first. And that means investing in proactive veterinary input and disease prevention protocols such as good biosecurity and sound quarantine measures for any incoming stock, and vaccination where appropriate. And recognising the ubiquitous threat of toxoplasmosis is a classic example where widespread vaccination could make a real difference to national flock productivity," says Ms Gascoigne.

Investigate abortions

She points out that a potential toxoplasmosis problem often first manifests itself at scanning time with a high empty rate, but the disease can also cause abortion and weak lambs. Experiencing dead or sickly lambs during the lambing period is typically the time when sheep producers feel its impact most acutely.

"If you had more than 2% of your flock aborting during the 2017 lambing season then you should ask your vet to investigate while the issue is still in relatively recent memory. Now is the time to work out what caused this year's problems with a view to avoiding similar issues next year. But your real focus should be on preventing infection in pregnant ewes in the first place and the best way to do that is to vaccinate replacement ewes well before they go to the ram."

The complex *Toxoplasma gondii* parasite lifecycle presents significant disease management challenges to sheep producers. The sheer volume of infectious oocysts produced by the parasite, and their resistance to destruction, leads to widespread environmental contamination.

According to MSD Animal Health's Stephanie Small, this is one of the reasons why it is so prevalent in British flocks.

"Sheep are extremely vulnerable to picking up the toxoplasma parasite from the environment. Fortunately, toxoplasmosis can be controlled effectively by a simple vaccination regime. The clear industry advice now is that every ewe should have been vaccinated before it breeds, but we estimate that less than one in five female flock replacements actually get protected before they go to the ram for the first time."



Toxoplasmosis can be controlled by a vaccination regime.

Timely vaccination

Ms Small points out that ewe lambs can be vaccinated from five months of age. Shearlings and older ewes can be vaccinated anytime between four months and three weeks before tugging.

"Immediately post lambing and up until the typical autumn breeding season there's a very wide window of opportunity to vaccinate most female breeding sheep against toxoplasmosis. So it makes sense to schedule this crucial intervention as

soon as possible, alongside other routine summer procedures. Correct pre-tugging vaccination is known to protect ewes for at least two breeding seasons," she adds.

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Pneumonia: take steps to tackle a multifactorial disease

By Leanne Forde, Bishopton Veterinary Group, North Yorkshire

In a recent study of post mortem examinations of fallen stock, pneumonia lesions accounted for 27% of deaths. Pneumonia means 'inflammation of the lung', but this does not tell us the actual causative agent and, therefore, further investigation is required to achieve a definite diagnosis. There are many causes of pneumonia in UK sheep. Some are bacterial and some are viral.

One bacterial cause is pasteurellosis. There are two types of bacteria within the pasteurella family that are of great significance to sheep – *Mannheimia haemolytica* and *Bibersteinia trehalosi*. Although both cause bacterial pneumonia in sheep, the scenarios presented can be very different. Both bacteria normally live within the upper airways of sheep without causing a problem. But at times of stress – such as weaning, transport or dietary change – when the immune system may not be functioning well, they can cause disease. Newborn lambs can also be affected if they have not received adequate colostrum.

Concurrent disease

B. trehalosi tends to affect growing lambs at between four and nine months old and often there are no signs other than death. Adult sheep rarely suffer from pasteurellosis alone, cases are often due to concurrent disease.

Fortunately, commercial vaccines are available to aid the control of pasteurellosis. Ewes should be boosted pre-lambing to improve colostral protection for lambs. Lambs will also need to start a vaccination course from one month old, depending on the



Lung tumours caused by a virus.

management system. It is also vital to follow label instructions. If two doses are required in the primary course, they must be given. Additional boosters may be required at high risk periods. It is important to be aware that vaccinations are only part of the control for this disease. Vaccination alone will reduce rather than prevent all cases. Good husbandry and minimising stress are key features in control and changes may need to be made for disease reduction.

