LEARNING FROM THE KIWIS: REPORT ON NSA VISIT TO NZ

DEALING WITH RESISTANT SHEEP SCAB MITES

LATEST NSA POLICY WORK

GETTING AHEAD OF THE SPRING AND SUMMER WORM CHALLENGE

FORTHCOMING NSA SHEEP EVENTS

NEW NSA OFFICE HOLDERS
Key time to shine light on ‘dark corners’ of industry

by Phil Stocker, NSA

Most of us will never have heard of a ‘command paper’ before, but one exists now that will shape sheep farming for many years to come.

The recent launch of the Agriculture Bill command paper marks the start of a consultation process to pass legislation in advance of our departure from the EU in March 2019, work that will set a brand new domestic policy and framework.

While the paper is for England only, it will influence and sit alongside similar work in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. It therefore has to be one of the most significant pieces of work that will shape the future of agriculture. And its title (‘Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a green Brexit’) is very telling.

NSA will reply on behalf of the sheep industry – see page 16 for details – and even though the consultation period closes on Tuesday 8th May, one of the busiest times in the sheep calendar, I encourage NSA members to also respond if possible.

Live exports

A section on ‘fulfilling our responsibility to animals’, which specifically mentions stricter controls on the export of live animals for slaughter, has undoubtedly been influenced by animal welfare campaigning organisations. They have a real skill for whipping up support with distorted and misleading messages conveyed in language chosen carefully to gain maximum sympathy from a public that can’t be expected to know any different. And like many other topics, it seems easier to attract attention and create a compelling argument against something rather than for it.

If you can get past the fact they are often driven by vegan interests, there is actually much about the sheep sector that animal welfare campaigners like. But there are also aspects they don’t – namely transport and slaughter.

I recently took part in a debate with one of the welfare campaigning organisations for BBC Radio Wales. On arrival, I was welcomed by a very friendly reporter who, when learning I was there to talk about live exports of sheep, enthusiastically replied that she was there to talk about live exports of sheep, enthusiastically replied that she was there to talk about live exports of sheep, enthusiastically replied that she was there to talk about live exports of sheep.

Then there is non-stun slaughter. As a result of the article on the importance of non-stun slaughter in the February edition of Sheep Farmer, I was aware of a number of sheep farmers who have recently purchased halal meat to include in their own dishes.

Finding answers

Banning is rarely the answer as it does not drive things underground or result in ways around the rules – unintended consequences that often make things worse not better. Our response has been to look for answers, such as an assured live export scheme with high standards and transparency that could answer our critics and allow us to meet our high welfare reputation while keeping this valuable trade.

For non-stun slaughter, we need to convince the Muslim world that electric stunning doesn’t kill sheep, it renders them unconscious. The New Zealanders have done that and pretty much all their lamb is to halal standards yet all is pre-stunned.

Both these topics are examples of ‘dark corners’ of our industry that we sweep under the carpet at our peril. We’d do better to bring them out in the open, debate them, and find solutions.

NSA report

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Save the date
The NSA AGM will be held this year on Thursday 9th August, with NSA Head Office at Malvern, Worcestershire, hosting the event for the first time in many years.

The official business will be followed by an update by NSA staff, lunch and then a visit to a nearby farm. Details to follow in due course.

Want to work with NSA?
NSA Marches Region is looking for a secretary to organise and co-ordinate its presence in Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. This is an exciting opportunity for anyone interested in promoting the interests of the sheep sector, within a small but dedicated team of regional sheep farming committee members.

This flexible role, paid for by NSA Marches Region on an honorarium basis, includes:
-Organising and taking minutes at four committee meetings annually, to include an Annual Regional Members’ Meeting.
-Arranging and participating in two NSA Marches Region events annually (such as farm walks, regional meetings or social events) and an NSA Marches Region Next Generation event.
-Co-ordinating NSA Regional Managers Meetings (whole day meetings) at NSA Head Office, Worcestershire, annually.
-More information can be found on NSA Head Office on 01684 892661 or enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

Farm assurance changes
NSA members in England with farm assurance are reminded that Red Tractor assurance are reminded that Red Tractor is making changes to its beef and lamb scheme from June this year. To enable the transition, NSA members are being encouraged to start using antibiotics on Red Tractor farms. new requirements are coming in around livestock health and performance reviews with a vet. Contact Assured Food Standards if you are unsure how the changes affect you.

Fitting final tribute
In a fitting tribute to the legacy he has left behind in the sheep sector, Samuel Wharry (pictured) has been named as recipient of the 2017 George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep sector.

A sheep farmer from Carnoustie, Angus, Samuel had a distinguished career with NSA from the early 1990s, helping in becoming chairman in January 2015. His sudden death in early 2017 caused hard losses to the organisation and the industry.

The award will be presented to Samuel’s family at NSA Sheep 2018 in July. Nominations for the 2017 award will be accepted from this autumn.

New NSA office holders throughout the UK
With all NSA regions now having their new Regional Chairmen in place, three new Regional Chairman are in place. Peter Derryman, Nigel Dumford and Tim Yeart (pictured left to right) take the reins in NSA South West, South East and Cymru/Wales regions respectively. Based near Harlton, Devon and his family run pedigree breeding enterprises of Suffolk and Hampshire Downs alongside a commercial flock of Romneys. Nigel runs a pedigree Texel flock alongside his son’s Christmas tree business in North Wish Swing, and is a much sought-after consultant on livestock handling matters. Tim can be found in Yorkshire, Eddie Eastham runs Ferry Hill and Dorset Down sheep.

