

# Sheep Farmer

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2018



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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REDUCES ANTIBIOTIC USE**

**MUTTON TASTE-TEST RESULTS**

**MEET THE 2018 NSA NEXT  
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## Whatever it brings, 2018 is set to be challenging

I had a good Christmas and new year break. There's something special about taking a bit of time off when most other people are also only doing the minimum. You're not worried about events and meetings that you feel you should be at, there are fewer emails, and the season of peace lives up to its name.

I'd previously made the decision not to attend the Oxford conferences this year. I've been for several years in succession, but the budgets were tight and my diary for the remainder of January and February were such that I needed a few clear days to tackle a backlog of work. But then a late invitation came to speak at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC), on the importance of adequate slaughtering facilities for the sheep industry, and it was too good an opportunity to turn down.

All went well and the ORFC workshop I was involved in, being on the more radical end of farming, presented some interesting although challenging proposals for the development of a new mobile slaughtering system, to support the growing number of people who are selling lamb and mutton direct and but have no local processing facilities. And then I met a man who was very angry and that wrecked my upbeat mood.

### Positive debate

He was angry about what NSA has been saying about the problems caused by white-tailed sea eagles on the West coast of Scotland. He felt that our claims were unsubstantiated and that we were affecting plans for extending the golden eagle range into Galloway. I tried to reason with him, but to no avail. I suggested that if he wanted to discuss this openly with the sheep farming community then his anger might get in the way of a positive debate. And I then left and attended a workshop on the future direction of farming and land management in Wales, but not able to concentrate as much as I'd have liked.

Arriving home later that night I felt I got my just reward for not attending the Oxford Farming Conference (the original one) when I opened the newly arrived Farmers Weekly and found that I wasn't on their list of top 20 'farming influencers'. Nervously opening the Farmers Guardian I was grateful they didn't run a similar list and I decided to give up and go out and continue a battle with an old propane cylinder that I'm



converting into something more useful. After an hour of wielding an angle grinder and a cutting disc, life was soon feeling better and the mood of failure and doubt has lifted. I think I'll be spending a lot of time with my angle grinder this year!

I've been saying for some time that we need to be aware that change is coming and we are now getting to a point where we are hearing some early indications of what that change may be, with people interpreting it in whatever way they choose.

### More clarity

The messages are vague enough to almost allow the detail to be whatever you want it to be. While a domestic transition of some five years now looks likely, there is still no clarity or vision and there are, undoubtedly, some large arguments ahead.

The promised Agriculture Bill should, in theory, begin to offer some clarity when it comes out for consultation in the next few months, and the recently launched 25-year environment plan is offering some broad clarity of direction that should not be a surprise. It would be ideal if they could be discussed in tandem, particularly for sheep farming where the two go largely hand in hand.

This year should see an EU trade deal agreed, if not finalised. And it could be a year when we learn more about food imports and quotas and tariffs, and maybe get some news on trade opportunities in, and threats from, more distant markets.

It's certainly going to be an interesting year and I wish you all a happy, productive and fulfilling 2018.

Sheep  
Farmer



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# National Sheep Association

## NSA Head Office

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

### Phil Stocker

NSA Chief Executive  
pstocker@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Julie Jennings

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

### Joanne Briggs

Communications Manager, and Policy Officer for England  
joanne@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Hannah Park

Communications Officer  
hannah@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Katie James

Communications Support Officer  
katie@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Gill Callow

Membership Secretary  
gill@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Abi Swaffield

Membership Recruitment Officer  
abi@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Helen Davies

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

### Karen Sumner

Bookkeeper  
karens@nationalsheep.org

### Rachael Porter

Sheep Farmer Acting Editor  
Contact via NSA Head Office

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

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## NSA Office Holders

Lord Inglewood  
Honorary President

David Gregory  
Honorary Treasurer

Bryan Griffiths  
Chair of the Board

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

Dan Phipps  
Chair of UK Policy and Technology Committee

## NSA Project Partners

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

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

## NSA Regions

### Central

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

Anne Payne  
Regional Manager  
01142 883241  
anne@handbanktexels.co.uk

### Cymru Wales

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

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

### Eastern

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

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

### Marches

Antony Spencer  
Regional Chairman  
07973 301954  
antspencer27@aol.com

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

### Northern

Eddie Eastham  
Regional Chairman  
01228 576382  
07770 732817  
eandreeastham@btconnect.com

Heather Stoney-Grayshon  
Regional Manager  
07966 699930  
heather@nationalsheep.org.uk

### Northern Ireland

Brian Jamieson  
Regional Chairman  
07790 673808  
bjami245@gmail.com

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

### Scottish

John Fyall  
Regional Chairman  
07837 291258  
chairman@nsascotland.org

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

### South East

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

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

### South West

Alan Derryman  
Regional Chairman  
01395 597836  
ahderryman@hotmail.com

### Ian May

Regional Manager  
07913 043234  
ian@nationalsheep.org.uk

# News Update

## NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair reminder

NSA Eastern Region's Winter Fair, which is being held Melton Mowbray Market, is just days away. With an array of information, activities, demonstrations and competitions, the event, on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> February, promises to offer something of interest for all sheep producers.

The event will run from 10am until 4pm and entry is free for NSA members (one membership card permits one free entry). Non-members will be charged £5. More information is available from event organiser Jonathan Barber, NSA Eastern Regional Manager, in conjunction with Norfolk-based Ceres Solutions. Call 01953 607860 or email [carroll@ceresolutions.co.uk](mailto:carroll@ceresolutions.co.uk).

## Action against scab

Sheep producers must take note of recently published evidence of resistance in sheep scab mites to the 3-ML endectocide products, ensuring they only use these products when necessary and follow company instructions carefully.

That's the advice from SCOPS, which has been aware of this work and in response has already held a Stakeholder and expert workshop to look at how the industry can effectively manage scab in the light of this new information.

"Sheep producers should not be alarmed at this stage," says SCOPS' Lesley Stubbings. "But a diagnosis is vital to avoid over-use of scab treatments. So if you think you may have sheep scab, contact your vet who can arrange for a diagnosis.

"We now also have a blood test that shows whether sheep have been exposed to scab without having to wait to see clinical signs".

SCOPS urges sheep producers who suspect that an endectocide treatment may not have been fully effective to check that the dose rate was correct, that the whole group was treated properly, and that there's been no chance of reinfection.

"They should also inform their vet, who can confirm the presence of scab mites and advise on further treatment options," adds Mrs Stubbings.

One option is to remove any remaining mites by plunge dipping in an organophosphorus (OP) product. "But remember that OP

should not be applied by either a shower or a jetter. Not only is this unlicensed, it's not an effective treatment against sheep scab."

SCOPS Chair Peter Baber also recommends that producers take action to protect themselves, by making sure they quarantine any sheep coming into their flocks, and treat against sheep scab.

"No-one must delay in taking positive action," he says. "The workshop that SCOPS held in January drew together the full breadth of expertise available to the industry. We are now formulating a new plan to tackle sheep scab, utilising the new tools and approaches available to us, which we urgently need to apply as effectively as possible."

## New NSA Chairman

NSA is pleased to welcome Bryan Griffiths as its new Board of Trustees Chairman.

The individual taking on the role of NSA Chairman is elected for a three-year term and is someone currently serving as one of 12 NSA Trustee/Board members. Bryan and his wife Liz lamb commercial ewes, on a 300-acre farm, near Burrington in North Devon.



The flock comprises 900 lowland Mules and Suffolk crosses, run alongside 60 finishing cattle.

As a supporter of NSA for many years, Bryan's longstanding involvement in NSA South West Region has seen him take part in countless regional meetings and events. He has undertaken office holder positions locally, as NSA South West Region Chairman, and nationally, as NSA English Committee Chairman, serving two years in each role. Bryan takes over from outgoing acting NSA Chairman Margaret Dalton, who stepped into the position after the sudden passing of Samuel Wharry in May 2017.

Bryan says he is looking forward to continuing to build on the excellent work that those working in the role prior to him have undertaken.

## NSA regional meetings

Official notice of upcoming NSA Annual Members Meetings was given in the previous edition of Sheep Farmer, but with several still to come members are very welcome to attend. Details as follows:

- NSA South East Region at the Angel Hotel, Gosport Road, Privett, West Tisted, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3NN, at 4pm on Wednesday 7th February.
- NSA Northern Region at the Tynedale Function Suite, Hexham Mart, NE46 3SG, at 7.30pm on Tuesday 13th February.
- NSA Scottish Region at Airth Castle Hotel and Spa, Airth, Stirlingshire, FK2 8JF, at 4pm on Wednesday 14th February.
- NSA South West Region at Exeter Livestock Centre, Exeter EX2 8FD, at 7.30pm on Wednesday 21st February.
- NSA Cymru/Wales Region at the Royal Welsh Showground, Hafod y Hendre, Builth Wells, LD2 3SY, at 2pm on Thursday 22nd February.

## Campaign to reduce antibiotic use

UK cattle, sheep and pig sectors are teaming up during February to promote the 'liquid gold' properties of colostrum in reducing the need for antibiotics in farm animals and improving their lifetime performance.

The #ColostrumIsGold campaign, created by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance, will underline that responsible use of antibiotics starts with new-born calves, lambs and piglets receiving the right amount of colostrum within a couple of hours of birth – something all farmers have the potential to achieve.

A wide range of organisations will be releasing information and promoting best practice throughout the month, mainly based around getting the three 'Qs' – 'quality, quantity and quickness' – of colostrum delivery right.

Specialist sheep vet Fiona Lovatt says that lambs receiving insufficient colostrum at birth is behind one of the sheep industry's biggest antibiotic use 'hotspots', in what is otherwise a low-use sector.

"And it's largely avoidable," she says. "The reality is that we simply don't see watery mouth in lambs that have taken sufficient colostrum on board in that golden 24-hour window, immediately after birth.

Dr Lovatt says a 5kg lamb at birth needs one litre of colostrum, during



Testing colostrum quality

the first 24 hours of life, to give it essential levels of natural immunity. But, importantly, the first feed should be within two hours of birth.

"Antibodies – essential in protecting against all disease including E coli infections – cannot cross the placenta, so must be transferred through colostrum," she explains.

"While thin ewes, or those that are not well fed in the run-up to lambing, will produce too little colostrum of low quality, more often it's a case of simply not getting enough colostrum into the lamb quickly enough after birth."

She says the sheep sector should

not be relying on use of preventative antibiotics – because of image but also the very real problem of antibiotic resistance. "We know from government data that 50% of neonatal lamb E coli are already resistant to spectinomycin – the most commonly used dose. We need to protect these antibiotics, or we will lose them."

Farmers and vets looking for more information should search for the #ColostrumIsGold hashtag on Twitter, or go to the [FarmAntibiotics.org](http://FarmAntibiotics.org) website to be signposted to useful tools, resources and case studies.

# NSA reports – devolved nations

## NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



**Most farmers in Northern Ireland will be glad of an early spring, so I'd like to start the year by hoping for better weather in 2018.** The second half of 2017 saw continual rain and has resulted in large numbers of cattle being housed early, with no chance of getting slurry tanks emptied. Straw, clamp silage and round bales prices are twice what they were in 2016, but I'm sure we'll survive what's in store with all sorts of improvisation. The snow also arrived with us at the beginning of December, but thankfully didn't cause too much disruption.

In November, the Northern Ireland (NI) Farm Quality Assurance Scheme celebrated its 25th Anniversary. One guest speaker was Patrick Wall who spoke about the importance of provenance, good animal welfare standards and quality assurance looking forward. He added that these could become a key point of differentiation for the industry across the UK, but particularly in Northern Ireland.

## Live exports

We are concerned to hear that Michael Gove has supported the Live Exports Bill because here in NI we have a strong cattle and sheep industry that's highly dependent on live exports to maintain economic viability. Five-year averages for NI show that almost 60,000 cattle and 485,000 sheep were exported live, each year, to a variety of destinations in continental Europe. We need specific detail on these proposals to see exactly how it will affect NI and livestock exports from the region.

An Expert Working Group on Sustainable Agricultural Land Management for NI has produced a paper entitled 'Making Ammonia Visible'. It highlights that the problem is most acute in NI, with emissions per square kilometre 50% greater than in the Republic of Ireland and double that of England and Wales. This is due to NI having a more intensive livestock sector than other parts of these islands, with 70% of emissions in NI

coming from cattle, 13% from poultry, 7% from pigs and 2% from sheep. A total of 91% of all ammonia emissions in NI come from agriculture.

Stated within the report is the recommendation that, to achieve a sustainable future for Northern Ireland's agri-food sector, ammonia emissions must be addressed through a partnership approach. This would need to incorporate communication and education on ammonia, investing in plugging our ammonia knowledge gaps, and implementing a range of ammonia mitigation measures; and not on contracting the size of this sector.

There are some controversial statements in this report and conflict with previous thinking. The full report can be found at [www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/sustainable-agricultural-land-management-strategy-report-and-executive-summary](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/publications/sustainable-agricultural-land-management-strategy-report-and-executive-summary)

I have also been appointed to a sub group of the NI Animal Health & Welfare Strategy Group to look at preparing an animal health strategy for Northern Ireland. The first meeting will take place in early January.

## NSA Scottish Region

By George Milne, Development Officer



**NSA Scottish Region has been extremely busy with meetings running up to the end of 2017 and that looks set to continue into 2018.** At the forefront,

NSA Scottish Region has been consistently representing members at Brexit meetings in Scotland and the wider UK. We are present in a UK Livestock Brexit group, which meets once a month, and is now recognised by Defra officials as a leading key group of organisations to communicate information regarding the livestock sector. We are also members of both NFU England and NFU Scotland Brexit round table discussion groups, which have been working well and are each interacting with Government.