Mycoplasmas do not cause death, but they can result in reduced growth rates in lambs and usually present as a quiet cough among the flock. Infection with mycoplasmas can predispose to other bacterial causes of pneumonia. Good husbandry and nutrition are key to reducing infection.

Lung worm

Lung worm in sheep is usually of little significance. Although they are often found in the lungs, they rarely cause major disease alone and are kept at bay by the products used to treat parasitic gastroenteritis. There are occasions where high levels of lung worm can be seen on post mortem examination. When this is the case, there is often other underlying disease hindering the immune system to allow such a high burden.

There are many viruses that can cause pneumonia in sheep and they often cause disease alongside the pasteurellas, such as parainfluenza and respiratory syncytial virus. There are another three viruses that are of increasing significance. These diseases are often referred to as 'iceberg diseases' because when one case is confirmed in a flock, there will be many more not showing clinical signs. We are still learning about these diseases and the extent of their prevalence within flocks.

Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA) are lung tumours caused by a virus. The tumours are slow growing and so disease can take years to manifest. Copious fluid is produced by the tumours, which can pour out of the nose during the 'wheelbarrow test'. Quite often the disease will present in older ewes that gradually lose condition and then may die with pneumonia symptoms. There is no treatment or vaccine available for OPA. Diagnosis is difficult in live animals because



B. trehalosi causes bacterial pneumonia.

there are no current blood tests, but ultrasound scanning can be performed by specifically trained vets. Most of the time the disease is diagnosed at post mortem. But if the sheep diagnosed with disease are from a particular source, more informed decisions can be made when purchasing sheep in the future.

Maedi visna is a disease that presents in a very similar manner to OPA – slow growing lung lesions with concurrent wasting. Again there is no treatment but, unlike OPA, there is a diagnostic blood test. There is also a national accreditation scheme running, involving annual screening of the flock. The scheme works on a test and cull approach; all positive animals are culled. The test often detects the disease before clinical signs of disease. Not only does testing allow contagious animals to be removed from the flock, but animals can also be culled while still retaining full cull value.

Immune system

Border disease itself does not directly cause pneumonia. It is closely related to the cattle disease BVD. The way this virus works is by suppressing the immune system, leaving animals more susceptible to other diseases. If a ewe is infected during pregnancy, she will make a full recovery, but her lambs can become infected for life. Some affected lambs are born weak and only survive a few days, some are born small and trembling; referred to as 'hairy shakers'. However, a proportion of these persistently infected (PI) lambs appear completely normal and may even become replacement breeding animals. All of their subsequent offspring will then be PIs. This disease can quickly run through a flock.

Check trace-element status before tupping

The tupping period is the most important time of the year for defining sheep flock productivity and profitability, making pre-tupping management and nutrition crucial. While much of the focus will be on energy supply to manage body condition, Agrimin's Tom Darling stresses the importance of making sure that trace element supply is adequate.

"You can never produce more lambs than are present at scanning," he says. "From scanning onwards, all that happens is that the number of lambs falls up to lambing, and thereafter until lambs are sold, with typical losses being 15% of lambs scanned not being sold."

"While there are actions that can be taken to reduce this wastage, it cannot be prevented and lambs sold can never exceed the scanning percentage. So it makes sense to work to maximise the scanning percentage to give yourself the best chance of selling more lambs. Any investment at pre-tupping should deliver a strong return."

Target BCS

Most management advice focusses on energy and body condition score (BCS) in pre-tupping ewes. The aim is to get hill ewes to a target BCS of 2.0, upland ewes to 3.0 and lowland ewes to 3.5. By segregating ewes based on condition in the run up to tupping it is possible to successfully manage energy supply to increase, hold or lower condition by varying energy intake, perhaps by restricting access to forage or by introducing supplementary feeds.

"But while energy requirement varies, the demands for trace elements, which have a major role in affecting fertility performance, remain constant. Managing feed access or changing feed type within or between groups of ewes can cause fluctuations in the essential trace elements supplied across the whole flock."