NSA in 2018
- NSA Sheep Centre at Royal Uller Show. Wednesday 16th to Saturday 19th May at Balmoral Park, Lisburn, County Antrim, www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.
- NSA Scot Sheep. Wednesday 30th May at Kings Arms Farm, Ballantrae, South Ayrshire. www.scotsheep.org.uk.
- NSA Scottish Region Sheep Centre at Royal Highland Show. Thursday 21st to Sunday 24th June at the Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, Edinburgh. www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.
- NSA Sheep Centre at Royal Welsh Show. Monday 23rd to Thursday 26th July at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells. www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.
- NSA South Sheep. Saturday 8th September at the South of England Showground, Ardingly, West Sussex. www.southsheep.org.uk

Free entry for members to NSA Sheep Event and NSA South Sheep: half price entry for NSA Scot Sheep. One free/reduced entry per membership card held. Not a member? Join at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership.

Despite the storm and freezing high winds that caused devastation in some areas of the UK, and at the least painful inconvenience in all others.

The snow storms and freezing high winds that caused devastation reaches you it will be more than a month since the extreme snow storms and high winds that caused devastation in some areas of the UK, and at the least painful inconvenience in all others.
NSA reports – devolved nations

NSA Cymru/Wales Region
By Helen Davies, Development Officer
We welcomed a new Chairman and Vice Chairman at our Annual Regional Members’ Meeting, at the top is Tim Ward, a Kerry Hill and Dorset Down breeder from Montgomery, Powys, supported by Kate Hovers of Sennybridge, Powys. Kate is a sheep farmer and vet, being a past Sheep Veterinary Society President and running a flock health advisory service since 2004. Llew Thomas stepped down as Chairman but remains an NSA Trustee.

Our guest speaker after the business part of the meeting was Ren Mouney, a farmer dairy farmer who now runs 15 McDonalds franchises employing 1,200 people from Pembroke Dock to Newport, Gwent. In the face of Brexit, he challenged the sheep industry to come up with the product that would appeal to a younger generation who seek out more exciting and convenient eating experiences. He said lamb had been used in a McDonalds promotion called ‘Great Tastes of the World’, an Indian burger, but it proved difficult to cook right.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, picked up on this theme and addressed the challenge of ‘putting something exciting and interesting between the 20 to 40 age group market by tapping into international cuisine options and taste experiences. He said: “We believe we can do something in that more artisanal end of the market, linked with our British heritage and traditional sheep farming, and creating interest in both local and global markets alongside the industry’s core offering.”

NSA Ambassador
Caryl Hughes, who farms near Llangollen, Clwyd, shared her experience as part of the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme. She said she particularly valued the networking opportunities it had created within the group of 12, with them remaining in touch via social media, sharing problems and opportunities it had created within the group of 12, with them remaining in touch via social media, sharing problems and opportunities it had created within the group of 12, with them remaining in touch via social media, sharing problems and opportunities it had created within the group of 12, with them remaining in touch via social media, sharing problems and opportunities it had created within the group of 12, with them remaining in touch via social media, sharing problems and opportunities it had created within

International links
It was also interesting to meet Ian Fox, Deputy Head of Mission at the British Embassy in Belgrade, who gave us an insight to agriculture there. It seems they have a more stable government and a good working relationship with Russia, the EU and others throughout the world, and would be keen for the UK to strengthen those relationships.

Back at home, well known sheep farmer Brendan Kelly from Randalstown, County Antrim, is the NI rep for British Wool, elected to take over from Ian Buchanan from Dungiven, County Derry, who has served on the board for the maximum 12 years, the last three as Board Chairman.

At time of writing in late March, old season lamb is still on an upward trend allowing lamb finishers a decent margin for feeding until the end of the year. We should not get complacent, but it does help morale going into a new season with prices on a high. Let’s hope the bubble doesn’t burst.

The next Regional Committee meeting will be on Tuesday 17th April at 2.15pm in Haflod Y Hendre, Royal Welsh Showground.

Llew Thomas (centre), retiring NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman, joins speakers at the Annual Regional Members’ Meeting.

Llew Thomas, centre, retiring NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman, joins speakers at the Annual Regional Members’ Meeting.

NSA Northern Ireland Region
By Edward Adamson, Development Officer
To raise awareness of the qualities of lamb, especially from animals raised on this side of the water, NSA Northern Ireland Region sponsored this year’s Senior Lamb Culinary Freestyle competition. This is held in the Salon Culinaire Chef’s Skills Theatre at IFEX, a Northern Ireland trade show.

Other recent activity includes me representing NSA at the Animal Agro Show, held as part of the annual GrainTec Show in Kiev, Ukraine. Animal health certificates for the movement of live animals and germplast to Ukraine are hopefully only weeks away, and presence at this show will have helped trade.

Lack of investment means the Ukrainian sheep industry is currently small and mostly unprofitable, but the country is coming to see the sheep industry as a food product that would appeal to a younger generation who seek out more exciting and convenient eating experiences. He said lamb had been used in a McDonalds promotion called ‘Great Tastes of the World’, an Indian burger, but it proved difficult to cook right.

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Edward meeting Natalia Yakymenko of the Ukrainian Sheep and Goat Association.

NSA Scottish Region
By George Milne, Development Officer
The long, hard Scottish winter, coming on the back of a very wet summer, has questioned the resilience of many sheep farmers. Grass is scarce, winter keep is limited and bagged concentrate is expensive – so let’s hope the strong prime lamb trade continues and gives finishers the encouragement to be more enthusiastic when purchasing stores later this year.

NSA Scottish Region held a very positive Annual Members’ Meeting, with myself and Chairman John Fyall reporting on a busy past year and extensive policy work. Sybil Macpherson retired as NSA Trustee and was replaced by Peter Myles of Dallog, Angus. Maimie Paterson continues as Treasurer.