Snow at Edward Adamson's home in December 2017.

NSA Scottish Region met recently with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing, with a further meeting planned for early this year.

I also had the opportunity to attend a Confor conference entitled Towards a Common Countryside Policy, officially opened by Under Secretary of State of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Therese Coffey. Dr Coffey highlighted the need to see a significant increase in tree planting, to reach 12% of land under trees by 2060 and 130,000 hectares of new timber by 2032, creating 4,000 new jobs and improving grant funding.

But I was very concerned to hear a Minister cover nothing but forestry and tree planting under the common countryside policy heading, which I raised when given the opportunity to ask questions. This is the position we find ourselves in with other sectors now seeing a real opportunity to tap into a new UK-type CAP scheme, where any future funded schemes could target the rural countryside. It is going to become more important than ever to make sure that the sheep sector is represented at all these types of conferences this coming year, which NSA Scottish Region will continue to do.

## Future engagement

We are also busy with replies to various consultations at the moment. NSA Scottish Region members can be assured that we are responding in a constructive way for the future of the sheep sector. Documents like this are highly likely to have a significant part to play in how our industry will be structured going forward and we will welcome future engagement with these groups, set up by Mr Ewing, to ensure that the sheep industry has a strong and viable future.

We are delighted to be holding our NSA Scottish Region Annual Members Meeting at Airth Castle, in Stirlingshire, on the Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> February. We look forward welcoming members to the meeting, which will be followed by a dinner. *Details of the NSA Scottish Region Annual Members Meeting and Dinner are available at [www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org).*

## NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Davies, Development Officer



**In early December, I, alongside NSA Cymru/Wales Region office holders, met with Cabinet Secretary for Energy, Planning and Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths for an on-farm meeting in Oswestry.** We heard

some encouraging messages on threats and opportunities surrounding Brexit, trade, live exports, the proposed lynx release, and the impact of quarantine units. It



wasn't surprising to hear Ms Griffiths outline an immediate priority to ensure ongoing and sufficient funding for Wales as a devolved nation, which aligns to NSA's Brexit position paper. On the proposed lynx release, Ms Griffiths agreed to write to Secretary of State Michael Gove for an update on Lynx UK Trust's pending licence application to determine the role of Wales within that.

NSA also expressed its concern around the low level of quarantine unit uptake. While industry may have called for these, we do not feel they have been developed in true partnership. We need a system that gives us the biosecurity we need while also supporting the nature of our diverse and rich industry – and one that is driven jointly by interest and culture and the need to be profitable.

We are pleased to announce that NSA Welsh Sheep 2019 will take place at Glynliffon College, Caernarfon. Holding the event at a college will be a new venture for NSA Welsh Sheep and we are looking forward to working with Glynliffon to promote NSA Cymru/Wales Region alongside what the college has to offer.

## Interesting speakers

Our Annual Regional Members Meeting will take place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, at 2pm, in Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Show Ground. Members and friends are welcome to join us from 12.30pm for traditional Welsh Cawl, tea and coffee before listening to our impressive line-up of speakers. We will be joined by businessman Ron Mounsey, Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers' Sion Ifans, and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Caryl Hughes. They will be followed with an update on NSA's current and ongoing activity from NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker.

Ron was a dairy farmer until 1998, after which he trained to take on a McDonalds franchise and now runs 15 restaurants from Pembroke Dock to Newport, Gwent. Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers (WLBP) Sion Ifans will then update the audience with a presentation on the WLBP database and a membership benefit that it offers Welsh Farmers. Regional NSA Next Generation Ambassador Caryl Hughes (2017 intake) will also share her experiences of the past year with the meeting.

*If you plan to attend the Annual Members Meeting on Thursday 22nd February, please find an agenda and minutes of the previous meeting in the enclosed NSA Cymru/Wales Region Report. Please inform Helen Davies, using the contact details on page two, if you plan to attend, or if a Regional Report is not included with this issue of Sheep Farmer. If you live outside the NSA Cymru/Wales Region and would like to request a copy, you can also do so by contacting Helen.*

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# NSA reports – English regions

## Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

**Many producers are commenting on the poor quality of silage this year, due to unfavourable conditions at the time when it should have been made.**

Due to this, we are being urged to feed both high energy blocks and good quality concentrates to maintain foetal growth rate and reduce twin lamb disease. We are also being reminded of the increased problems with liver fluke, due to the wet weather and the fact there is only one drench that will cover all stages of fluke development. A local vet has advised careful, planned use of this to ensure that we maintain the drug for a good time yet. More on this is available at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk). We've also learned of the rise in the number of sheep scab cases being reported.

On a different note, some farmers in the Peak District have commented on the general lack of respect for wildlife or farmers from the visiting public. More people seem to be walking where they want to walk and not keeping their dogs on leads, and mountain bikers continue to leave gates open. In view of the proposals by Michael Gove that future subsidies be attached to giving benefits to the public, questions may need to be asked around the education of the public.

## Marches

By Antony Spencer, Chairman

**Firstly, I would like to wish you all a happy and, hopefully, prosperous new year – fingers crossed for a good trade.**

We held our Annual Regional Members Meeting back in November, at Stratford Livestock Market. It was great to welcome a full room of members and friends who came to listen to a fascinating presentation by AHDB Beef & Lamb's Duncan Wyatt and Amy Fawcett. They certainly gave us plenty to think about following a talk and discussion on a future outside the EU. But the topic that stood out was efficiency and how we might improve this going forward.

As we know, there is no system to fit everyone and all farms are different. The one thing to really grasp is that we must all try and strive to get the most out of what we have in order to weather periods of uncertainty. Having spoken to a few neighbours recently, scanning numbers appear to be up a bit. And this will, hopefully, mean plenty of lambs on the ground this spring. It should give us



A successful second year for NSA South East Region's Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Conference, held at Surrey University.

a bit of a head start towards improving efficiency.

The lamb trade seems to have held quite well during the Christmas period, which may bode well for hoggets going forward into 2018. It certainly feels like we are in a better place than we were this time in 2017 and I think there are fewer lambs in our area compared to 12 months ago. As they say, though, 'trade finds lambs', so it will be interesting to see just how many there are out there.

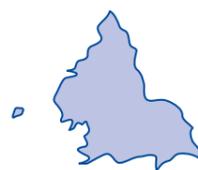
With lambing just around the corner for most of us, I would like to wish everyone a successful run and may the spring sun shine and all your adoptions take.

## Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**The region held a joint event with AHDB Beef & Lamb at Barnard Castle Mart back in December on what was a very cold night.**

Libby Bell was well prepared with a brace of space heaters to keep us warm. The evening consisted of AHDB demonstrating lamb selection, with the aid of virtual-reality goggles to see carcasses that weren't there. The subject of marketing was also discussed, with questions from the strong crowd of more than 60 NSA members and friends. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker attended and gave the group an interesting roundup of NSA activities. The evening concluded with a charity auction, run by Libby, and everyone had mince pies and a nip of something festive before people retired for the night. Thanks go to AHDB for attending the evening and to Libby and her staff at Barnard Castle for being such accommodating hosts. Thanks also to Hilary Atkinson and her staff in the café for the lovely pie and pea supper.



We held our most recent regional committee meeting on Wednesday 10th January and remind members that NSA Northern Region Annual Members Meeting is to take place on Tuesday 13th February 2018, 7.30pm, at Hexham Auction Mart. There will be the usual formal business followed by entertainment from our speakers including: Phil Stocker, Thomas Vickers, and Adam Day.

*All NSA Northern Region members are welcome. If you plan to attend the NSA Northern Region Annual Members Meeting, please contact Heather Stoney-Grayshon using the contact details on page two.*

## South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

**The NSA South East Region Annual Members Meeting will take place on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> February, 4pm, at the Angel Hotel, Privett, Alton.**

The speakers will be local farmer Gordon Wyeth and British Wool Chief Executive Joe Farron. And there will also be a report from regional NSA Next Generation Ambassadors Richard Taylor (2017 intake) and Clover Cross, who was sponsored by the region to attend the Sheep Breeders Round Table. Ryan James, from Farm and Country Supplies, has kindly agreed to sponsor our meeting along with Kenton Hart, from Scotmin, who will explain the science behind one of the company's new products. There will also be some changes to our office holders and a full report will appear in the next issue of Sheep Farmer.

Our 'Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Conference' took place on 22<sup>nd</sup> November at the School of Veterinary Medicine, Surrey University,



in Guildford. The conference was a resounding success with nearly double the attendance we had in 2016 and there have been some wonderful comments from speakers and delegates. The NSA South East Region had a lot of help from many individuals to ensure this was the case and we now have the challenge of matching the same standard next time. An edited film series of the sessions which took place at the conference can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports/). The film can also be obtained from Bob Blanden directly, using the contact details on page two.

NSA South Sheep 2018 will take place on Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> September at the South of England Showground, Ardingly, West Sussex. We recently held an event committee meeting and I can confirm that Sam Stanisstreet is the Event Chairman and Zoe Stanisstreet joint Event Organiser alongside myself. Zoe has been preparing the details of a photography competition, so we can attract plenty of entries. And this will allow us to have our own calendar for 2019. Find more details at [www.southsheep.org.uk](http://www.southsheep.org.uk).

## South West

By Alan Derryman, Chairman

**As I come to the end of my two years as NSA South West Region Chairman, which seems to have gone very quickly, we have seen some very interesting developments following the vote for Brexit.**

How that will eventually impact on the sheep industry is still unclear but, whatever your views, I am sure there are going to be opportunities to find new markets and I am confident that we can keep the ones we have at present – despite all the pessimism we hear from some quarters. Government support is clearly going to change with the words 'public good' being used. Time will tell where this will lead us, but I think we will



More than 60 sheep producers enjoyed a joint NSA and AHDB Beef & Lamb event, held in Hexham, in December.

have to justify any payments. The environment will be high on the list and, possibly, help with capital farm investments. Let's hope it will be made achievable.

A dry year seemed a certainty until mid-July, but since then it hasn't stopped raining. Ground conditions have become saturated, even on the driest land, during the past few weeks. So let's hope that the new year will bring a change. As members may know, Kate White stepped down as Regional Secretary in August and we wish to extend our thanks for all her hard work during the past few years. Ian May, from South Molton, will be taking over this year and I wish him all the best in this new venture. Our Annual Members Meeting is taking place on Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February, at Exeter Livestock Centre, and this will be a great opportunity for members to meet Ian. I also would like to thank everyone within NSA for their support during the past two years.



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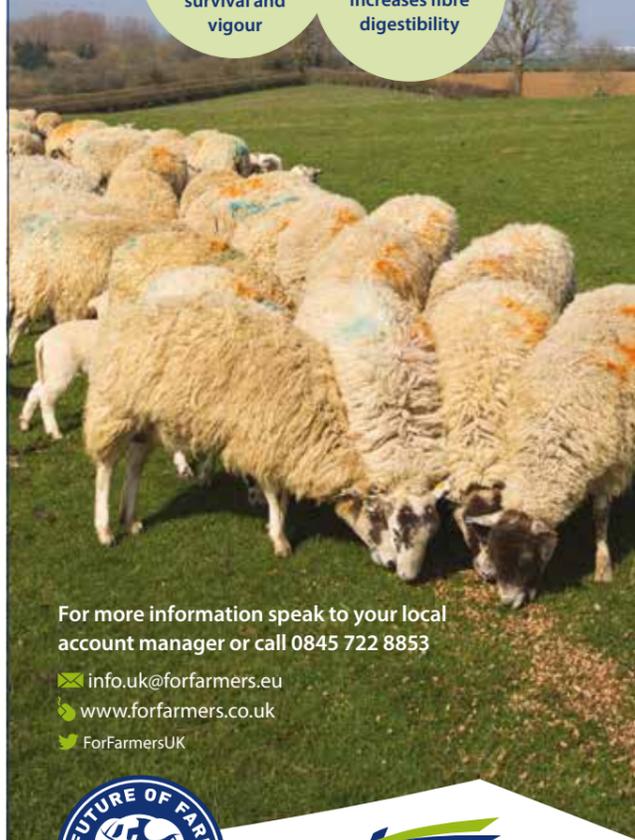
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## Plans underway for NSA Scot Sheep 2018

Plans for NSA Scot Sheep 2018 are well underway and the organising committee is hard at work, putting together an exciting programme of events for Scotland's national sheep event. The date for diaries is Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> May at the attractive venue of Kings Arms Farm, at Ballantrae in South Ayrshire. Hosts Robert and Caroline Dalrymple, along with farm manager Andrew McLean, run a flock of 1,400 ewes with all lambs, except replacement ewe lambs, finished on farm.

The reputation of the sheep flock, which comprises 1,000 Texel cross Mule and 400 Scotch Mule ewes, is sure to be a big draw for the thousands of sheep producers, from across Scotland and the North of England, who are expected to attend. The farm tour is always a highlight of NSA Scot Sheep and this year will be no exception. Features of the event will include trade stands and breed society exhibits (closing date for applications for space is Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February), stock judging, NSA Next Generation shepherd of year competition, a sheepdog trial and sheep shearing competitions, a comprehensive seminar programme, grassland demonstrations, and a show and sale of pairs of ewe hoggets. Practical demonstrations will cover lamb carcasses and grading, sheep dressing, wool spinning, crook making, fencing, and dry stone dyking. Organising the event is the local NSA committee, under the chairmanship of George Allan and Scotch Mule Association Secretary and Event Organiser Euan Emslie.

More information and application forms for trade stands and breed society exhibits can be obtained from Euan by calling 07718 908523 or email him at euan@nsascotland.org.