Mr Darling adds that the key measures affecting scanning percentage are ovulation rate and conception rate. Both are influenced by trace element levels.

"The target should be to get a minimum 75% of ewes in lamb by the end of their first cycle, particularly as ovulation rate declines with time during the breeding season. This means it is important to ensure that ewes are in the best possible physiological state



Correct BCS and trace-element status is vital for good reproductive performance.

to cycle and hold to service at the start of the season, so pre-tupping supplementation is essential, followed by supplementation throughout the time the tups are in."

In most cases supplementation is required because forage is a variable and often poor source of the trace elements involved in fertility. Mr Darling says that in most parts of the country at least one of the major trace elements will be limiting and intakes will be further compromised where access to forage and supplements are restricted or increased to manage BCS.

Reproductive performance

The key trace elements affecting fertility are selenium, iodine, copper and cobalt. Ewes need the target daily levels every day so supplementation throughout pre-tupping and tupping is vital.

Lack of selenium can cause poor reproductive performance. In females, it can cause early embryonic death, resulting in poor scanning figures in sheep. Inadequate selenium also affects male fertility so rams may benefit from supplementation too.

If ewes have inadequate cobalt then ovulation rate and egg quality can both be affected, reducing the chance of hitting the target of 75% of ewes in lamb in one cycle. Iodine is required by the thyroid and has a role in the production of the essential reproductive hormones influencing cycling and conception.

"If in any doubt, take forage samples

to understand the status of grass being fed to ewes. As there are genetic differences in copper requirement between sheep breeds, copper should not be supplemented to animals susceptible to copper toxicity.

"If ewes will benefit from supplementation, it is important to remember that this must be started well in advance of tupping as it is at this stage that the follicles that will develop into the eggs released at ovulation are forming. You want to ensure egg quality is as high as possible.

"Supplementation should continue throughout the tupping and early pregnancy periods to help achieve low levels of early embryo losses."

Adequate supplementation

Mr Darling recommends using eroding boluses for effective and consistent trace-element supplementation, suggesting they are the most efficient and straightforward way to ensure all ewes in the flock receive adequate supplementation.

"With flock productivity and margins closely influenced by the number of lambs sold and with the maximum possible lambs available determined by the success of tupping and the scanning percentage, any cost at this time should be measured against the potential return when the flock margin is calculated. Investment in effective trace element supplementation at pre-tupping can help set ewes on a more profitable path."

Reaping the benefits of the newest wormer group

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

On 1st July, 2017, monepantel (Zolvix) became available to sheep producers via SQPs and pharmacists, as well as vets. In the previous issue of *Sheep Farmer*, I stressed the need for us to strike the right balance when using this wormer in our flocks. On the one hand we need to harness its potential to improve lamb performance and slow anthelmintic resistance (AR) to other groups. On the other hand, we must not fall into the trap of over-use, as this brings with it a much-increased risk of developing resistance to monepantel itself.



Forward planning

There is no doubt that this is going to be a challenge because it means that we must think even harder about what worming products we use and when. The days when you could simply rotate product groups annually are long gone. In reality, most flocks will need to use three, or more, groups in a single season – for example 1-BZ for nematodirus, a 2-LV or 3-ML and then a 4-AD or 5-SI in the late season and for quarantine – if they are to slow the development of resistance while still maintaining good worm control. This is quite daunting. It requires much more forward planning and monitoring, using FECs and probably additional cost.



Gareth Owen.



Matt Blyth, sorting sheep.

So, on the assumption that it's more convincing to hear what others are doing, I asked some sheep producers and an SQP about their experiences and the benefits they have seen.