The meeting also saw Ian Duncan Millar of Morend still acknowledge the region’s good work on behalf of the industry and thank us for our continued involvement with the Moredun, plus a presentation from Emma MSP, Parliamentary Liaison Officer to the Scottish Government Cabinet Secretary for Rural Economy and Connectivity.

Lamb dinner
A highly successful dinner followed the meeting with 70 members and guests served Scotch Lamb legs. These were carved at the tables by selected guests and Michael Ritch, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, was named best carver of the evening. Our guest speaker was Lord Duncan, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State in the both the Scotland Office and Northern Ireland Office. The evening concluded with presentations made by NSA Next Generation Ambassadors Rory Gregor and Alister Watson, and a charity raffle raising £1560. Thank you to all who helped make it a successful evening.

In policy news, the recent announcement by the EU that we can move to an age cut-off point for identifying when lamb carcasses need to be split is very positive – see page 16 for details. NSA Scottish Region played a large role in requesting for the LFASS loan scheme to be put in place once again, with payments hopefully arriving by the time you read this.

We will be hosting a parliamentary reception on Wednesday 16th May to highlight the important role sheep farming plays in rural Scotland, including delivering environmental, social and economic benefits. Invited guests will be given opportunity to sample Scotch Lamb dishes and be reminded of two important NSA reports – The complementary role of sheep in upland and hill areas and The benefits of sheep in arable rotations.

Delicious Scotch Lamb legs, kindly donated by Scottbeef and carved by guests, were the highlight of NSA Scottish Region’s annual dinner.

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NSA reports – English regions

Central
By Anne Payne, Manager
Like everywhere else in the country, our region has been hit in the face from the East! (mark one and mark two). There are varying reports from members about abnormal lamb and ewe losses, farmers spending extra on feed blocks to try and halt loss of condition, difficulties in housing for long periods of time because of a shortage of straw, and general exhaustion on the part of shepherds undertaking just the basic daily tasks to keep stock safe. On a different note, it is known that NSA still hasn’t completed all 2017 BPS payments – but we have heard of one member whose payments for 2015 and 2016 are also incomplete, having only received two-thirds of each! (together) last June, with no sign of the 2017 payout yet. Unable to spend the time involved in arguing the details of the dispute, they have been forced to pay agents to deal with it on their behalf.

Outstanding contribution in NSA Northern Region

Award for Kath
Congratulations to Kath Birkinshaw, NSA Central Region committee member and respected agricultural photographer, who has been made an Associate of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. Kath has done so much to encourage photography in NSA North Eastern Region, using her work to promote NSA and sheep and lambing efforts. Kath’s success is an inspiration to us all. Kath’s pictures are used in NSA’s communications, report covers, social media and more, helping to raise the profile of NSA in the region.

Lambing has been consuming most of our time here in NSA Eastern Region. In general it appears to have gone well, allowing for all the usual challenges and the unusually extreme weather. Our Winter Fair at Melton Mowbray went well and my thanks to all who helped in many various ways – full report on page 8.

Congratulations to our past regional chairman, Andrew Foulds, who upon his retirement as an NSA Trustee has been appointed an NSA Vice President. Dan Phillips, our current Chairman, has taken on the role of Trustee. We are organising our annual NSA Eastern Region farm visit to walk with John Pawsley, so watch the NSA website, email update and Facebook page for a date and time. John is Chairman of Sheepmilling Farm at Sheepmilling, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk. His family has been farming in Suffolk for four generations and, since 1999, he and his wife Alice have been farming organically. In 2014 livestock were introduced to this previously arable-only enterprise, in the form of New Forest and Kerry sheep, and now Robert Spink, NSA Eastern Region Vice Chairman and NSA Next Generation Ambassador, has joined the Sheepmilling team on the sheep side.

The farm provides educational visits and a bed and breakfast team is used for weddings, meetings, dining & dancing. We are in for a very special visit to hear about how sheep have fitted into the organic arable system, so hope to see you there.

Marches
By Antony Spencer, Chairman
Although we have had to put up with seemingly endless hours of thawing out taps and troughs and miles of carrying slishing water buckets around, we were thankful not as hard hit by the recent weather as many of you – and my heart goes out to those who have suffered losses.

Losses are part of the game, I also had to report that NSA staff member Hannah Park is leaving for pastures new, where we will also lose her as NSA Marches Region Secretary. She has done so much to encourage younger NSA members with her work with NSA Ambassadors and our NSA Next Generation regional event last summer, and I am sure I speak for all in wishing her every success for the future. Although they are big boots to fill, we are looking forward to the new replacement secretary, if you think you might fit the role or know of someone who might, you will find all the details on page 3.

On a brighter note, the trade for sheepmeat at the moment is serious and writing this a few days before Easter it seems as though most deadweight centres have reached that often elusive ‘Fiver’. Looking back to this time last year we were still hoping to reach £4/kg, so long may it continue. There are certainly not so many early lambing flocks in our area anymore so it will be interesting to see just how much old season lamb is out there and if there is enough to get us through to the changeover. While at it looks rosy at the moment, I just hope we get the right Brexit deal so as not to spoil the party.

South East
By Bob Blanden, Manager
Our Annual Regional Managers’ Meeting saw retiring Regional Chairman Andrew Barr welcome more than 80 members. He handed the reins to Nigel Durnford in the top spot and Yann Le Du as Vice Chairman.

Yann echoed everyone’s appreciation for the years of service Andrew has given as Chairman, which he has not entirely escaped from as he continues as an NSA Trustee. Nigel has been replaced in his former role as Treasurer by John Byrden.

Following the formal part of the meeting, we had a presentation from Richard Taylor, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador who has been voted onto the regional committee, on his very useful first year in the programme. Local farmer Gordon Wyeth then kept us interested in ‘his’ out of ‘box’ thinking and successful business, followed by British Wool Chief Joe Farron on fresh thinking and new efficiencies there.