**Wednesday 30th May**  
**Kings Arms Farm, Ballantrae**  
**South Ayrshire, KA26 ONH**

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Further information from the Website or Organiser Euan Emslie  
T: 01430 441870 / 07718 908523  
E: euan@nsascotland.org

[www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org)



## NSA events and ram sales 2018

### NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair Friday 9th February

Melton Mowbray Livestock Market,  
Leicestershire, LE13 1JY.  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/erwf](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/erwf)

### NSA Sheep Event Wednesday 18th July

Three Counties Showground,  
Worcestershire, WR13 6NW.  
[www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk)

### NSA Scot Sheep Wednesday 30th May

Kings Arms Farm, Ballantrae,  
South Ayrshire, KA26 ONH.  
[www.scotssheep.org.uk](http://www.scotssheep.org.uk)

### NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale Monday 6th August

Royal Welsh Showground,  
Builth Wells, LD2 3SY.  
[www.nsaramsales.co.uk](http://www.nsaramsales.co.uk)

### NSA South West Region Ram Sale Wednesday 15th August

Exeter Livestock Centre,  
Exeter,  
EX2 8FD.  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

### NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram Sale Friday 24th August

Rugby Farmers Mart,  
Warwickshire,  
CV8 2RG.  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

### NSA South Sheep Saturday 8th September

South of England Showground,  
West Sussex,  
RH17 6TL.  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

### NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale Monday 17th September

Royal Welsh Showground,  
Builth Wells, LD2 3SY.  
[www.nsaramsales.co.uk](http://www.nsaramsales.co.uk)

### NSA Eastern Region Melton Ram Sale Friday 21st September

Melton Mowbray  
Livestock Market,  
Leicestershire, LE13 1JY.  
[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events)

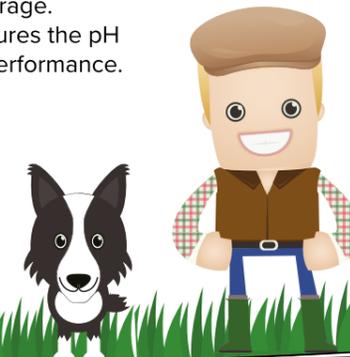
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# Tornado fencing kit up for grabs in NSA giveaway

NSA is delighted to announce it has teamed up with Tornado to giveaway four wire fencing packages during in 2018, as part of a membership recruitment prize giveaway.

Tornado has generously provided each package, which comes with fixings to allow you to complete 300 metres of stock fencing. The four lucky winners will each receive 300 metres of wire from Tornado's stock fencing range, 600 metres of barbed wire, barbed staples (5kg box), 20 gripple mediums, and 20 gripple t-clips.

"NSA is pleased to be able to offer this prize, and our thanks go to Tornado

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- 600 metres of Tornado Titan barbed wire.
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- 20 gripple mediums.
- 20 gripple t-clips.

for generously donating each package of wire and fixings," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. "The need for quality fencing is essential for sheep producers across the UK – not only to keep livestock in but also to keep unwanted animals out. I'm sure each of the lucky winners will welcome these kits for repair or replacement jobs, safe in the knowledge that they are using a high-quality product."

## Multiple entries

This prize is not just on offer to new NSA members – as an existing member, you can get your name in the hat multiple times by recommending someone to sign up to NSA. The more new members who sign up on your recommendation, the more entries you can earn.

The four draws will be spaced through 2018, with non-winning entries at each draw automatically rolling over to the next one. So the sooner you can recommend one or more friends or neighbours to sign up to NSA the more

chances you will have to win. Entries are now open and will close on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

"Tornado is delighted to be supporting NSA with this giveaway during 2018," says Tornado Marketing Manager Nick Jones. "We have enjoyed working with NSA on a number of initiatives, including the fencing competition at the biennial NSA Sheep Event. The event on 18<sup>th</sup> July this year will see the 17th competition since the event began back in 1984. Good luck to everyone who enters the prize draw. We hope the winners will be extremely pleased with their Tornado prize packages and find them useful."

Information, full terms and conditions and NSA membership forms can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw).



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SHEEP FARMER

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### Member's Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  
DOB: \_\_\_\_\_  
Please supply photo ID, eg passport, driving license, YFC/ student card if applying for under 27  
Tel: \_\_\_\_\_  
Supplying a mobile phone number will allow us to send you occasional text messages about NSA events in your area.  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
Supplying your email address will allow us to send you the NSA Weekly Email Update, packed full of news and information.

### Payer's Details

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  
Tel: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
If this membership is a gift please tick if delivery is direct to the new member and not to the buyer

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

No of commercial breeding females? \_\_\_\_\_  
No of pedigree breeding females? \_\_\_\_\_  
No of bought-in store lambs finished per year? \_\_\_\_\_  
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Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name(s) of account holder(s): \_\_\_\_\_  
Branch sort code: \_\_\_\_\_  
Bank/building society account number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reference: \_\_\_\_\_  
Instruction to your bank or building society: Please pay National Sheep Association Direct Debits from the account detailed in this instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with National Sheep Association and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.  
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Tel: 01684 892 661 Email: [membership@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:membership@nationalsheep.org.uk) [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk)

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# Heading in the right direction

**This year has got off to a flying start with some radical policy ideas starting to emerge and the pace of potential change such that some hats will have to be held onto tightly. If we want to understand the broad overall direction for food and farming policy then to examine Secretary of State Michael Gove's appearances at both Oxford conferences, on the same day, is not a bad place to start. Reports from both events said how inspiring his presentations were and they certainly kicked the opposing conferences off to a great start.**

But there is still a lot of detail to be decided and played for and plenty that's still open to interpretation. The more welcoming response, due to a strong environmental slant, was probably, but not exclusively, from the Oxford Real Farming Conference with Mr Gove commenting that this 'baby of conferences' (only nine years old compared to 80) was bigger. But then it was a lot less expensive to attend, it had many more smaller-scale farmer delegates, and this is arguably 'a growing movement' as opposed to an

existing 'farming industry'.

Mr Gove spoke about future policy direction in England, but close dialogue with all the devolved nations aims to achieve a relatively level policy framework. He also made it clear that this thinking is not just his but shared by the Cabinet and the Prime Minister herself, and that the direction of travel is one where there is little difference between the political parties. So his permanence, or otherwise, in this post should not create uncertainty.

The global picture he painted is one of a growing population, a migration away from rural areas and towards urban centres, and a growth in middle classes who have and want greater food choice and abundance. So the demand for quality food is bright.

On the other side of the balance sheet is serious soil degradation and erosion, high greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, iconic landscapes under threat, and human-health problems (associated with diet) including obesity, coronary heart disease, and mental illness. We must produce more food and more efficiently but 'natural capital',

things like soil, air and water, are essential for life on earth and simply must be improved.

There is much to feel inspired about but, as Mr Gove reminded his Oxford audiences, survival is about the ability to read change and adapt and that is exactly what the NSA will try to help our members to do. There is plenty to be positive about – a commitment to try to get that free-trade agreement with the EU, a commitment to maintain core funding structures for farming until 2022, and investment into wider trade access.

## Public-good approach

In addition, much of Mr Gove's vision aligns closely with what NSA Brexit and future policy asks for. And it is takes a position that we believe will benefit sheep farming here in the UK and could improve the recognition of the value of sheep farming, as well as sheepmeat consumption.

The important role of sheep in the uplands and the common sense of pastoral grazing meat production was mentioned, and the reward for

the public-good approach was also mentioned many times. Examples were not just the environment and natural capital, but also access to land and benefits for public health, as well as the role of farming in maintaining rural infrastructure and communities.

Whether Mr Gove has arrived at these positions after reading some of NSA papers and reports, or whether we are just 'on the button' doesn't really matter. The potential for sheep farming to play a key role in the future of British agriculture is high, although we need to make a more attractive case than the rewilders and we need to make lamb and mutton a more attractive choice for consumers. Someone mentioned to me recently that sheepmeat should be the meat of choice for 'flexitarians' – those who make considered choices and want to save the planet and benefit their health. This all means we can't stand still – far from it. But if we listen, read the signs well, and adapt, we have as good a chance as any sector to thrive in what is still an uncertain and volatile future.

## Brexit update

As an indication of what is to come regarding the next steps with Brexit, Defra and DIT are consulting with the UK's International Trade Select Committee. It has launched an inquiry into the UK's trade relationship with Australia and New Zealand. It will be the first in a series of inquiries examining the potential for new trade relationships with members of the Commonwealth. NSA will respond to the inquiry. These inquiries will be important, but none more-so than our trade relationship with two of the leading sheepmeat producers in the world.

The expected command paper that will inform the future Agriculture Bill is expected imminently, the 25-year Environment Plan is now released (albeit with no consultation), and Michael Gove is now talking about the need for a coherent food policy.



## TSEs and splitting

NSA has been in renewed communication with Farming Ministers George Eustice and Lord Gardiner on the subject of TSEs and carcass splitting. Our most recent response states that the EU Commission has now tabled an amended proposal, which would permit a change in assessing when a sheep should be split (from tothing to a set date).

The Commission has also re-tabled a proposal (that the UK opposed first time round) to change the tissues that are considered to be Specified Risk Material and to remove the spinal cord from the list. Defra has produced evidence that is currently being considered by the Government Advisory Committee on Dangerous Pathogens and this will determine whether the UK supports this change or not.

Removing the spinal cord from the SRM list should, in theory, remove the need for splitting altogether. Whether the UK will support this move is still to be determined. The fact is that BSE, in field conditions, never crossed the species barrier and there is a complete absence of evidence that Scrapie represents any risk to human health. Furthermore, the success of the National Scrapie Plan has resulted in zero cases of classical Scrapie during the past two years.

## Sheep scab alert

NSA has been involved in many initiatives to eradicate, or reduce the effect of, sheep scab. The industry has been suffering (as have the sheep) from scab for more than 100 years and, despite a huge amount of effort and expense, it is still with us and, if anything, it is getting worse.

January 2018 saw various organisations interested in sheep health and scab specifically come together under the guidance of SCOPS for an intense two-day workshop to explore where we stand and whether we can have another co-ordinated effort. After so many 'failed attempts' it's not unreasonable to ask if it's worth it. But such a debilitating disease simply cannot be ignored, we can argue that we are looking at sustainable disease control and medicine use through fresh eyes given what has been learnt with wormers and antibiotics during the past decade or so, and the tools in the scab-control toolbox are being renewed, repaired, with some now needing to be handled gently so they don't break.

NSA members, and the wider industry, will hear a lot more

*continued on page 14*

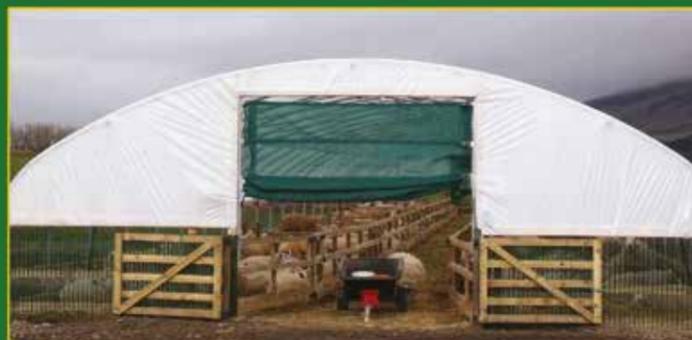
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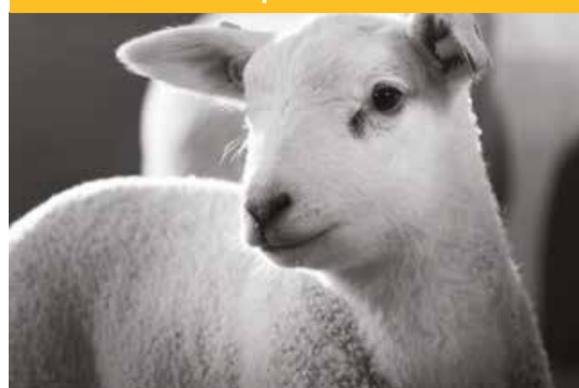
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about this during coming months – particularly following the news that there is evidence of resistance in sheep scab mites to the 3-ML endectocide products. Many reports also suggest that scab-infected sheep are increasingly being seen during the autumn and winter

months. And there are, indeed, strong indications that the ML injectables (such as Doramectin, Moxidectin, and Ivermectin) are in some cases not as effective as they once were.



On a positive note, we now have available an effective and commercially available ELISA test (originally developed by the Moredun Institute) that can identify antibodies from blood samples.

To be able to test for antibodies is far more accurate than skin scrapes and can obviously identify the presence of scab mites well before any visible lesions occur. This could be a highly valuable tool to help sheep farmers protect their flocks.

### Dipping initiatives

While dipping has declined in line with the increase in ML use, we are now seeing initiatives from professional and well-equipped mobile dippers that are resulting in an expansion in throughput. Although it's not widely discussed, we have reasonable knowledge of scab hotspot regions. It is not, and must not be, a crime to get sheep scab. But to ignore it, or to fail to take reasonable steps to deal with it, is unacceptable. It leads to serious welfare problems, as well as impacting on other flocks. Watch out for more on this and please do get involved as the issue develops.



Pictures courtesy Neil Sargison

# Not all sheep taste the same

By Bob Kennard, NSA

**The Victorians knew a thing or two about mutton – the meat largely fed the manpower needed for the industrial revolution. The Victorians may not have understood the health-giving benefits of mutton's high levels of Omega 3 fatty acids, but they did know about the effect of breeds on the flavour of the meat. As Mrs Beeton wrote in 1864: 'The difference in the quality of the flesh of various breeds is a well-established fact, not alone in flavour, but also in tenderness.'**



Yet, there have been no modern scientific taste comparisons between breeds of sheep using animals more than two years old. Taste differences between breeds in lambs have shown that breed plays no part in determining the flavour of sheep meat, but this appears to be only true of animals that are less than a year old.