Matt Blyth, of Didling Farms, is amazed by the number of producers he meets who are still using white (1-BZ) drenches throughout the season. "Poor lamb growth rates are a common complaint, yet sheep producers still don't know if the wormers they are using are working effectively," he says. "We had that situation here when I first started. Testing and swapping to effective wormers, including a one-off late season drench with either group 4 or group 5, has made a huge impact on our lamb growth rates".

SQP advice

Andrew Pattison, SQP with RM Jones agrees. "I would encourage my sheep producer customers to take the time to talk to their SQP when they go in store to buy wormers. Additional training is now underway and this means that they can advise producers on product choices and suggest ways to monitor lamb performance and worm challenges."

Malcolm Sanderson farms in Lancashire and admits that he was

initially sceptical about the benefits of using one of the new groups, but with AR confirmed on his farm to two groups (white and yellow), he decided to take the plunge in September 2015 with his remaining lambs.

"They had not done very well since weaning, despite being on good grazing. I was amazed at the difference. Within days we were recording growth rates of more than 300g per day in six-month-old lambs and they looked so much healthier. I have no problem justifying the cost of this once-a-year investment, particularly as I know I am also slowing resistance. This is so important for the longer term."

Hampshire-based sheep producer Martyn Fletcher concurs and adds that he uses weighing and drafting kit to split lambs into three weight groups for the late-season drench with a group 4 or 5. "This means that we can maintain the accuracy of the treatment by dosing to the heaviest in each group, but it also keeps the cost to a minimum."

Quarantine benefit

Leicestershire-based Gareth Owen points out that, for him, another vital benefit is quarantine. "I must have confidence that the replacements I buy are not bringing in any resistance or *Haemonchus contortus*. I have no way of knowing what the risk is when I bring sheep on to the farm."

"Yarding on arrival and treating with either a group 4 or 5 drench means that I can be sure that they are safe and that's worth a lot to us."

Sheep producer Charles Sercombe, who is also NFU Livestock Board Chairman and SCOPS member, agrees but adds a note of caution. "We must ensure that everyone heeds the advice and avoids looking for quick fixes," he says. "I fully support the need to get these drenches used as part of the fight to slow down AR on our farms, but with that comes a huge responsibility. We have to resist any temptation to use them outside of the recommended times unless advised by our vet," he says.

The take-home message has to be that there are sheep producers out there who are striking the right balance. They are adopting sustainable practices and carefully including the new actives only as quarantine and mid/late season treatments and reaping the benefits of effective worm control.

Improving the lifetime performance of ewe replacements

By Hayley King, AHDB Beef & Lamb **Annual replacement rates for English sheep** **flocks range between 19% and 26%, and represent almost 10% of the full economic costs of a sheep enterprise. According to the most recent AHDB Stocktake report, average replacement costs for flocks lambing in February and March are approximately the same as their paid labour costs. For flocks lambing in April or May, replacements cost about the same as feed and forage.**

To understand what is happening to replacements on commercial farms, AHDB is launching its new 'Challenge Sheep' project. The project, which aims to understand the lifetime performance of ewes by analysing data from 13 farms in England, will build on information from the organisation's sheep key performance indicators (KPI) project about the importance of the rearing phase of ewes.

Ewe lambs

If ewe lambs are mated, it is vital that they have reached more than 60% of their mature bodyweight before breeding.