As NSA Sheep in September are building, I will be part of a NSA Next Generation event called ‘The Business of Sheep’ at Hole Farm, Hadlow Down, East Sussex, TN22 4HB. As well as the shepherds’ competitions, there will be seminars/workshops covering topics including getting on the farming ladder, different sheep systems, business costs, sheep in arable systems, and positive communications.

A line up of excellent speakers, plenty of opportunity to ask questions and a network throughout the day, and finishing with a social event with BBQ, bar and camping – just right for those already in the sheep sector or looking at it. Register for the event and enter the competitions at www.southsheep.co.uk or contact Marie Prebble on 07702 043585 or marie@kentshepherd.co.uk for more details. An insert is enclosed with this magazine for regional members.

Meet Nigel Durnford, new Regional Chairman, on page 22.

South West
By Ian May, Manager
After what feels like a very long winter, I’m sure I’m not alone in hoping for a calmer spell of weather. Snow, frozen pipes and sheds overflowing with couples waiting to go out have been countered by a brilliant lamb trade. This will hopefully help the early lambers, who had a particularly difficult time of it.

The NSA South West Region Annual Members’ Meeting went very well, with many thanks to our four guest speakers for a series of interesting talks. Vet Emily Gascoigne outlined the AHDB Beef & Lamb Challenge Sheep project, which, with seven years to run and two focus farms in this region, should provide ample opportunities for farmers to engage.

Howard Tratt fed back on his first year as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador. It was great to see the broad set of opportunities this programme provides, and we look forward to hearing more from Richard Rosnier who has been selected as part of the 2018 intake.

Busy annual meeting

Like other regions with annual members’ meetings in recent months, NSA South East Region saw a packed room and plenty of topics to discuss.

Bryan Griffiths, NSA South West Region committee member and NSA Chairman, followed with some thoughts and observations from a recent trip to New Zealand.

The meeting was brought to a close by NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, who gave us an overview of the major topics on his plate at the moment, including the latest discussions around Brexit. It was great to hear how engaged NSA is being on behalf of our farmers.

Phil also attended the NSA South West Region Ram Sale’s annual meeting, this time to give a presentation on the ram longevity research project. This led to a lively discussion around the large audience of breeders and interested parties regarding a ram’s health status on purchase and subsequent aftercare.

Finally, many thanks to Alan Derryma who stands down as Regional Chairman this year – and congratulations to Peter Derryma who takes over, and to Howard Tratt who will be supporting him as Vice Chairman.
Seminars prove a major draw at
NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair

A slightly new format for this year’s NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair saw the seminar programme feature more strongly through the day, resulting in a good attendance and strong engagement from audience members.

The programme kicked off with Kate Hovers, vet and independent sheep consultant, talking about reducing lameness in flocks. She took visitors through the five-point plan, which places equal importance on rapidly and effectively treating lame sheep, culling repeat offenders, vaccinating stock, quarantining incoming animals, and avoiding infection.

In addition to lameness, a number of other speakers covered technical husbandry topics during the day. Charlie Thompson of Zoetis Animal Health offered advice on parasite control, and Howard Gilbert of Valac provided top tips on successful rearing of surplus lambs.

Technical knowhow
Dr Liz Genever introduced AHDB Beef & Lamb’s ‘Challenge Sheep’ project, which encompasses a wide range of work looking at the management of ewe replacements. Her particular focus on the day was looking after young ewes at lambing time to reduce culling/losses and improve production.

Next up Charles Secombe, NFU Livestock Board Chairman and NSA Central Region Committee Member, shared his thoughts on what the sheep sector would look like post-Brexit. He argued that without a regulatory framework within which farmers could be profitable they would also do what they can to look after the environment. He said: “I believe that if farmers are profitable they will also do what they can to look after the environment. I am confident we can devise a scheme that can deliver for the environment at the same time as producing food.”

The environment and food production was also touched upon by Robert Spink, local sheep farmer and NSA Next Generation Ambassador, who described his involvement in running sheep in arable rotations. Mr Spink expounded the positive environmental benefits of the practice, particularly in terms of soil health, and looked at the practicalities of running sheep on units that do not necessarily have the expertise or infrastructure of doing so.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, summarised the findings of the ram longevity research work that concluded last year and was supported by NSA. He said: “In pursuit of answers around the working life and cost of rams in commercial sheep flocks, this study gathered information from almost 600 UK sheep flocks through focus groups and an online survey. We are now in a position to respond to claims from NSA members that rams do not work on commercial farms for as many seasons as wanted with data, and pin-point practical on-farm solutions for producers who want to maximise the working life of rams.”

New format
Speaking more generally about the new format for the NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair, Mr Stocker added: “The day worked very well, with plenty of individuals attending the seminars and also making the most of the opportunity to have quality, worthwhile discussions with the trade stands present. Those attending seemed well aware of the changes on the horizon, and were fully engaged with the messages from the day.”

Event fact file
Event: NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair.
Venue: Melton Mowbray Livestock Market, Leicestershire.
Date: Friday 9th February 2018.

Competition winners:
• Stockjudging: Geoff Watson, Northamptonshire.
• Trade stand: Allflex.
• Breed society stand: Lleyn Sheep Society.

Full results at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

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NSA Scot Sheep to be ideal setting for discussing the industry’s future

Sheep producers from across Scotland, North England and Northern Ireland will be in optimistic mood as they head for NSA Scot Sheep 2018 on Wednesday 30th May.

This year’s event, held in South West Scotland, will be hosted by Robert and Caroline Dalympie, along with long time farm manager Andrew Maclean, at Kings Arms Farm, Ballantrae, Girvan, Ayrshire. They run a highly-productive flock of 1,000 Texel cross Mule ewes with all lambs finished on the farm, and 400 Scotch Mule ewes crossed with the Texel to produce replacement ewe lambs.