As part of the Heritage Sheep feasibility study, currently being carried out by the NSA, a taste test was carried out at the Welsh Winter Fair in November. Show-goers were asked for their comments on eating differences between samples of mutton from three Welsh breeds of sheep.

### Wide diversity

Currently, most promotional work on sheepmeat is focused on one product, standard lamb. But there is, in fact, a wide diversity of UK sheepmeat of which the public are not generally aware – unlike the revolution of choice to be seen in most other food sectors.

Sheepmeat consumption has not only declined in recent years, but the age profile of those eating it is predominantly older. If the diversity of sheepmeat could capture the imagination of younger consumers, this would be a welcome boost for sheep producers, and the priceless gene pool of our 60+ native breeds could have a premium market value.

NSA sees the potential for a more diverse sheepmeat market, similar to that seen in the whisky sector. Like the sheep producers' standard lamb, whisky producers supply a standard mass-market, blended-grain product. They also have a wide range of malt whiskies, which vary according to the distillery location, ingredients and environment, producing subtle differences in flavour and character. These are categorised by



Mutton breed tasting at the Welsh Winter Fair.

terms such as light, fruity, rich or full-bodied.

Just such a descriptive system could be applied to older sheepmeat, perhaps using descriptors such as sweet, rich, herby and mild.

However, before that, it needs to be demonstrated that there are indeed breed differences in eating qualities.

During the past year, three meetings have been held in London, Edinburgh and Abergavenny, where mutton breeds have been compared. Anecdotally, all three have shown significant differences in eating experience between the breeds. However, until the NSA tasting at the Winter Fair, there had not been a systematic tasting of mutton breeds, with an analysis of the results.

### Eliminating variables

It was important for the NSA trial to eliminate as many variables as possible. Three Welsh breeds – South Wales Mountain, Beulah Mule and Lleyn – represented mountain, hill and lowland breeds. All three were grass-fed, ages at slaughter varied between three and seven years, and all carcasses were dry-aged for between 14 and 18 days. Legs of each breed were cooked slowly in sealed roasting bags.

NSA staff offered the samples to fair visitors and asked them to score various attributes:

**Tenderness** – 1 to 7 (1 being tough and 7 very tender).

**Juiciness** – 1 to 7 (1 being dry and 7 very juicy in the mouth).

**Sweetness** – 1 to 7 (1 having no sweetness and 7 being very sweet).

Also, on a scale of 1 to 7, the samplers were asked to consider the differences in flavour and texture between the samples. Here, a score

of 1 would denote that they tasted no difference between the sample, through to 7 which would denote a very great deal of difference.

A total of 99 people were interviewed with a good spread of ages, from teenagers to the elderly. The gender split was 56% men and 44% women.

The three breeds scored well on all three attributes, with averages of 5.9 out of 7 for tenderness, 5.0 on juiciness, and 5.0 on sweetness.

The purpose of this exercise was not to rank the breeds, but to gauge the degree of differences between the breeds.

The majority of respondents thought there were significant differences between the breeds. The average score for degree of difference, in both flavour and texture, was 4.9 out of a possible 7. This finding is in line with anecdotal results from the tastings carried out elsewhere.

### Eating qualities

The opening lines of a Victorian poem by Thomas Love Peacock are: 'The mountain sheep are sweeter, but the valley sheep are fatter.'

Throughout the Victorian period, UK mountain breeds of mutton were highly prized, particularly for their sweetness, as Peacock's poem suggests. Analysis of the NSA tastings clearly demonstrates the favourite breed for sweetness was the South Wales Mountain, as it was for tenderness.

While further tastings comparing other breeds are needed, the results demonstrate that breed differences in eating qualities of older sheep are real. More than that, the results corroborate the views of Victorian writers that certain breeds excel in specific attributes.

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# Halal meat: trends, challenges and opportunities

By Emma Heathcote, AHDB Beef & Lamb  
**Halal is an Arabic word for anything that is permissible for Muslims. Although it is often used in relation to food suitable for consumption by Muslims, its religious interpretation covers other aspects of life including Islamic marriage and business transactions. The opposite of Halal is Haram, meaning not permitted.**



Above: Cooking with Saima on YouTube.com.



Left: www.simplybeefandlamb.co.uk

For meat to be Halal, it must be derived from a permissible animal slaughtered by a person of faith while the animal is alive, but not necessarily conscious. While some Muslim authorities permit some forms of pre-slaughter stunning, others are of the view that these methods do not guarantee a live animal at the point the neck is cut, hence they put a blanket ban on all forms of stunning. It is worth noting that the slaughter of animals without stunning in the UK is a legal and highly regulated procedure.

## Market growth

The world market for Halal meat is economically significant and continues to grow due to the expansion of the Muslim population. There are an estimated 1.8 billion Muslims globally, two thirds are under

the age of 30 and generally consume a heavily meat-based diet. The recent movement of millions of Muslims to Europe from unstable Muslim-majority countries has reinforced the significance of the Halal market in Europe. In the UK, the population of Muslims is less than 5%, but they account for more than 20% of sheep meat consumption. Additionally, the UK Halal market underpins the ewe trade. So the significance of this market for



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YouTube stars cook with Halal meat.

sheep producers cannot be underestimated.

It is vital for producers and processors to understand the requirements of this growing segment of the market, as well as the seasons for peak Halal meat consumption, in order to maximise the opportunities it offers.

Ramadan, when Muslims abstain from eating food during day-light hours and families get together in the evenings to break their fast, is one of the peak periods for Halal sheep meat consumption. The festival lasts for 29 or 30 days, depending on the sighting of the moon, and is followed immediately by Eid-al-Fitr, which also brings families together for celebratory meals to mark the end of the month-long fast.

## Key festivals

The estimated start date for Ramadan in 2018 is Wednesday 16 May, plus or minus a day, and that for Eid-al-Fitr is Friday 15 June. The third key festival is Eid-al-Adha, which is usually referred to as Qurbani.

During this festival, every capable Muslim is expected to have an animal killed and offer a portion of it to the destitute in society, as well as to neighbours, family and friends. Sheep are the most common animals used during the three-day Eid-al-Adha festivities in the UK, and the throughputs of Halal abattoirs significantly increase to meet this demand. Eid-al-Adha is expected to fall this year on Tuesday 21 August.

In recent years, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) has increased its activities in the Halal sector, with a view to better understanding and further developing this market. The creation of the first Halal sector manager's role, in early 2017, was a key step towards making this happen.

AHDB is aiming to create a platform for sheep producers and opinion leaders in the Muslim community to increase understanding of the requirements of the Halal market. In October 2017, AHDB, in collaboration with the NFU, organised a farm visit in Leicestershire for Halal sector stakeholders, which was attended by Islamic scholars, Halal certification bodies and abattoir operators.

## Necessary accreditations

In terms of access to the export market, AHDB is working closely with the major UK Halal certification bodies to ensure that we have the necessary accreditations in place to ensure the smooth movement of products from the UK to the global Halal marketplace.

In the summer of 2017, AHDB launched a consumer campaign to promote lamb as a versatile product to the Muslim community, with Muslim social influencers recruited to demonstrate different ways of utilising lamb to create easy-to cook meals in a series of videos. The content was then shared on different social media platforms to engage the Muslim consumer. Other activities aimed at improving animal welfare at slaughter and product quality have been planned for the future.

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# Progressive attitude drives Gloucestershire-based business

By Hannah Park, NSA

**An open mind with a keen eye for business opportunities is the approach that Henry Dunn and his family have taken to running their mixed farming enterprise in Newent, Gloucestershire. As a result, Upleadon Court has expanded from 180 hectares (450 acres) to 280 hectares (700 acres). The farm now comprises 100 hectares (250 acres) of arable production alongside permanent pasture, which supports 700 ewes, 250 finishing cattle and is run in tandem with successful lamb marketing group May Hill Producers.**

When Gloucester Market closed, after the foot-and-mouth disease crisis in 2001, Henry and his neighbour Mike Credland saw an opportunity and formed the May Hill group, which operates from Upleadon Court's collection centre. Supplied by local farmers, as well as producers further afield, it operates 52 weeks of the year, supplying lambs into Randall Parker Foods, Llanidloes for retail into Sainsburys, and export markets including France and Germany.

## Education platform

The group, as well as his long-standing involvement in NSA Marches Region (most recently his appointment as the regions Trustee/Board Member), has provided the ideal platform for education, according to Henry. "This is something that I see as vital to the future of the sheep industry. We hold a lot of meetings and open days for consumers and farmers through the May



Shearling ewes, which will form the final lambing batch of 180.

Hill group. "Depending on the audience, we'll talk about how the collection centre works as a step in the supply chain, or the role of EID when it comes to traceability and farm assurance.

"For farmer audiences, we talk about the importance of consistently drawing lambs to specification. Our guys know

that we're looking for a 20-kilogramme, 2-3L carcass at R&U grades when they bring their lambs in. And they need to be weighing and handling them regularly to achieve this."

## Valuable network

Henry explains that May Hill has become a valuable network of not only customers, but also producers who discuss and share information on a regular basis. "We learn from one another," he says. "It's connected us to much a wider pool of people in the sheep industry and across the supply chain – people we may not have met otherwise. And it has also helped us expand and improve our own enterprise, which is all helpful if you keep an open mind and a keen eye on the business.

"We've expanded and developed the farm during several years and erected a lot of new buildings. But you've got to have a vision of where you want to get to and run it as a business, as well as a farm. It's no good just farming or being busy outside, you've got to be able to look at a set of accounts and know where and how you're going to run the business well."

Since taking the reins at Upleadon in 1980, there has been considerable

investment in farm buildings, sheep and cattle. The flock of 700 ewes comprises North Country Mules, alongside Suffolk and Texel crosses. Mules are put to a Suffolk tup, with crosses put to either the Charollais or Texel. The ewes are lambed indoors in four batches of 180, which Henry says makes the work load more manageable between himself, wife Carol and younger daughter Sarah.

Alongside her work on the farm, Sarah is also an active member of her local Young Farmers and Tug of War clubs. And Henry's eldest daughter Rachel works for a private planning consultancy firm, but has helped on the farm and at NSA events that the family has been involved in. These have included several regional NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions including the most recent, in 2017, where Sarah won and qualified for a place in the final at NSA Sheep 2018 in July.

## Flock health

Aside from a 'handful' of Suffolk Mules that are retained annually as replacements, the majority of the lamb crop is finished and Henry offers creep feed with the intention of drawing lambs to sell on a weekly basis as lambs hit 12 weeks old. Replacements are generally sourced from the same, local farms

each year. New arrivals are quarantined on arrival and receive an orange drench (4-AD) alongside one for fluke. Ewes are also vaccinated against enzootic and toxoplasmosis abortion and all sheep are annually plunge dipped and bolused with trace elements.

Henry says flock health has benefited hugely in recent years thanks to engagement with sheep vet Fiona Lovett, his own local vet practice in Gloucester, and independent consultant Lesley Stubbings. "Working to reduce the level of lameness in the flock has been one of the main successes in recent years," says Henry. "It's all about using the correct treatment. Rather than using antibiotic for all issues, we now identify a problem and treat accordingly. But we're constantly changing and learning with our practices and how we do things. Nothing is set in stone and you've got to move with the times and whatever is out there.

## Embracing change

"We're always looking to the future and at ways that we can improve and we are always willing to change." And it is this attitude to change that Henry says will be key to a future for the UK sheep industry outside the European Union. "The UK sheep trade is dominated by exchange rates and if the industry is to remain profitable then we need a Brexit deal with workable tariff rates to allow exports to continue. Only time will tell if we get them.

"We're in a serious situation at the moment, with a growing percentage of people under 35 years old who don't want to eat, or have little interest in eating, lamb. We're producing a niche

## Farm facts

- 280 hectares (700 acres) in total. 100 hectares (250 acres) of arable production and permanent pasture.
- 100 hectares (250 acres) of wheat, barley and oats. 20 hectares (50 acres) of forage maize (for silage) is also grown, as well as red and white clover, which is sown as a greening crop. Stubble turnips were also grown for the first time this year.
- 700 ewes, plus 250 finishing cattle bought in annually.
- Lamb marketing group May Hill Producers established in 2001 and operated from Upleadon Court Collection Centre.

product and it's vital that the connection to consumers is made.

"We need to produce what people want to see on their plates. Realistically, this is smaller and quicker cooking cuts without compromising on taste."



A total of 250 finishing cattle are bought in each year.



Henry Dunn and daughter Sarah.



Henry runs North Country Mules, alongside Suffolk and Texel crosses.

# All change for agricultural landlords and tenants?

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes Solicitors  
**The Tenancy Reform Industry Group (TRIG) met during summer 2017 to develop recommendations for reform that relate to both Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) tenancies and farm business tenancies (FBTs). The group picked up on themes from previous reviews, as well as exploring ways to enhance productivity in the let sector.**



Recommendations included:

- Limited income tax relief on farm land rents to encourage letting and letting for longer. Evidence from Ireland shows this can have a powerful effect.
- SDLT – exempt leases of agricultural property, to remove a deterrent to a tenant taking a longer lease.
- CGT Rollover Relief – allow reinvestment in improvements to let farmland.