Location	System
West Sussex	1,000 Lleyn and Lleyn-cross ewes. Lambs indoors from March. Breeds 210 home-bred replacements as shearlings.
Hertfordshire	1,200 New Zealand Romneys. Lambs outdoors from April. Breeds 180 home-bred ewe lambs.
Wiltshire	1,000 New Zealand Romneys. Lambs outdoors from April. Tups 200 home-bred shearlings.
Devon	900 Lleyns. Lambs indoors. Breeds a mixture of 100 home-bred and bought-in replacements.
Dorset	1,500 mules. Lambs outdoors from March. 700 ewe lambs bred (flock expansion).
Gloucestershire	1,250 ewes across a range of breeds. Lambs outdoors from March. A mixture of 500 home-bred and bought-in shearlings.
Worcestershire	1,250 North Country mules. Lambs indoors from March. 200 bought-in ewe lambs.
Leicestershire	1,700 Aberfield. Lambs indoors from March. 600 bought-in shearlings (flock expansion).
Shropshire	1,100 Lleyns. Lambing indoors from April. 100 home-bred ewe lambs.
Cumbria	800 Swaledale and North Country mules. Lambs outdoors in April. 250 home-bred shearlings.
Cumbria	1,200 Swaledale and North Country mules. Lambs outdoors from late March. 110 home-bred ewe lambs.
North Yorkshire	500 Texel cross mules. Lambs indoors from late March. 200 shearlings – half bought-in, half home-bred.
Northumberland	1,000 Aberfield and Aberfield crosses. Lambs ewe lambs indoors in April. Breeds 400 home-bred ewe lambs

Table 1: The data collected as part of Challenge Sheep

Tupping	Ear tag, BCS, weight.
Scanning	BCS, weight, scanning result.
Lambing	BCS, weight, lambing, lamb linked to ewe, lamb birth weight, lamb sex, lamb rear type.
8 weeks	BCS, weight, lamb weights.
Weaning	BCS, weights, lamb weights (adjusted to 90 days).
All year	Death and culls with reasons.

If mature weight is between 70kg and 75kg, ewe lambs must be a minimum of 45kg at mating. Research suggests that there is no benefit from exceeding this target.

Reaching 60% is not only important for ewe lambs' breeding success in their first year, but also for their lifetime performance. Ewe lambs must continue to grow during successive lambings, reaching 80% of their mature weight at their second mating and their full mature weight by their third mating at three years old.

A low bodyweight pre-mating, or slow weight gain from mating through to mid-pregnancy, is associated with increased foetal loss. This emphasises the importance of achieving target weights

pre-mating and continued weight gain through pregnancy.

If replacements are not bred until they are shearlings, at 18 months of age, the target is for them to reach at least 80% of their mature weight at mating. For example, a Mule shearling ewe, with a mature weight of 75kg, needs to be 60kg at her first mating when she is 18 months old.

The sheep KPI project showed a greater proportion of light lambs (less than 17kg) at eight weeks of age come from shearlings. This suggests that more work is needed to ensure shearlings are able to cope with their first lactation.

Project outline

Challenge Sheep starts in October 2017 and will track more than 3,000 replacement ewes entering 13 flocks across England this tupping season. A similar number of replacements will join the same farms in autumn 2018 and will be followed for the next six production years.

The project aims to compare the management of replacements mated as ewe lambs and those as shearlings, across a range of systems, and to identify factors that influence how long they remain in the flock.

The flocks selected have a good history of recording data via electronic identification (EID) systems. The data that will be collected is shown in Table 1. Historical data will be mined with the aim of making full use of millions of records that already exist on these farms.

Another aim of the project is to produce guidance for other producers on how to get the maximum value out of their EID records for managing replacements.

A description of the 13 farms involved can be found in Table 2. Open events will be held on these farms in the autumn to introduce the farms and the project.

Discussion groups will be established around the farms, with meetings held three times a year so progress can be tracked.

Improving the efficiency of meat production through improved nutrition and management is a key priority in the AHDB Beef & Lamb 2017 to 2020 Inspiring Success strategy.

More information can be found online at beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/challenge-sheep.

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Show season for British Wool

For British Wool, summer brings with it a busy schedule of agricultural shows across the UK. These events not only provide an opportunity to showcase the organisation's activity, but also offer visitors the chance to meet and speak with British Wool representatives in their area.



wool supply chain and to highlight the ceaseless work of British Wool. "These shows offer British Wool the opportunity to showcase the consistent work carried out on behalf of UK producers," said Chairman Ian Buchanan. "And they provide a business and educational platform where producers can seek advice and tips on how to improve the quality of their clip. Our aim is to help them make the most of this, often undervalued, commodity as it undergoes the grading process at a British Wool depot.