Anticipation

The reputation of the flock and the farm’s attractive location on the Ayrshire coast makes for an ideal setting for NSA Scot Sheep and the event is set to attract its usual large attendance from sheep producers looking to keep up-to-date with all the latest developments in the industry. With the prime lamb market holding up remarkably well this spring, and encouraging prospects for this year’s lamb crop, sheep producers will be anticipating a good year despite all the uncertainties of Brexit.

The implications of Brexit on the sheep industry and its likely impact on future support will be the focus of two out of four short, sharp seminars, that combination of which will feature a galaxy of leading figures in the sheep industry. Brexit will no doubt also feature in the official opening address by John Scott, MSP and well-known Ayrshire farmer who formerly chaired the Hill farming committee of NFU Scotland. The other two seminars will look at sheep disease and prospects for the next generation.

Farm tour

The farm tour is always a must at NSA Scot Sheep and this year will be no exception. There will be plenty of other attractions in the packed programme too, including the farm tour to Sam Jones, who runs a flock of 1,150 North Country Mules, the primary enterprise alongside some arable farming.

The tour will head first to the home of Pauhla and Martin Whitaker who run a fully certified organic farm in Gloucestershire. The pair run 350 breeding ewes, a 70-cow suckler herd and some arable land alongside regular workshops, certificated professional therapist courses and direct sales of home-produced lamb and beef.

Heading to Worcestershire for the second visit will bring the tour to Sam Jones, who runs a flock of 2,150 North Country Mules, the primary enterprise alongside some arable production. Sam is a keen advocate of data recording, which he incorporates into his system alongside the use of solar panels and biomass boiler.

Update from the host

Farm manager Andrew Maclean reports that lambing has been going well, even with adverse weather ranging from very wet to hard frost.

That meant 12 ewes and lambs had been turned out by 3rd March, despite 400 ewes having lambed by that time. Nearly everything has lambed now, with only 40 sets of triplets (fewer than normal) and more twins, but Mr Maclean is confident the final tally will not be far short of the 200% recorded at scanning.

“It’s been very cold and we’ve had frozen pipes and no running water in the sheds on occasion, which is unusual in this part of the world,” he reported in late March. “The grass has just disappeared and we are still feeding 1.5lb of rolls to the ewes to maintain milk and condition when we would normally be down to half a pound.”

NSA Scot Sheep 2018 visitors to look for ways to thrive in uncertain times

The theme of NSA Sheep 2018 is ‘Thriving in an uncertain future,’ a banner beneath which an action-packed day will deliver political seminars, technical workshops and practical demonstrations, all aimed at driving on-farm efficiencies and profitability, regardless of what the future holds.

The event returns to the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, but will be held slightly earlier in the year on Wednesday 18th July. More than 250 trade and breed society exhibitors will feature alongside numerous attractions for visitors to enjoy, ensuring everyone goes away with the very latest industry information.

Helen Davies, Event Organiser, says: “NSA Sheep 2018 is the major technical event for the UK sheep industry. With the UK’s journey to leave the EU now officially more than half way through, there is little doubt that changes are on the horizon. This year’s event will provide ideas and opportunities for individuals keen to thrive and, as such, will be a must-visit for anyone involved in the sheep industry.

The seminars will be a highlight of the day, with an impressive line-up of speakers and chairmen. First up will be a discussion around future sheepmeat trade, looking at the importance of both EU and non-EU trade deals, and how both fit with our own domestic market. Next will be the future of farm support, a seminar looking at what the future might hold and what we need it to hold in order for the sheep sector to thrive.

Technical focus

The focus will then switch to more technical topics, with sessions looking at the use of technology in driving farm businesses and opportunities within our existing domestic market for products such as heritage breeds and halal.

Practical sheep matters will also feature in two workshop areas, which will double the programme seen at the 2016 event.

NSA members can enter NSA Sheep 2018 free of charge (one free entry per membership card). Sign up in advance at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership. Event details and farm tour bookings at www.sheepevent.org.uk.
Looking ahead to NSA ram sales

The 2018 season of renowned NSA ram sales will kick off with the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale on Monday 6th August at the Royal Welsh Showground. It promises to be a good sale and is the venue of choice for early lambing flocks wanting the pick of rams ready for tupping. It traditionally sets the price for top quality, healthy, assured rams.

The online entry form is now a much valued feature of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales website. It, together with the online catalogue and gallery of pictures, are all designed to make the buying and selling process as smooth as possible. The online entry form is now a much valued feature of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales website. It, together with the online catalogue and gallery of pictures, are all designed to make the buying and selling process as smooth as possible.

A buoyant mood at the same sale last year good sheep sold well and the event grossed a record £256,880, which was £43,000 more than in 2016. The top price was 1,750gns and the number of rams sold was 426, well up on the 390 the year before, with more than 76% of the rams forward going to new homes.

The headline figure of 1,750gns was for a Texel shearing, sold by Welsh Language homes. Before, with more than 76% of the rams forward going to new homes.

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NSA is delighted to be working with Tornado Wire to be offering the four prize packages, each of which consists of everything you need to erect 300 metres of stock fencing. That’s 300m of Tornado Lambsafe stock fence, 600m of Tornado Titan barbed wire, a 5kg box of barbed staples, 20 gripple mediums and 20 gripple t-clips.

Four prizes
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 make a successful recommendation, the more chances you will have to win. Just put your details at the bottom of the membership form opposite, tear out the page and pass it onto a non-NSA member to sign up. Entries close on 30th November 2018.