## Unanimous approval

The County Farms working group unanimously approval a set of recommendations, including:

- The formal examination and approval of Local Authority proposals for their rural estate strategy (including strategic capital disposals where these are proposed as part of the strategic plan).
- The amendment of statutory provisions relating to smallholdings to reflect the change in state pension age (and any future change).
- The adoption of a single rural dwelling exceptions policy under planning legislation to allow local authorities to grant consent for rural dwellings in appropriate locations and with suitable agricultural-tie conditions.



It remains to be seen how many of TRIG's recommendations make their way into the final draft of the upcoming Agriculture Bill or other legislation (changes to the fiscal regime require Treasury involvement). Ministers have given few hints so far, but George Eustice told the Tenant Farmers' Association autumn 2017 conference that ministers were looking very carefully at what he called the 'interesting package of measures' that came from TRIG.

It may be that Brexit, future farm support schemes and the impacts of devolution on agriculture will dominate the legislative landscape to the exclusion of these more technical matters, but it would be a shame if this further work by TRIG was not taken up by policy makers.

to the fiscal regime require Treasury involvement). Ministers have given few hints so far, but George Eustice told the Tenant Farmers' Association autumn 2017 conference that ministers were looking very carefully at what he called the 'interesting package of measures' that came from TRIG.

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Copies of TRIG's working group papers, submitted to Defra Minister George Eustice in October, have now been published. Headline recommendations affecting AHAs and FBTs are as follows:

- As an alternative to forfeiture, to allow FBTs of more than 10 years to be terminated by notice for non-payment of rent, tenant's breaches or death and (in part) following planning consent for non-agricultural use – the 'notice' procedure to follow broadly the lines of that used in the AHA regime.
- To give an existing AHA landlord and tenant greater freedom to make changes to the holding where there is agreement on re-organisation and where the parties agree that the new/amended agreement is to remain within the AHA.
- To allow AHA landlords to invest in the holding without impinging on the statutory rent review process (in effect, on terms equivalent to any other provider of finance for such work).
- Where there are clauses in AHA tenancy agreements that restrict freedom of movement, to permit either landlord or tenant to serve a notice referring the clause to dispute resolution with a view to it being modified.
- AHA tenancy clauses prohibiting the erection or alteration of buildings to be subject to a test of reasonableness.
- To introduce a time limit in the AHA for referring 'notice to do works' counter-notices to dispute resolution and a counter-notice procedure for other notices to remedy under Case D.
- To amend the timetable for AHA game damage claims.
- To introduce a statutory mechanism for conversion of a year-to-year AHA to a fixed term assignable AHA tenancy.
- In relation to AHA succession, to replace the suitability test with a business competence test and repeal the commercial unit test.
- To limit the availability of succession where the tenant is above a particular age.
- To allow a wider range of AHA successors but with a limited term AHA tenancy being offered, at an open market rent, after which an incontestable notice to quit could be served.

## Taxation

On the tax front, there were several technical recommendations. Notably, however, most of the tax working group were not in favour of the TFA's call for APR to be disallowed for future lettings of fewer than 10 years.

# Winner's passion for sheep and sheepdog training shines

By Wendy Short, contributor  
**The sheepdog trialling world was taken by storm in summer 2017 when Lancaster-based Ricky Hutchinson won both the supreme championship and reserve place at the International Sheepdog Trial, with Jock and his sire, Sweep, respectively.**

For one person to scoop both positions is not unique, insists Ricky, but it is nevertheless a tremendous achievement. And it followed on from success at the English National trials earlier in the summer, when Sweep was the overall winner, as well as securing the brace championship with Jock, who was placed fifth individually.

When asked which of the two dog stands out as his all-time favourite, however, Ricky has no hesitation in naming Sweep, now 11 years old and retired from major trials. He is by Ricky's own Wendedale Roy and out of one of his bitches, Lyn, while Jock is out of Ian Brownlie's Mo, who won the International title in 2013.

## Different dogs

"Despite being father and son, the two dogs are very different," says Ricky. "Sweep likes to think things out and Jock likes to knock things out. My partnership with Sweep is so strong that it feels as if we are making decisions together. He is the best dog that I have ever had and he understands sheep better than I ever could.

"The bond with Jock is not quite as solid, but we are getting there and I can only hope he will carry on improving. At just over four years old, he already has the International trial under his belt, while Sweep was five-and-a-half before



Ricky Hutchinson with his dogs Sweep and Jock.

he won the English title. He also came third in the World trial in 2014," he explains

Sheepdogs are not Ricky's only passion and he is equally committed to his flock of 500 Swaledale ewes, based at the family farm in Litledale. This flock size is not large enough to make a living, of course, and so dog and handler training has become Ricky's main stream of income. His championship wins, coupled with the view that UK trainers are among the best in the world, makes him in great demand as a teacher. Ricky has made 65 trips to the US and Europe during the past two years alone and his clinics are always fully booked.

## Right approach

"The main problem that I see is difficulty with the stop," he says. "That is 90% of training and if it is unreliable, then the dog is unlikely to progress much further. With the right approach, it can be corrected in most dogs, but it is harder to tackle when they are older because ignoring the command will have become a habit.

"Nearly all sheepdogs want to please their handlers, but they need to be taught correctly. In many cases, people think their dogs are being defiant, when in fact they are confused. It is not fair to leave a dog in its kennel for several weeks and then take it out and expect it to work sheep efficiently. It is worth investing time in getting the basics right and then the rest will follow."

A strong belief that trial dogs should be competent at farm work lies at the

heart of Ricky's training. He is convinced that this is where they learn to think for themselves. He generally starts training pups at between seven and 10 months old, although there is no hard and fast rule because a lot depends on individual temperament. He uses the same open-minded approach when choosing a new dog to add to his 21-strong pack.

## New blood

"Good dogs are very hard to find, so it doesn't make sense to limit your preference in any way," he stresses. "I usually take the last pup left out of the litter. It is often the small and scrawny one – a bit like me when I was younger!

"I breed a couple of litters a year and I may keep one, but I will also buy an older dog, if I like what I see. In fact, I bought Sweep at 16 months old from Ben Randles, from the Chatsworth Estate in Derbyshire, where I used to work as a shepherd. At the moment, I have a young competition bitch named Moya who is coming on to replace Sweep."

Ricky has a message for readers who have an interest in sheepdog trialling. "I would like to see the sheep industry and working dogs remain at the heart of trialling, although there is a place for hobby competitors. If any sheep producers reading this have an interest in getting started, I would encourage them to take the next step and get in touch with their local association. It is a great hobby and you will meet a lot of good folk. We need new blood in our sport."

Photo © Lisa Soar

# Scotch Lamb campaign strengthens retail demand

The recent Scotch Lamb PGI marketing campaign, undertaken by Quality Meat Scotland, has delivered strong results for the industry in Scotland.

First launched in 2013 and now in its final year, the 'Wham Bam Lamb Thank You Lamb' campaign focused on how simple and quick Scotch Lamb is to cook. It also aimed to encourage Scottish consumers to incorporate lamb into their mid-week meal repertoire, highlighting that it is simple to rustle up a delicious dish in under 30 minutes.

A key driver for the campaign was to get more Scottish people eating lamb. It set out to change the traditional image that lamb is only good for a Sunday roast and reposition it as a modern, versatile, mid-week meal solution. That is critical to ensure that younger consumers experience lamb and consider it as a great option for their dinner tables, either alone or with their family or friends.

Figures from Kantar Worldpanel (12-week data to 5 November 2017) show retail sales of Scottish-origin lamb in Scotland increased by 38.2% during the high-impact campaign compared with the same period in 2016.

Overall retail sales of lamb in Scotland increased by 3.5% in value terms during the twelve-week period of the Quality Meat Scotland (QMS) marketing campaign and the average price of Scottish-origin lamb increased by 13.2% to £10.01 per kg.

## Greater frequency

Reaching 87% of Scottish adults, the campaign saw a 27% volume increase of the number of people buying lamb and shoppers were also buying it more often. This strong Scottish-origin performance was set against a declining UK market, with overall sales of lamb decreasing by more than 10% across the country.

The campaign included eye-catching adverts on billboards and in the press, commercial radio advertising, as well as online and in-store activities – including some opportunities for consumers to sample delicious lamb dishes before they bought.

Adverts on commercial radio stations put the 'versatile Scotch Lamb' message across to consumers on their busy commute, at a time when they would be thinking about what they would like for their dinner. This was then backed up by visual marketing outside stores, which encouraged consumers to buy the product.

"Digital advertising, including activity on social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook, continues to be a



good tool for us to communicate with our target market," says QMS's Marketing Controller Suzie Carlaw. "The trend now is for people to search online for recipes rather than reach for the old cook book to inspiration.

"There are some fantastic, quick and easy recipes that can be found through the Scotch Kitchen's Facebook and Twitter pages, or on the Scotch Kitchen website.

Recipe leaflets and other point-of-sale materials were also distributed via the members of the Scotch Butchers Club, run by QMS.

## 'Lambassador' support

Supporting the marketing campaign was a high impact PR campaign, which included support from TV presenter Andrea Mclean as the campaign 'lambassador'. Andrea visited a sheep farm, near Galashiels, where she spent time with Graham and Kathleen Lofthouse at Bankhouse Farm,

the 2017 Scottish Sheep Farm of the Year.

She then joined a group of top Scottish bloggers for a session in Edinburgh, cooking some of her favourite Scotch Lamb dishes to help raise the profile of quality assured Scotch Lamb.

Other activities also included the artistic and creative talent of members of the Scottish Association of Young Farmers Clubs (SAYFC). They were challenged to create 'bale art', which included the Scotch Lamb logo, and a Justgiving page was set up so that people who were impressed with the young farmers' works of art could donate in support of the STV Children's Appeal. The winning bale art was selected by TV presenter Lorraine Kelly.

"The figures demonstrate that when lamb is put front of mind with consumers, through a promotional campaign like 'Wham Bam Thank You Lamb', great results can be achieved.

"It's also really encouraging that the figures show there is a strong demand for chops, steaks and mince by the younger generation, which highlights that they don't just view lamb as a Sunday meal but as a mid-week meal too," adds Miss Carlaw.





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# Antibiotics: as little as possible, as much as necessary

By Emma Heathcote, AHDB Beef & Lamb

The sheep industry, like



all other livestock sectors, is being challenged to ensure more responsible use of antibiotics. The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) has set a target for the sheep industry to reduce usage by 10% while maintaining good health and welfare.

Lambing time is a hotspot for antibiotic use, with one study finding that more than 40% of the antibiotics used on sheep farms are associated with lambing. For example, pregnant ewes injected to prevent enzootic abortion, young lambs treated to prevent watery mouth and joint ill, and ewes that require intervention at lambing.

Watery mouth can result in significant lamb losses around lambing time, with joint ill causing problems during lambing and after turnout. Good hygiene at lambing and sufficient consumption of colostrum by lambs are vital to reduce the disease challenge and the amount of antibiotics used.

One way to meet the RUMA target is to encourage sheep producers to avoid using routine prophylactic antibiotics for neonatal lambs, except in high risk situations, as assessed in the veterinary flock health plan. This can be tracked by looking at oral antibiotics sales, which are quite specific to the sheep industry, with the aim of a 10% reduction in sales during the next five years.

"There is a big drive for all livestock

industries to reduce antibiotic use and move away from blanket treating all animals, many of which do not show any signs of disease before treatment," says AHDB Beef & Lamb Senior Scientist Liz Genever.

"Instead of relying on antibiotics, sheep producers should ensure high levels of hygiene at lambing by using clean and dry pens, using clean gloves, and washing hands regularly. It is also important to manage ewe diets by testing forage and supplementing it appropriately so the ewes produce good quality colostrum, which will help the lambs face any disease challenges that remain."

## Watery mouth

Watery mouth is caused by lambs swallowing bacteria from the environment. The bacteria produce toxins which, when absorbed by the lamb, causes drooling and swelling of the abdomen. Affected lambs usually stop feeding, show signs of abdominal pain and are wet around the mouth. Lambs need to be treated rapidly with antibiotics and anti-inflammatory drugs or they will quickly die. Inadequate colostrum quality is usually the underlying cause.

## Joint ill

Joint ill is caused by infection, which can be ingested or may enter the body through open wounds such as the navel in very young lambs or through tagging, docking or castration wounds in slightly older lambs. Affected lambs are usually

## Lambs at high risk of watery mouth include:

- Those born to young or thin ewes
- Triplets
- Small or very large birth weight
- Stressful lambing
- Later-born lambs

dull, with one or more swollen, painful joints. Infection can also occur in the spine, resulting in paralysis of either the hind limbs only, or all four legs.

## Prevention

Prevention is better than cure. Ensuring optimal ewe nutrition and practicing strict hygiene around lambing will reduce the chance of lambs succumbing to these diseases.

"Making sure that ewe nutrition is right in the final few weeks of pregnancy will help ewes to produce good quality colostrum," explains Dr Genever. "Most of the mammary gland development takes place during the final weeks of pregnancy and there is a clear relationship between ewes' energy intake during this period and colostrum production.

She adds that inadequate nutrition pre-lambing not only reduces the quantity of colostrum and milk produced, but also delays the onset of lactation and increases the viscosity (thickness) of colostrum. "Since viscosity and volume of colostrum are inversely related, this is a major issue for new-born lambs. The lamb may also find it more difficult to extract thick colostrum from the teat."

## Treatment

In individual flocks, and with close veterinary supervision, it may be appropriate to use targeted control measures that include antibiotic treatment. "But it is not appropriate for all lambs to be treated routinely from the start of the lambing season," stresses Dr Genever. "Antibiotic treatments should be targeted towards high-risk individuals, following a proactive flock health plan and in consultation with your vet."