From the Black Isle Show in the north of Scotland and the Royal Cornwall Show in south west England, to Castlewellan Show in Northern Ireland and Anglesey Show in Wales, British Wool attends agricultural shows and events covering the length and breadth of the UK.

Its aim is to meet sheep producers from across the region, provide an educational platform to learn about the

Keen to inspire visitors to get involved at these events, one light-hearted element at several shows is the British Wool's 'Identify the Breed' competition, where visitors are challenged to test their knowledge of sheep breeds from



Identify the breed competition on British Wool's stand.

wool samples. This encourages people to handle various wool types and, with an underlying educational purpose, helps them to understand why they are graded and valued the way they are.

'Go for gold' in fleece competition

For the second year running British Wool is holding its National Golden Fleece Competition, which is being held in association with JG Animal Health. Qualifying fleece competitions are being held at 14 agricultural shows across the UK.

Producers are also invited to enter their fleeces, accompanied by a competition entry form, through any of the 11 British Wool grading depots. New on the list of qualifying shows this year are the South of England Show, in West Sussex, and the Peebles Show in Scotland.

The final judging will take place at British Wool's annual conference of regional committee representatives in Exeter, in November this year.

The competition's key objectives are to showcase the exceptionally high quality of British wool and to highlight the difference that fleece presentation can make in terms of increasing the value of producers' wool.

"This is an exciting and important competition for the industry and we are expecting strong entries throughout the qualifying competitions," said JG Animal Health's Director Jonathan Guy. "The final judging will be no easy task."

Fleeces will be judged in two categories – traditional carpet fleece and speciality knitwear fleece – to separate the different wool types produced in the UK. The winner will receive a

special competition salver and £500. The runner up will receive £250 and all finalists will also be presented with £125 in JG Animal Health product vouchers.

Full competition rules, as well as a list of eligible shows and British Wool grading depots, are available at www.britishwool.org.uk.

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Jayne and Mryfyn Roberts, from Wales, with the 2016 Champion Golden Fleece.



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On my farm...

Richard Taylor

Grazing across multiple agreements and making direct lamb sales in Wiltshire.

The sleepless nights are over, the shearer has finally been and the ewes look much happier in their summer gear. Lambs are growing well and I have been working particularly hard to keep grass in front of them while also keeping landowners happy with the grazing service I am providing. It's always a balancing act, but communication is the key. Planning well in advance – to get the stocking rate right on the paddocks available and moving round to suit sheep, shepherd and landowner – always gives me plenty to think about.



Summer feels like it has properly started and there is plenty of hay and silage being made. I had a fantastic day down at the South of England Show back in June, working alongside NFU to promote food and farming. It was great to connect with the public about agriculture and showcase the variety and ingenuity within the industry. I also got to meet the Duchess of Cornwall at the show.

Now the ewes are sheared and the lambs have been wormed and fly covered, I have been doing plenty of work for other people and taking

bookings for the lamb spit roast I recently purchased. I will start selling at



farmers' markets again in August, as well as ramping up the direct lamb sales. This is something I really enjoy and it will allow me some serious sheep shopping in the early autumn

Nicola Drew

Farming in partnership with her father near Talgarth, Brecon.

It's been a busy few weeks, as ever, and the scorching weather we've had has meant that we've been able to make a lot of good quality hay and silage. I am glad to see the end of that heat though, my body doesn't work that well at those temperatures! The last of the shearing has been nailed and the lambs have been treated for flystrike. Unfortunately the dry weather hasn't been good for grass growth, which isn't as good as it normally is. One bunch of twin lambs, in particular, aren't doing as well as they would normally do.

I am now thinking I might wean them a bit earlier than usual and get them back to the farm where I have some new leys. Hopefully they will then grow like mushrooms.