NSA is looking after your data
Under the new General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), NSA is updating its privacy policy which applies to all contracted members and associates of our organisation.

When becoming a member of the NSA, we collect your personal information in order to ensure your membership with us functions efficiently and you receive all the benefits associated with being a member. The new GDPR will not affect your membership or change the way we process your data.

Our privacy policy is freely available on request from NSA Head Office. If there are any queries or concerns over data protection, how we process your data or anything to do with these changes, please get in touch on 01684 892561 or membership@nationalsheep.org.uk. You can also write to us for further information or to request our privacy policy. The address is Data Protection at The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH.

Thank you for your help
NSA thanks the following companies for their annual sponsorship, which is invaluable to the work we do on behalf of the sheep sector.

Agrimin
• Assured Food Standards
• Bimeda
• Morlands Sheepskin
• Cargill Premix & Nutrition
• Ceva Animal Health
• Craven Cattle Marts
• Electric-Fence.co.uk
• Euro Quality Lambs
• Humber Palmers
• Limagrain
• McGregor Polytunnels
• Meeting Connect
• Pintone Communications
• Randall Parker Foods
• SAC Consulting
• SAI Global
• Soil My Livestock
• TGM
• Welshpool Market

Auction Mart Supporters
NSA also thanks members of the Livestock Auctioneers Association who help spread membership recruitment messages to their clients.

Spread the word about NSA
As the UK’s exit from the EU moves ever closer, there has never been a more important time to champion the interests of the sheep sector. NSA is working hard to do this – and every membership subscription helps fund activity and strengthen our mandate to speak on behalf of the industry.

To help encourage even more sheep farmers to get involved with NSA, we are offering a top membership recruitment prize for four lucky winners in 2018. You have an equal chance of winning whether you’re a new member who signs up to NSA for the first time, or a member of many years who refers a friend or neighbour to join. In fact, existing members can up their odds of winning, as your name will be entered in the draw each and every time you make a referral – the more people you persuade to join up, the more entries you get.

Four winners
More than 40 NSA members have won prizes in the annual draw. Profiles of the winners, as well as information on this year’s campaign and full terms and conditions can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.

Previous winners

Paying by Direct Debit triggers a 20% discount in your first year.

How to enter: Go online to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw, complete the Direct Debit form, pay by cheque, or pay by card to NSA Head Office and 01684 892561 to pay by card.

Member’s Details
Name:
Address:
Postcode:
Tel:
Email:

Please supply photo ID, e.g. passport, driving licence, VFC/ student card if applying under 27

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

Your choice of Enterprise or Hybrid

No of commercial breeding females
No of pedigree breeding females

No of bought-in stores or male half sisters

SI

Thank you for your help

Gold Supporters

Agrimin
• Assured Food Standards
• Bimeda
• Morlands Sheepskin
• Cargill Premix & Nutrition
• Ceva Animal Health
• Craven Cattle Marts
• Electric-Fence.co.uk
• Euro Quality Lambs
• Humber Palmers
• Limagrain
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Breadth and depth of activity as NSA’s continues key policy work

By Phil Stocker, NSA

We always said Spring 2018 would be the time when thinking would turn to our domestic agriculture policies and the future of farm support, and the first quarter of 2018 has seen just that.

The long awaited Agriculture Bill ‘command paper’ was finally released in February, nearly two months after the 25-year Environment Plan was launched with promise of a ‘food plan’ to follow. The command paper, tellingly titled Health and Harmony: the future for food, farming and the environment in a Green Brexit asks a wide range of very broad questions, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. It also seemingly limits response choices, although allows ways around detail. 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something’ has resulted in us talking about the potential for an industry-led, transparent export assurance scheme that would place the responsibility for meeting high welfare standards firmly on our shoulders. We have a way to go with this thinking, but if we sit back and do nothing then there’s only going to be one outcome.

**Non-stun slaughter**

Another issue that raises high emotions is non-stun slaughter. There are strong feelings among the ethnic communities that defend it, as well as many of the public and many sheep farmers too, who feel it is outdated and barbaric. Halal was covered in the last edition of Sheep Farmer magazine and, although we were talking about the importance of this market generally and not discussing the ethics of stun versus non-stun slaughter, two readers resigned their NSA membership in protest at the article, despite me doing my best to explain our position.

There is absolutely no question about the importance of the halal market to the UK sheep industry, and sweeping non-stun slaughter under the carpet may get us by for a while but doesn’t stop people continually raising it personally with Christine and Richard Atkinson, Gillridding Grange farm, Shropshire.

**Transparency in the supply chain**

The Government has now published its response to the call for evidence for the case to extend the Groceries Code Adjudicator’s remit in the UK groceries supply chain. It has recognised that primary producers are not adequately covered by the current code, a case that NSA made during the consultation process and has been making over recent years, even raising it personally with Christine Tacen.

The Government response has picked up on the lack of transparency and trust that discourages good relationships through the supply chain and, among other suggestions that should improve transparency, is proposing mandating for a standard sheep carcass classification system to ensure producers receive consistent information and are paid in a more transparent manner.

For as long as it is allowed, we have to do what we can to ensure it is done to the best possible welfare standards. But there is no doubt we have to work towards solutions to this part of our industry, and so NSA is pleased to support AHDB’s work to find acceptable alternatives.

These include being able to demonstrate ‘recoverable stun’ to convince Muslim community leaders in particular that when sheep are electric stunned they are unconscious/senseless at the point of cutting, not dead. NSA also supports the development of post (or immediate) cut stunning.

In fact we do, and should, support any work that improves the welfare of sheep at slaughter. This is better for the animals concerned, better for the quality of the product and better for the reputation of our industry – and a good reputation will only get more important, not less.

See page 2 for contact details for NSA Head Office and NSA regions.