For more information, see the BRP manual *Reducing Lamb Losses for Better Returns, Improving Ewe Nutrition for Better Returns and Feeding the Ewe*, available at [beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/returns](http://beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/returns)



# Monitoring notifiable and other important sheep diseases

By Amanda Carson, Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA)

**The OIE is the international 'World Organisation for Animal Health' that is responsible for improving animal health worldwide. It is recognised as a reference organisation by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and in 2017 had a total of 181 member countries, including the UK. The OIE maintains permanent relations with 71 other international and regional organisations and has regional and sub-regional offices on every continent.**

One of OIE's missions is to ensure transparency in, and enhance knowledge of, the worldwide animal health situation. Among the formal obligations of OIE member countries is the submission of information on the relevant animal disease situation present in their territory, including zoonoses (infections or diseases which can be transmitted from animals to people), in a timely and transparent way.

## Extensive database

And one of the functions of livestock and wildlife disease surveillance performed by Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) is to monitor and report on diseases, that occur in the UK, to the OIE every six months.

A single OIE list of notifiable terrestrial and aquatic animal diseases has been established, and the OIE manages the World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS), which can be found at [www.oie.int/animal-health-in-the-world/the-world-animal-health-information-system/the-oie-data-system](http://www.oie.int/animal-health-in-the-world/the-world-animal-health-information-system/the-oie-data-system). This provides information on the 116 diseases listed. This extensive database is a cornerstone in OIE efforts to minimise the spread of important animal diseases and to assist in achieving better worldwide control of these diseases and to facilitate trade.

The diseases that relate to sheep fall into four different categories.

### • Notifiable exotic diseases

Notifiable diseases are animal diseases that you are legally obliged to report to the APHA, even if you only suspect that an animal or groups of animals may be affected. These notifiable exotic diseases are not present in the UK and some are also zoonotic.

Descriptions of these notifiable diseases can be found on the gov.uk webpages: <https://www.gov.uk/>

*government/collections/notifiable-diseases-in-animals*

The APHA International Disease Monitoring Team also continually monitor for any major, notifiable or new and emerging animal disease outbreaks worldwide. They do this as an early warning to assess the risk that such diseases may pose to the UK. This includes, publishing preliminary outbreak assessments and updated situation assessments. A recent example would be Bluetongue, which is present in Europe, but not in the UK.

### • Notifiable endemic diseases

These are notifiable diseases that are present in some parts of the UK, such as TB and Scrapie. Any suspicion of these diseases in your sheep must be reported immediately to APHA.

### • Endemic diseases

There are several endemic diseases of sheep in the UK. Some examples include: paratuberculosis (Johne's disease), Border disease, Caprine arthritis/encephalitis, Maedi-Visna, and ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma.

However, some of these diseases are not present in other countries and so may influence trade requirements. An example is Maedi-Visna, so breeding animals must be tested before they can be exported.

### • Zoonotic diseases

Zoonoses are infections or diseases that can pass between animals and humans. Prompt and robust investigation and management of potential zoonotic infections is vital and requires close collaboration between various governmental and non-governmental agencies and other professionals, including vets.

The Human Animal Infections and Risk Surveillance (HAIRS) group is a multi-agency and cross-disciplinary horizon scanning group, chaired by the Public Health England. The HAIRS group meets once a month and acts as a forum to identify and discuss infections that have been identified, as well as periodically publishing information online about them.

## APHA's role

Vets must always consider the possibility of notifiable disease when examining sick animals. If there are signs that are cause for concern then these are reported to APHA and an official

veterinary investigation is carried out. Samples may be collected and are sent by courier to the specialist laboratories for testing. The labs are on call 24/7 so results can be provided as quickly as possible.

Scanning surveillance activities contribute through the provision of post-mortem examinations and laboratory testing. And every laboratory submission to APHA in England and Wales, SAC in Scotland, and AFBI in Northern Ireland, is considered for the presence of notifiable disease. Frequent telephone contact between veterinary investigation officers and private veterinary practitioners ensures that notifiable disease, or new and re-emerging disease, is considered in on-farm diagnosis.

For more information visit: England and Wales: <http://ahvla.defra.gov.uk/vet-gateway/surveillance/diagnostic/national-network.htm>

Scotland: [https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120144/farm\\_animal\\_diagnostics](https://www.sruc.ac.uk/info/120144/farm_animal_diagnostics)

Northern Ireland: <https://www.afbini.gov.uk/articles/animal-disease-diagnostic-services>

## Producers' role

Livestock producers are the frontline for detecting disease and reporting their suspicions to either their vet or directly to APHA. Producers also participate in targeted surveillance of certain diseases. Brucella is one example. By taking part in an annual sheep and goat survey, producers agree to allow APHA to collect blood samples from sheep and goat flocks for Brucella testing and this demonstrates our freedom as a country from this disease.

## Disease picture

Producers and vets are the 'eyes and ears' of animal health monitoring and reporting. It is vital that any suspicion of notifiable disease is reported quickly to APHA to ensure early identification and control of these diseases, should they occur.

Working together, producers, vets, APHA and other organisations can also build a picture of endemic diseases in livestock. In turn, this helps to raise awareness of these diseases and can help to improve the overall health and welfare of the national flock, as well facilitate international trade and protect public health.



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# Abortion in sheep: causes and prevention

By Shona Mouncey, Paragon Veterinary Group



**Many sheep producers will be preparing up for lambing time, if they're not already in the thick of it. Hopefully scan results will have been promising, despite the challenging weather at tupping time in 2017, and things are on track for a healthy lamb crop.**

Unfortunately, now is also when we start to see visible lamb losses, with abortions between scanning and lambing accounting for 30% of total lamb losses. For a lowland flock we would be aiming for a lambing percentage of 180% and above, with abortions occurring in fewer than 2% of ewes. Any more than this and investigation is likely to be merited. Each lamb lost before the point of lambing is thought to cost between £20 and £25.



There are both infectious and non-infectious causes of abortion in sheep. Many of the infectious causes are zoonotic and so can be harmful to people, particularly pregnant women, and so it is important to minimise the risk of these diseases to your flock, family and staff.

## Major risk

Enzootic abortion is a bacterial infection caused by *Chlamydia abortus*. The source of infection is carrier sheep, with infection being spread at lambing time from aborted/infected lambs, uterine discharge and bedding. Buying in sheep is a major risk for the introduction of this disease, which accounts for 52% of diagnosed abortions.

Abortions tend to occur late in pregnancy and it is recommended that the ewes are not retained for future breeding as they may abort again and remain infectious to other sheep. They must not have lambs fostered onto them after aborting.



Aborted lamb.

Toxoplasmosis is caused by a parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii* and accounts for 25% of diagnosed abortions. The disease is spread from infected cat faeces in contaminated feed, water and bedding and the outcome depends on the stage of pregnancy when sheep are infected.

If infected early in pregnancy, the foetuses are often re-absorbed and the ewe presents as barren. When infected in late pregnancy, lambs may be stillborn, mummified, or born alive but weak. With twins, one lamb may be born alive but weak, and its twin may be mummified. The latter example is a classic presentation of toxoplasmosis.

Following infection, sheep do tend to develop immunity and so it is advised to retain infected sheep for future breeding as the disease does not spread from sheep to sheep, and sheep should not abort more than once from toxoplasmosis.

## Adequate nutrition

Salmonella, campylobacter and listeria are three other bacterial infections that can cause abortion in sheep and may cause the ewe to be ill herself. Salmonella and campylobacter are spread from sheep to sheep and also by wildlife or birds. Listeria is found in silage contaminated with soil.

Non-infectious causes include inadequate nutrition, metabolic disease, stress from weather, overstocking or worrying by dogs.

Scanning ewes will help to ensure adequate nutrition because diets can

be tailored to the number of lambs, which in turn helps to prevent metabolic diseases such as twin lamb disease. Ewes should not lose more than 0.5 of a body condition score between scanning and lambing, with the aim for lowland ewes to be at a condition score of 3 at lambing time.

With so many causes of abortion, it is important to carry out diagnostic tests if more than 2% of ewes are affected, or clusters of abortion occur, so that the correct prevention plan can be put in place.

## Standard approach

Before a diagnosis is reached, the standard approach to any aborted ewe should be the same:

- Isolate from other ewes and permanently mark so that she can be identified later.
- Biosecurity must be maintained with kit, buckets and boots being disinfected after contact with sheep that have aborted.
- Gloves should always be worn and hands washed after handling aborted ewes.
- Retain aborted lambs and placenta for sampling in a clean bag.
- Speak to your vet for advice on diagnostics.
- Dispose of bedding carefully and disinfect pen after use.

While some causes of abortion have characteristic features, such as their timing or the appearance of the placenta, the only way to know the

cause for sure is to carry out laboratory testing. Samples from both aborted lambs and placenta give the best chance of a diagnosis.

During outbreaks of multiple abortions samples should be taken because sometimes a diagnosis is not reached on the first set of samples. Ewes may also be blood sampled and there are often subsidised schemes to reduce the cost, which may be carried out at the end of lambing in one batch of between six and eight ewes.

It is important to clearly identify the ewes that have aborted or are barren at the end of lambing so that they can be found for sampling later, if this is required. Non-infectious conditions can be harder to identify, but often an accurate history and examination of others in the flock may be suggestive of the cause.

## Prevention plan

Once a diagnosis is found, a prevention plan can be put in place. Both enzootic and toxoplasmosis are preventable by vaccination prior to the next breeding season, although toxoplasma vaccines have been in short supply during 2017.

During the affected lambing season, a treatment plan should be discussed with your vet once a diagnosis is found. Unfortunately, in many cases, there is little that can be done to prevent further abortions during that season and the focus has to be on prevention for the following season. There is a vaccine available that can be used in pregnant sheep during an outbreak of enzootic abortion, but otherwise they are not safe to use in pregnant animals.

Experiencing abortions can be a disheartening experience, but taking the correct steps can help to minimise the spread within your flock and, by reaching a diagnosis, plans can be put in place to try to prevent further losses in the future.

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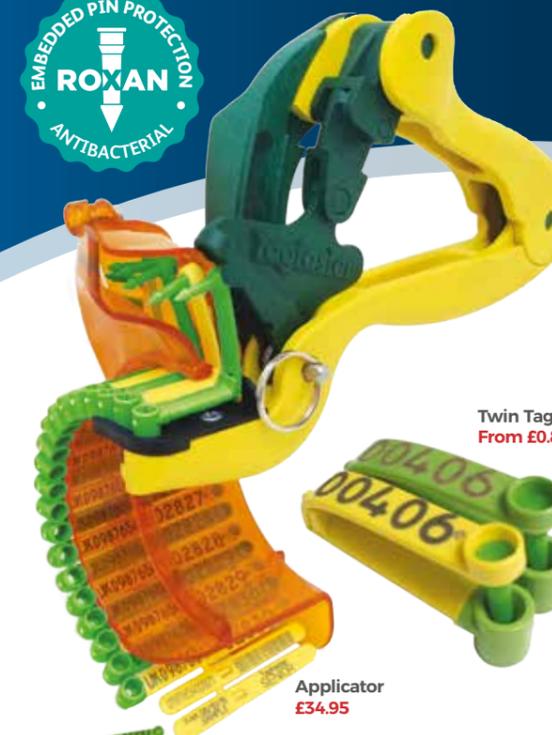
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# Best-practice guidelines for controlling louping ill

By Beth Wells, Moredun

The louping ill vaccine, which was successfully developed and initially produced at Moredun in the 1930s, has become temporarily unavailable.



There are currently low stocks of vaccine left that have been allocated to vets in areas of the UK where the virus is highly prevalent. But the absence of this vaccine is likely to have a major impact on hill sheep farms and grouse moors where the disease is present. So Moredun, along with collaborators from the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, MSD, Elanco and Livestock Health Scotland, has produced best practice guidelines.

Louping ill is a disease caused by the louping ill virus (LIV), which is transmitted by ticks and is principally seen in sheep and red grouse. Ticks become infected when they feed on a host animal with high levels of LIV in their blood and these high levels only occur in sheep and grouse for a maximum of five days following infection.

Adult sheep, which are vaccinated or have been previously exposed to infected ticks, tend to be immune and lambs from these ewes are protected for the first two to three months of life by colostral antibodies, if the lamb receives enough colostrum after birth.

## Co-infection risk

But it is worth noting that this is not the case for Tick Borne Fever (TBF) where protection is not derived from maternal antibodies. LIV and the agent of TBF can be transmitted by the same tick, or by different ticks present in the same habitat, giving rise to co-infections. Exposure to LIV and TBF concurrently in an unprotected sheep will usually result in neurological symptoms and death and, as well as these co-infections, stress associated with handling, dosing and vaccination can lead to symptoms of louping ill being displayed.

The guidelines suggest that liaising with your vet to develop a working tick-control plan for your individual farm and circumstances is the first point to consider. Further important points for the management of sheep flocks in the absence of a LIV vaccine are:

- Effective tick control. This is essential in high-risk areas, to reduce tick



numbers and LIV, and if aiming to reduce tick on other species

- A high-risk area could be considered as one where the total tick burden on an untreated sheep is greater than 20 and LIV prevalence within the sheep flock is greater than 10%
- Expose young lambs to ticks in the spring to ensure exposure to TBF while lambs are still protected against LIV by maternal colostral antibodies
- Ideally undertake this exposure away from core moorland, if there is a red grouse management interest
- If you lamb inside and turn out later to the hill, remember they may not have been exposed to tick or LIV
- Weigh up the benefits of minimising disturbance and handling of sheep when ticks are most active, which is when temperatures exceed 7°C and during the peak

times of spring and autumn

- Weigh up the benefits of frequent acaricide treatment against the stress of gathering. Is the hill high or low risk for tick/LIV?