We have sold all bar a handful of the February lambs. They averaged £94.94 but, after deducting £9.71 each for hard feed, this brings them back to £85.23. It's good to get them gone and we've now moved on to selling the March lambs.

We've just managed to get in our crop of swedes sown, to help feed the ewes this winter. So fingers crossed for a drop of rain now. The farm is usually fairly wet, which can be tricky in the winter when grazing swedes. We've done a little drainage work to help in this year's swede field.



Matt Haydon

Running close to 2,000 pedigree Lleyns, as an employed shepherd in Staffordshire.

Ewes and lambs are performing well, with many lambs getting very close to being ready to draw. That's around two weeks earlier than 2016 – and three weeks compared to 2015. I strongly believe that this is down to improved genetics and better grass quality this spring.

My thoughts are now turning to managing grass and lambs to achieve a steady supply through our retail business Daylesford Organic. I think it could prove to be tricky this year with so much silage aftermath available. This is uncommon, but a great position to be in for the time of year.



In my role as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, it fills me with great pleasure to be involved at a regional level with the organisation. My local NSA Central Region Committee met recently to discuss current issues and Brexit took up a large proportion of the agenda. We're still at such an early stage of what could be a rollercoaster ride, so it really is so important that sheep producers keep voicing their opinion to ensure that government remembers the importance of sheep farming and its role in our countryside.

Our NSA representatives are working tirelessly at a high level but, now more than ever, we need to stick together and back NSA to be the voice for sheep farming. I really would encourage everyone to get involved in their local NSA Committee, wherever possible, to give us a stronger voice.

Top tips for employed shepherds

Work hard, plenty of time and effort and attain high standards – three key points to consider, according to shepherd Ellen Helliwell, for anyone looking for work as an employed shepherd.

She says that there are various employment options that shepherds can explore when looking to get on the sheep-farming ladder, be it contract shepherding, share farming or a permanent position.

From her beginnings on her parents' tenanted hill farm in the Peak District, Ellen (24) has spent time working on a mixed lowland farm in the Cotswolds before moving to her current position on an upland enterprise in Cumbria.

"You've got to be prepared to put the hours in at the beginning," says Ellen. "Simply helping family and friends out during busy periods – such as lambing, shearing and gathering – will give you a lot of valuable experience and contacts. Contracting work is also great when you're starting out. Working on farms with different systems – from lowland, upland and hill to outdoor or indoor lambing – will give all you a good overview of how different systems work. If you get the right job for you it will help to build your confidence and develop your skills. But don't be put off if this doesn't happen straight away."

During her time in the Cotswolds, Ellen successfully applied to become an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, alongside 12 other young sheep producers from around the UK, and is heavily involved in showing stock and regularly attending agricultural shows and events during the year. "Just putting yourself out there means that you learn so much along the

way. But getting involved in various farming organisations and events also means you meet other young people to share experiences with or get advice," says Ellen. "I also try to keep up to date with agricultural current affairs by attending meetings, reading the farming press, and through social media. It means you know what's going on, but it also means that you can intelligently answer questions at interview to impress potential employers.

"In the early days, in particular, building up a good reputation for yourself is essential. We all know farming involves hard work and long hours and there are likely to be many occasions where you end up working more than you originally agreed to. It does require patience but, if you get on with it, you will gain more respect and a better reputation for yourself. Having a good working dog will also make you more attractive to a potential employee."

In a competitive industry keeping a job, either full-time or contracting, can also present its challenges. "You have to be able to get on with the people you are working with," says Ellen. "You might not always agree with the way things are being done, and you may be able to think of more efficient ways, but I've found the best way to deal with these types of situations is to politely ask questions and just let them get on with it. You will have your chance to do it your way at some point in the future.

"Working hard, taking pride in your job and putting time and effort into your work will earn you respect from your work colleagues and will also go a long way towards ensuring that your boss will want to keep you on."





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