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**Hot topics gaining attention**

As always, NSA has continued to engage with the press on a regular basis. Highlights of the last two months include:

- Warning that the awaited decision on allowing lynx to be released in the UK will limit the success of the Government’s 25-year Environment Plan, as rural stakeholders will not engage in the concept of a national forest if it will become the habitat of a large predator.
- Signing up to a joint industry statement, resulting in 33 organisations getting behind a statement in the Sunday Times (pictured) highlighting the essential role of agriculture in food production and calling for the Government to give the sector appropriate priority during Brexit negotiations.
- Emphasising the risks of the Environment Agency raising its licence fees, with consequences for UK farmers in the battle against treatment-resistance sheep scab – see page 26 for details.
- Congratulating Defra in agreeing to run a national exercise on foot-and-mouth, simulating a disease outbreak and assessing the ability of the Government, various agencies, local authorities and the livestock industry to react. NSA and other industry bodies have been requesting the exercise to take place since new disease movements and traceability databases were created in England and Wales.
- Supporting a call for a network of small, local abattoirs in a report launched by the Sustainable Food Trust. NSA said sheep farmers who operate as producer-retailers are an important part of the marketing mix and that industry and the Government needed to work together to address rapidly changing and complex issues facing small processors.
- Backing a letter to the Veterinary Record and Veterinary Times to urge vets to work with sheep farmers to ensure livestock in need of antibiotics were treated quickly and effectively at lambing time, but that blanket treatment of all lambs was not endorsed.
- Refuting claims by the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) that the traditional Welsh dish of lamb cawl is the most polluting of classic British meals. NSA questioned the credibility of the charity in issuing the misleading and irresponsible message to grab attention on the serious topic of climate change.

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**NSA Head Office and NSA regions.**

**Transparency in the supply chain**

The Government response has picked up on the lack of transparency and trust that discourages good relationships through the supply chain and, among other suggestions that should improve transparency, is proposing mandating for a standard sheep carcass classification system to ensure producers receive consistent information and are paid in a more transparent manner. NSA looks forward to further progress on this.
Fact-finding trip to New Zealand strengthens NSA vision for future

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

Given the current situation with our planned exit from the EU, where the existing New Zealand import quota is just one of many things still left to fight over, and the likelihood of a new UK-NZ trade deal lies further ahead, there were all kinds of sensitivities about the Kiwis inviting the Brits over for a red meat fact-finding visit.

But with clear guidelines about what was up for discussion and what wasn’t, the trip went ahead with considerable benefits to the UK group when we are at such a crossroads in our farming future. It was an interesting mix, with 14 of us representing the UK red meat levy bodies and various farming and processing trade organisations, plus officials from Defra, the Department of Trade and Industry and the devolved nations. With both industry and government involved, including representatives from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, it was good for the UK delegation to spend time learning from each other as well as gathering information during the visit.

Some food for thought

In this era of social media and alternative proteins, it is easy for consumers to feel guilty about eating lamb. Listen to the negative press and red meat is ruining the environment, causing animals to suffer, pumped full of antibiotics and likely to give you cancer.

As an industry, we need to constantly respond to negative, inflammatory comments with robust, science-based facts. We can confidently say legislation guarantees lamb is safe to eat, that it is an important part of a healthy, balanced diet, and that farmers adhere to high welfare and environmental standards. And continued research means we will hopefully be able to provide more information on the value of carbon sequestration of grass-based production.

Lamb is a niche product that, in terms of global trade, cannot and should not compete with cheaper proteins; we are not feeding the masses but providing a premium product for the people who want to eat it, not the people who need to eat it. If we can market lamb correctly to a world population that is growing in number and affluence, there are opportunities for growth.

But this growth is in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and India, not within our traditional, comfortable markets of the UK and EU. The population of Europe is static, at best, and is similar to the USA in seeing a rise in the number of vegans, vegetarians and flexitarians. That is not to say that we should stop trying to counter the antimeat eating lobby, but we should accept our consumers will be increasingly far flung around the world.

Subsidy removal

New Zealand famously removed subsidies ‘overnight’ in the 1980s. As we heard frequently on the visit, the Kiwis are very proud of this and so confident that it was the making of their industry that they want everyone else to do the same. Given that they export nearly everything they produce, from kiwi fruit and wine to lamb and milk powder, it would be to their advantage to compete on a world stage where other countries no longer benefit from financial support. But take away their dislike of the market distorting influence of subsidies, and the NZ hatred of direct payments ‘overnight’ in the 1980s. As, even if fewer business went broke than feared, red meat production is in the hands of far fewer farmers and scantily populated rural areas are struggling to maintain thriving communities with viable schools, services and infrastructures.

The bottom line is this – if the UK Government and general public want our country to look the way it does and values the role of small, family farms in delivering environmental stewardship, high animal welfare standards and active engagement in rural communities, it will have to pay for it. Be that via higher food prices or continued Government support, we have an awful lot to lose if the wrong decisions are made over the coming months. But given that we find ourselves in a unique situation of being able to rewrite the EU rulebook for UK purposes, what can we take from the less regulated industry in New Zealand? We can learn from the attitude that stems from the very top level of Government that regulation needs to be outcome-based. There is no desire in NZ for the prescriptive type of legislation that is typical of the EU.

Farmer trust

An example on water quality, a hot topic for the Kiwis, is that the Government has decided to relegate legislation specifically on fencing waterways and managing erosion and instead encourages farmers to pick what is relevant to their situation via a Sustainable Land Use Initiative. It is an oversimplification to say the New Zealand Government ‘trusts’ its farmers more, but there is a lot to be said for giving farmers choice within schemes that prioritise activities relevant to a sector or region. If people share a decision, there is buy-in and less reason for them to try and ‘beat the system’ that is not of their making.