Advice on treatments for tick control, including in young lambs and tups, along with factors impacting on the efficacy of tick control treatments, biosecurity tips and wildlife and habitat management, is also included in the best practice guidelines. *Guidelines can be downloaded at <https://www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/ticks-tickborne-diseases>.*

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# Feeding innovation boosts production and controls costs

By Owen Roberts, Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC)

With so much uncertainty ahead, many sheep producers are focusing on areas of their business that they can control.



Production costs are the subject of an annual study by Aberystwyth University's Institute of Biological and Rural Sciences (IBERS), on behalf of the Welsh Government. And the work draws on data from 600 enterprises.

The latest IBERS Farm Business Survey results again suggest that the highest variable costs for sheep producers are from feed and forage, at an average cost of 59p/kgLW. In terms of fixed costs, power and machinery also account for 39p/kgLW.

The research also, however, highlights the efficiency gains that can be made to keep overheads under control. The most efficient third of Welsh sheep farms, according to the survey, kept their feed and forage costs to an average of 42p/kgLW and their machinery costs to 30p/kgLW.

One enterprise that has implemented on-farm efficiencies to drive down the cost of power and machinery, as well as maximising forage utilisation, is based just five miles south-east of Aberystwyth.



Richard Tudor's sheep and the self-feed system.

Self feeding also makes more of home-grown silage. "This system helps keep the forage fresh, and uses it more efficiently," explained Richard. "To achieve the maximum returns, expenditure on additional feed has to be kept to a minimum. So

reducing silage waste has a direct impact on the bottom line."

He also believes that his system promotes a more natural way for sheep to feed. "Using this method, the sheep graze rather than gorge. And there's much less pushing and shoving."

At Glanystwyth, the system is part of a wider drive to maximise silage quality and usage. The silage is analysed to assess what supplements, if any, are required.

## Forage quality

"Many producers are paying more attention than ever to the quality of their forage, and the most efficient ways of feeding," says Eleri Price, Supply Chain Development Executive at Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC).

She refers to HCC's publications on grassland management and emphasises that paying attention to the quality of forage could also make a significant difference to the bottom line of an enterprise.

"For many Welsh farm systems, the quality of silage is an important consideration," says Dr Price. "Analysing silage can help producers to judge the correct quantities of supplementary feed required by their flocks, optimising animal health as well as profitability."

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# Keeping sheep fit and healthy reduces need for antibiotics

By Sara Gregson, contributor  
**Good grassland management drives the livestock enterprises of brothers Duncan and Angus Nelless, based at Thistleyhaugh Farm, near Morpeth in Northumberland. With this comes high performance and high health status, with little need for antibiotics.**



The Nelless' farm 571 hectares of mainly owned land and Duncan is in charge of 2,000 pedigree Lleyn ewes and 600 ewe lambs. Five hundred are in the RamCompare programme and are mated to different ram breeds, lambing indoors from 23<sup>rd</sup> March. The rest of the ewes are bred pure and lamb outdoors from 16th April. Additional ewes are brought in to foster orphan lambs.

## Big issue

"I think antibiotic use is one of the biggest issues that sheep producers will face in future," says Duncan. "Even though usage is much less than with other species, some flocks still rely heavily on them. We do not blanket treat for anything and are careful how we use them, without compromising the welfare of the animal concerned."

Treating footrot was the main reason for giving antibiotics until the Nelless' started vaccinating all the sheep. Now in the third year of vaccination, lameness is rarely seen in the flock.

The amount of antibiotics used around lambing time varies. Main-crop lambs that look weak are brought inside

and treated with antibiotics if needed. There are usually fewer than 200 out of more than 2,500 main crop lambs that need this. The use of wood shavings, in individual pens, has also had a dramatic effect on the amount of antibiotic use.

"The key to having strong lambs that will stand up to the foulest weather is to have them suckling good quality colostrum as quickly as possible after birth. And that all starts with the condition of the ewe before lambing," says Duncan.

Target body condition score at tupping is between three and four. After mating, large mobs of ewes are cell grazed, moving on to a fresh piece of grass every two days.

## High-quality grazing

In mid-pregnancy, the ewes are put onto poorer ground or into sheds and fed medium-quality hay. This gives the fields a break before lambing and provides high quality grazing from the moment the lambs arrive.

The Nelless' rarely suffer abortions, but do vaccinate against enzootic abortion and also give a clostridial vaccination. "We work very closely with the vets," adds Duncan. "Our health plan outlines the antibiotics we would give and we always have to justify their use before administering them."

Wallace McCurdie runs 850 mainly Lleyn ewes on his 346-hectare farm, near Rugby in Warwickshire. He began organic conversion 20 years ago and sells 400 yearling ewes and 70 rams for

breeding each year. He sells slaughter lambs through Rugby Farmers Mart, at Stoneleigh.

"I work on the premise that if the ewes are fit and healthy there will be fewer problems and I won't need to treat very often," says Wallace. "Having a closed flock helps, as we don't generally bring any diseases in to the farm. If we do buy a ram, we follow strict quarantine procedures."

Due to excessive predation of newborn lambs by vermin, his ewes lamb indoors – which adds cost and extra work. Two part-time employees spend their days mucking out and re-bedding the lambing pens to prevent E coli infection. Navels are double dipped – once at birth and again an hour later. This limits the incidence of watery mouth and joint ill.

## Blood tests

Making sure the ewes have all the right vitamins and minerals is also important. Regular herbage analysis and blood tests reveal what may be missing in their diet. Each animal receives a bolus, once or twice a year, to make up any shortfall.

"The decision to go organic was purely a business one," explains Wallace. "But I like this way of farming now, and it has had a definite impact on the health and welfare of the sheep. As well as hardly using any antibiotics, we don't use much wormer, which means we have more resilient animals while spending less money on them."



Duncan Nelless and his sheep.

# Liver fluke and scab warnings – be on your guard

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

**SCOPS and COWS continue to gather information on the incidence of liver fluke this winter. Reports confirm that there is a significant risk in North, West and Central Scotland, West Wales and Cornwall, while Eastern Scotland and parts of North and South West England are medium risk and most of Central and Eastern England are low risk.**



Reports of disease continue mainly from high risk areas, but make sure you keep up with local information. Use tests, abattoir feedback and post mortems to help risk assess your farm. Re-infection is a major concern. Some of the cases being reported are in animals that were treated in September and have picked up another fluke burden. Flukicides do not have any residual activity. If treated animals are put back on the infected pasture they will become re-infected.

Vets are urging sheep producers to make sure that clostridial vaccinations are up to date. Black disease is a major cause of losses in sheep that have had their livers damaged by liver fluke. Product choice is critical. Triclabendazole is still the product of choice because it kills the most immature fluke. However, sheep producers must be aware that there are cases of resistance to this product and they must check the status on their farm. There are reports of many instances where sheep producers are using adulticides in the autumn, which is adding to the instances of acute disease because immature fluke are not removed. For more detail visit [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk)

## Sheep scab

The big challenge for 2018 is sheep scab. The use of the 3-ML group (as injectables) has always been a concern for SCOPS because of selection for resistance in worms when used against sheep scab. But now, unfortunately, the scab mites have also joined the resistance party. In four farm cases investigated by University of Bristol so far, all have scab mites that tolerate exposure to the endectocides. Conversations with vets, sheep producers and SQPs suggest that people are becoming suspicious of efficacy, with



comments such as 'they [injectables] are not working as well as they did'.

While many of these cases will be associated with under-dosing, poor application and/or re-infection or lack of diagnosis, we now have to add the possibility of resistance to the list. The implications for the sheep industry could be very serious, so SCOPS is not sitting back and waiting for more evidence. We need to act now.

## Raising awareness

Firstly, we are holding a workshop in early January (with support from AHDB), to take a fresh look at the problem and the tools available, such as the Elisa test, to develop a plan.

Secondly, we need to raise awareness and work to ensure the endectocides are used properly, but we must also avoid 'knee jerk' reactions that could make things worse. A key concern is a swing to the use of OPs through jettors or showers.

These application methods are not effective against scab and risk the development of resistance to our last line of defence – the OPs used. SCOPS is fully aware that dipping facilities on farms are few and far between, so will

be discussing all options at the meeting in January, which includes access to mobile dippers.

## Action plan

What can you do at this stage?

- Don't panic. If you think an endectocide has not worked effectively, discuss this with your vet and/or SQP and make sure the case is reported to the VMD [www.gov.uk/report-veterinary-medicine-problem/animal-reacts-medicine](http://www.gov.uk/report-veterinary-medicine-problem/animal-reacts-medicine).
- When you use an endectocide make doubly sure that you check the dose rate and application method and follow the instructions to the letter.
- If you have 'itchy' sheep, get a diagnosis from your vet before you treat, don't just guess. In Wales, a free diagnostic service is available via the APHA.
- Do not use an OP through a jetter or shower, it is only effective as a plunge dip.

SCOPS will be providing more information during the coming months and we hope to have access to a list of mobile dippers you can use should you need to dip.

# More live lambs on the ground

Taking steps to increase lamb survivability in the immediate post-lambing period should be a management priority as it will have a significant impact on returns.

So says large animal vet Chantal Bryant from Derbyshire-based Scarsdale Vets, which is part of the XL Vet group, adding that 60% of total lamb losses occur in the first two weeks of life, with 49% of all losses happening during the first 48 hours after birth.

“Although there will be breed variations, the broad objective is to produce live lambs, weighing between 4kg and 7kg at birth, which are up and sucking within 15 minutes. If this is achieved then the lamb has a 90% to 95% chance of being weaned,” she says. “Management pre-lambing and around lambing will greatly influence this, ensuring lambs are born within the optimum size range and that ewes are healthy and have an adequate milk supply. It is essential to manage ewes to ensure that they are at the target body condition score at lambing. Lowland ewes should be at score between 3.0 and 3.5 and the target for hill ewes is 2.5.

## Milk supply

“If ewes are too thin at lambing then they will tend to have light lambs, below 4kg, which will have insufficient brown fat and will struggle during the first 24 hours. And, if they survive, they will have reduced growth rates and not least because ewe milk supply and quality will be poor due to reduced udder weight.”

Ms Bryant adds that if ewes are too fat then then problem is likely to be large lambs with an increased need for assisted lambing, affecting lamb vigour. “The ewe will also have reduced feed intakes immediately pre-lambing, which can compromise milk production.”



She says that pregnancy toxemia, or twin lamb disease, can be a problem with both overly fat and thin ewes. And pregnancy toxemia can lead onto other conditions such as hypocalcaemia, reduced milk production, reduced lamb growth and increased lamb mortality.

She advises that managing body condition score (BCS) is the most effective prevention strategy and the foundation of increased lamb survival. So she recommends grouping ewes at scanning, based on the number of lambs carried and BCS, to allow targeted pre-lambing nutrition to ensure the correct condition score is achieved at lambing.

## Adjust rations

“Scanning and BCS are the best ways to correctly group ewes, allowing rations to be adjusted to maintain condition as required.”

At lambing, the key to lamb survival is to ensure ewes and lambs get on their feet quickly so the lamb can suck and the ewe can settle into milk production.

Farm-O-San’s Roxanne Winstanley adds that in the run-up to lambing ewes tend to go off food and water. “And when they lamb they lose large amounts of fluids, leading to dehydration. Many ewes do not drink for eight hours after lambing, making the problem worse,” she says.

“Lambing is a time of significant physiological stress and it is important

that ewes recover quickly so they are able to care for their lambs and settle into lactation. Key to recovery is prompt and effective rehydration to encourage ewe vigour, increase appetite and promote early lactation yields.”

She adds that a dehydrated ewe takes longer to recover from lambing and will have reduced milk yields, which will impact on lamb performance and have consequences continuing for several weeks after lambing. Prompt and effective rehydration can ensure ewes settle into lactation quicker.

## Rehydrating solution

“Effective rehydration immediately post-lambing is not just about access to plenty of clean fresh water,” she continues.

“At lambing, ewes also lose electrolytes which need to be replaced. As they will have been in negative energy balance, they can also be short of rapidly available energy. Supplements which provide electrolytes and dextrose will rehydrate ewes more effectively than water alone.”

Ms Winstanley recommends providing rehydrating solutions to ewes for at least six hours immediately post lambing. “There is no doubt that rehydrating ewes can be a cost-effective part of post-lambing management routines and it can help to improve the survivability of lambs in the crucial first 48 hours.”

# Maximising wool returns and global opportunities

British Wool has a global reputation for high quality and this standard is, in part, due to the outstanding skills of the nation’s shearers. It prioritises training and knowledge transfer to ensure that these skills are maintained and improved for the future success of wool marketing.



Training courses, which cater for all abilities, are available and have proved to be incredibly successful across the UK. Beginning with a ‘blue seal’ award and running up to the highest ‘gold seal’, the courses offer training from beginner to advanced level.

“We have more than 60 instructors in the UK and all have many years of shearing experience and include several national champions. With co-operation and support from host farms and colleges, the courses offer shearers of any age and ability the opportunity to learn more about their trade and advance their skills,” says British Wool’s Head of Shearing, Colin MacGregor.

## Firm foundation

Nick Harding, from Chilsworthy in Devon, has benefited from British Wool training. He is a shearing contractor and has achieved his blue, bronze, silver and gold seals. Nick began shearing at the age of 22, on his uncle’s 1,000-head sheep unit. He was also heavily involved with Devon Young Farmers, who were in the same building as the British Wool Training Office. “I mentioned to them that I needed to go onto a course to hone and improve my skills and the rest, as they say, is history. This really was the beginning of what has become a life within the shearing industry.”

These courses laid the foundation for the impressive career that he has since built. This year alone Nick has sheared here in the UK, New Zealand, Estonia, Latvia, and Finland. And it was in Finland where he sheared sheep right up to the Arctic Circle.

“You can go to almost anywhere in the world and get a job – there is shearing to be done nearly everywhere. And having training through British Wool courses, which are internationally recognised, opens many doors.”



Above: British Wool shearing course.

Left: Nick Harding.



Photo © Emily Fleur

In recent years, competitive shearing has seen a huge resurgence and Nick regularly takes part in shearing competitions across England and Wales. “It’s been great for the industry – people are excited about shearing and shearers are pushing themselves to their limit. If you have a competitive streak it can give

you something to strive for. It’s motivating and introduces you to new experiences and people from around the world.

## High standards

“But it’s not all about competitions – it’s about standards,” he adds. “If you do not have principles in terms of shearing to the very highest standards on a day-to-day basis – you are not going to do well in the competitions. Some of my own personal achievements include doing the main shear across the South West of England every year.

“I am also proud to have helped with the both the eight- and nine-hour ewe world records and, of course, winning the Royal Welsh Show as a senior shearer in 2015. All this has been possible through getting the right training from a fantastic team of instructors and mentors.

“I think it’s important to make a commitment to a series of courses. The knowledge I have gained has served as a strong foundation for my career and having now built my experience and skill, I’ve had many opportunities I hadn’t thought possible. It doesn’t happen overnight, but the rewards will come.”

## Course booking and contacts

British Wool training courses are held on host farms across the UK from late April to the end of July. Anyone interested in attending a course should visit the British Wool website – to register and benefit from a 10% discount for online payment.

More information is also available from British Wool’s Regional Co-ordinators: Donna Mackenzie (Scotland, Northern England and Northern Ireland), on 01877 339657; Alison Gould (Central and Southern England), on 01392 477944; and Fiona Reuter (Wales), on 01686 626449.



Nick competing in the 2017 Open Shearing Final at Devon County Show.



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# Bright stars of UK sheep industry

After another gruelling selection process, it is fantastic to have 12 bright, young sheep enthusiasts to form the NSA Next Generation Ambassador group for 2018.

Many applications poured into NSA Head Office before Christmas, creating a challenge for the NSA regions to draw up a shortlist of people to be interviewed. Given the range of UK locations, shortlisted applicants were put through their paces in early January, via video link, by a selection panel of four, which included:

- **Kevin Harrison:** NSA English Committee member, Gloucestershire-based sheep farmer and long-term supporter of NSA Next Generation.
- **Eileen McCloskey:** NSA Northern Ireland Region Committee member, CAFRE advisor and lecturer at Greenmount College.
- **Dan Pritchard:** NSA Next Generation Ambassador (2016 intake), Gower-based sheep farmer and British Farming Awards Sheep Innovator of the Year 2017.
- **Jimmy Warnock:** NSA Scottish Region Committee member, Lanarkshire-based farmer and involved in the Royal Highland Educational Trust.

The next stage is for the Ambassadors to take part in five delivery sessions throughout the year, before they take on longer-term roles within NSA and the sheep sector to highlight positive elements of the industry and opportunities for other young people. The



five delivery sessions cover a wide range of sheep husbandry topics, business skills and personal development.

"It was particularly tough this year to choose only 12 people for the group, as some exceptional individuals expressed interest and demonstrated incredible passion and determination through their applications," says NSA's Joanne Briggs. "It has been inspiring to see the quantity and quality of young people actively involved in the sheep sector and NSA is dedicated to supporting as many of them as possible, either through the Ambassador programme or other NSA Next Generation activities."

"These latest appointments take us up to 58 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors during five years of the programme, which is a fantastic network for the organisation and a positive asset for the industry."

NSA Next Generation is funded by NSA Head Office, regions and ram sales, with the Ambassador programme additionally supported by various delivery partners and sponsors. Find profiles of all Ambassadors at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

## 2018 Ambassadors

1. Lauren Bird (27) Oxfordshire
2. Oliver Brayne (31) Derbyshire
3. Thomas Chapman (27) Staffordshire
4. Bleddyn Davies (25) Ceredigion
5. Rollo Deutsch (22) Gloucestershire
6. Joe Emmett (26) Norfolk
7. Kirree Kermode (32) Isle of Man
8. David McMullan (27) County Antrim
9. Sion Morgan (28) Scottish Borders
10. Richard Rossiter (26) Devon
11. Catherine Sanderson (24) North Yorkshire
12. Zoey Symington (21) Shetland

# Meet the 2018 NSA Ambassadors

## Lauren Bird (27) Oxfordshire

A new job for Lauren has also brought a famous backdrop to work against. She is the new shepherd at Highclere Estate, better known as the setting for popular television series Downton Abbey.

This will be Lauren's second shepherding job in the UK, after spending seven years working on sheep stations in Australia and picking up what she calls her 'really bad Aussie accent'.

She believes that the move will allow her to lease some land, in addition to her employed work, providing a home for a Charollais stud she hopes to re-start from her time in Australia. Lauren also hopes to have opportunity to tender for a sheep share-farming lease at Highclere.

**Ambassador goal:** Lauren would like to use her experiences working at home and overseas, as well as being an NSA Ambassador, to one day offer an apprenticeship or college training opportunity to a young person coming into the sector.



## Oliver Brayne (31) Derbyshire

As a self-confessed 'sponge', Oliver says he can't wait to absorb all the new information he'll encounter as an NSA Ambassador. He loves learning and applying ideas to the low-input flock he's running in the High Peak area. This is currently 100 Easycare ewes and a few cattle on land rented from five different landlords. He is also a landscaper and fencer, but hopes to increase livestock numbers instead so he can farm full-time.

Oliver is a first-generation farmer and, as such, is passionate about encouraging other new entrants and better informing consumers. He says: "As farmers we should want to show any member of the public every part of our business. We should have systems in place that we are proud of and confident enough to share."

**One to watch:** Oliver wants to be a pioneer in the breeding of an upland, maternal, wool-shedding sheep with the potential to impact the entire UK hill sector.

continued on page 36



## Thomas Chapman (27)

### Staffordshire

One of the lucky few to have a county council farm, Thomas is ambitious about using his tenancy at Eccleshall as a springboard to bigger and better things. His five-year target is to increase



from his current 400 head of Mules to a closed flock of 800 home-bred composites.

Thomas runs a contract shepherding business alongside the farm, as well as grading lambs and scanning tags at Market Drayton and Ludlow markets. This motivates him to be 'picky' about the ewes he breeds from and the lambs he finishes. "I plan to continue using data collected via EID to aid decision-making and only select ewes with the

correct traits to produce replacements," he says.

Thomas adds that he would like to take on an apprentice one day, to give them the opportunities he has been fortunate enough to have.

**Top fact:** Thomas breeds and trains sheepdogs. He says this is invaluable for running his flock, but also a useful income stream when he sells some on.

## Rollo Deutsch (22)

### Gloucestershire

Nothing can stop Rollo from making the most of the opportunities that come his way.

Having been approached to take on a shepherding role, he instead negotiated buying the sheep and renting the land to establish his own 620-ewe flock.

Keen to find his next big break, he has kept up his work as a contract shearer and freelance shepherd, and continues to make new partnerships with landowners and farmers.

Rollo believes his best chance at succeeding, without being eligible for the BPS, is chasing efficiencies and establishing himself as a top 25% producer – showing people on the way just what can be achieved. He says: "I started with two sheep and worked my way up. I really want to show the older generation that it can be done and what they can do to encourage people like me. Young people want to come in, but they need support from the industry and government."

**Top fact:** Rollo competed at the NSA Marches Region Next Generation Shepherds' Day in the summer, qualifying for the national final in July 2018.



## Kirree Kermode (32)

### Isle of Man

This year's NSA Ambassador group will have something a bit different, with Kirree being the first person to be selected from the Isle of Man.

Despite living off the mainland, Kirree – and her parents and brothers – are well known throughout the UK for selling pedigree Texel rams, including some via the NSA Wales & Border Sale. They've recently added Texel-Charollais crosses to their portfolio, as well as the Charollais rams they've always sold locally. Kirree takes charge of the sheep enterprise at Ballasalla (in the south of the island) managing the unit's 250 Texel and 80 Charollais pedigree ewes, as well as a 600-ewe flock of mainly Suffolk and Texel crosses. She has big plans for the sheep, wanting to ensure the breeding ethos across them all is focused on the commercial traits that both buyers and the home farm need to survive.

**Top fact:** Kirree co-presents a countryside show on a local radio station, broadcasting two half-hour shows each week. She enjoys finding farming stories to interest and educate listeners.



## David McMullan (27)

### County Antrim

As the fourth generation on the family farm near Ballymoney, David believes he has a responsibility to push the business forward in the present and leave a mark for the future.



the land he rents, Joe has a mix of grass/forage crops in arable rotations and poor-grade grazing on heathland. "I strongly believe in building working relationships and having a good reputation as a grazier," he says. "I'm enjoying seeing how you can utilise marginal grazing to produce a quality product."

**Ambassador goal:** Knowing that local NSA meetings are great for giving him a boost, Joe's excited about travelling as an NSA Ambassador and meeting people from other parts of the UK.



## Joe Emmett (26)

### Norfolk

If 1,100 breeding ewes, 4,000 bought-in store lambs and 150 sucklers weren't enough to keep him busy at work, Joe also runs his own 340-ewe flock and 25-cow herd on rented ground near his home at King's Lynn.

His aim is to move his flock towards all pure-bred NZ Romneys and increase numbers but, for the meantime at least, to also continue his work as a self-employed shepherd.

On both the farm where he works and

He and his father run 350 commercial Mules and 20 pedigree Texels, with David keen to expand to 500 commercials and 30 pedigrees while also finishing more lambs off grass.

Leaving a legacy is not something David wants to restrict to his own farm. He sees his new role as an NSA Ambassador as an opportunity to get involved in the wider sheep sector. He says: "We are only the caretakers for this generation. I would like to leave a stamp on this farm and on the industry for generations to come. We need to look at the bigger picture rather than think we're just in a field all day on our own."

**Ambassador goal:** David is already using AI with his pedigree ewes to exploit genetics, but is also interested in utilising EBVs and even genomics.

## Catherine Sanderson (24)

### North Yorkshire

The whirlwind of positivity Catherine bought to her NSA Ambassador interview is indicative of her approach to everything

in life. She went into partnership with her grandparents two years ago, already updating husbandry practices on the farm, based near Thirsk, and doubling sheep numbers by adding 100 Swaledales to the existing 100 Texels.

She says: "I've invested in different breeds so we can produce prime lambs and Mule gimmers to access two different markets and be less exposed to changes in prices. I am also trying to improve the quality of my stock all the time, so our sheep will stand out even if markets are flooded."

Catherine's plans include more sustainable use of wormers and antibiotics and more performance recording – as well as continuing to increase numbers so she can reduce the amount of time she spends shepherding for other people.



## Zoey Symington (21)

### Shetland

Being the youngest Ambassador this year, and the one with the furthest to travel, will not phase Zoey. She already runs her own shepherding business and holds down three jobs.

Zoey is an important part of Shetland's farming community, working at the island's livestock lairage (import/export processing) and at the livestock market. She also works on a beef and sheep farm with 800 ewes and, if that weren't enough, is in partnership with her mother and sister on



the family farm at South Nesting (in the centre of the mainland island) with a 150-ewe flock.

Her priorities for the future are gaining a reputation as a contract shepherd and taking on more responsibility on the farm where she works, improving the breeding flock in the process.

**Ambassador goal:** Zoey can't wait to get started. She says: "To get to learn more about the sheep sector, where my main love of farming lies, is very exciting. I can't think of a better way to get involved in something I'm passionate about."

**One to watch:** Keen to educate the public and add value to an existing diversification project, Catherine plans to offer farm tours to people who stay at the farm's holiday cottage.

## Sion Morgan (28)

### Scottish Borders

He may be a long way from home, but Sion is making his mark as a shepherd for a large farming enterprise at Galashiels.

The opportunity to work with large numbers of sheep in a New Zealand-style system was enough to lure him away from the family farm in Carmarthenshire, Wales. He is in charge of 2,100 ewes on the home farm, plus another 800 on a neighbouring hill estate.

"I'm motivated and want to go wherever I can progress the best – be that Scotland, Wales or wherever," he says.

Sion is a keen competitor in sheepdog trials and has quite a following for his dogs and career on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. He sees social media as a great network for people working in isolated areas, as well as a tool for promoting agriculture.

**Top fact:** Sion qualified as an electrician before he decided sheep were his thing. He left his tool box behind to go shearing overseas, leading to a short



stint shepherding 45,000 ewes on one of New Zealand's largest sheep stations.

## Richard Rossiter (26)

### Devon

Developing commercial breeding animals is Richard's passion, with interesting work already afoot with the family's 600 Poll Dorsets, 200 Suffolk/Aber Blacks, and 400 Exlanas.

Richard's involvement in the Poll Dorset Centurion Group, promoting high performance sheep to pedigree and commercial customers, has led to an interest in prolifically, carcass quality and lambing ease. With the Exlanas, Richard is likewise involved in the SIG group and uses the low-input ewes in his own business to utilise coastal and stewardship land that's not wanted by local arable and dairy farmers.

Innovis' Aber Blacks, marketed as a finer-boned easier-lambing derivative of the Suffolk breed, is the newest addition to the farm at Kingsbridge. Richard would like to do more performance recording with these, hoping to add CT scanning to the mix.

**One to watch:** Richard says that the confidence he hopes to gain as an NSA Ambassador will encourage him to exploit his location in a popular holiday area to engage with the public, and integrate him into the NSA network of communicating farmer priorities to those in power.



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