While the NZ domestic market is small, product innovation can be found on shop shelves.
Mix of breeds and off-farm interests works for new South East Chairman

By Hannah Park, NSA

A sheep business that works for the whole family is the kind of enterprise Nigel Durnford runs in Malmesbury, Wiltshire.

A flock of 50 pedigree Texels now runs alongside the established ‘Fine Pines’ pedigree Shropshire flock, which have been ‘worth their weight in gold’ in grazing his son’s Christmas tree plantations.

Nigel explains: “After my son established the Christmas tree business, we wanted a way to manage grass growth from under the trees. I’d heard Shropshires were one of the only sheep breeds that don’t eat tree stumps. I was a bit sceptical at first but, amazingly, it works. We’ve now got 10 ewes and they do a fantastic job.”

Nigel is an established ram breeder and regular on the show scene in Southern England, so may already be a familiar face to some as he embarks on his most recent appointment as NSA South East Region Chairman.

Splitting his sheep enterprise into three flocks, Nigel begins lambing from 1st January with the Shropshires, followed by the Texels from the last week in February and then the remaining commercial ewes in April.

Breeding sales

The best Texel ram lambs are sold as breeding sheep, at autumn sheep fairs in the main, but also some private fairs in the main, but also some private fairs. Nigel explains: “I tend to go to those within a 50-mile radius of Salisbury, as they’re the customers who come to Wilton Sheep Fair where I sell a lot of my rams. They serve as a good shop window and are a good way to keep your name in front of potential buyers.”

Stock has also gone further afield in the past, with Nigel being very proud of the fact he exported 10 shearling ewes to Jersey in 2010, as well as some as he embarks on his most recent appointment as NSA South East Region Chairman.

Export stock

“Trying to get sheep into Jersey is hard but it is absolutely right. Trying to get the right amount of quality colostrum into ewes to the right condition is a never-ending challenge. I’ve tried all manner of feeding regimes when it comes to feeding them through to lambing. If you feed them too much, lambs end up too big and vice versa. I’ve found flat feeding works best on my system, so I start feeding them before tupping and give them all the same up until scanning, when they’re split into groups for additional secondary feeding where needed. It’s not practised very much, but I think there’s a lot to be said for it.”

Nigel says his earlier-lambing pedigree flock usually scan at around 160%, with this scanning information used to split the ewes into feeding groups. “I divide my ewes for secondary feeding according to scanning information. I don’t think groups should be based solely on this,” says Nigel. “Body condition should also be taken into account and I move ewes around if I think they’re not getting the right amount of concentrate feed offered. Grazing is made up of 40ha (100 acres) of mainly rented ground, plus 8ha (20 acres) of Christmas tree plantations used for the Shropshires. Of this, 4ha (10 acres) is cut for hay each year to feed through the winter.

Nigel says there is some flexibility in this and he will alter the regime slightly depending on grass availability, or if he thinks ewes are putting on too much condition, by cutting the amount of concentrate feed offered. Grazing is made up of 40ha (100 acres) of mainly rented ground, plus 8ha (20 acres) of Christmas tree plantations used for the Shropshires. Of this, 4ha (10 acres) is cut for hay each year to feed through the winter.

Grazing

If Michael Gove is saying he’s going to ban live exports, he’s not thought the practicability of how it’s done. “It’s a very interesting side line, within which I mainly deal with transport regulations,” he says. “The company is an approved Lantra provider for land-based and environmental training courses and I run the two certificate courses for drivers undertaking short and long-distance journeys. We do vehicle inspections to approve those doing more than eight-hour journeys.”

Nigel has changed his sheep enterprise to fit around his son’s Christmas trees. where a farmer in Northern Ireland sends livestock five miles south across the border requires the same export certification as any of those across the English Channel. Providing transport is done properly, to meet EU standards with livestock being fed, watered and rested correctly and stocked to the correct densities, there really is no issue. It’s not the crossing of a line, but the practicability of how it’s done. Hopefully the welfare course can further demonstrate to decision-makers the depth of understanding (long-distance hauliers have on laws around welfare.”

Nigel says that while there are obvious uncertainties in the market place at the moment, he is hopeful for the future of the industry. “The sheep sector needs a voice to negotiate the difficult times ahead, which is why it is so important for everybody who keeps sheep to be a member of NSA,” he says. “But there seems to be a bit of air of optimism in the marketplace, and it’s that positivity we need.”
Positive auction market throughput figures released for England and Wales

Throughout figures through the auction mart system released this month by the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA), demonstrate a strong demand for the red meat sector, and sheep in particular, with turnover across all species rising above the £7.7 billion mark during 2017.

With average values rising in almost all categories, the sheep trade also saw increases of 73,000 store and breeding stock and 75,000 slaughter stock sold through auction marts above 2016 figures. This, matched with growing numbers of buyers being attracted to the live sales ring, has helped to deliver a strong trade throughout the year.

Overall figures of sheep sold through livestock markets in England and Wales broke the 1.4 million mark in 2017, an overall increase of 148,000 store, breeding and slaughter stock from 2016.

Strong prices
Average values were also up on virtually all categories of sheep in England over the previous 12 months, while averages in Wales increased for breeding and primestock and cull ewe prices remained fairly static. These figures are for the period of 1st January to 31st December 2017, representing a calendar year average, and therefore do not consider, for example, the old season lamb sales currently taking place.

Ted Oglen of CCM Auctioneers recognises similar patterns at Skipton Auction Mart. He says: “The sheep market has generally been very comfortable in 2017. We have had plenty of customers ring-side and a good strong trade in premium sheep. This has in part been driven by demand from farm shops, high quality retailers and family butchers. There has also been increased trade into premium markets across north western Europe.”

Annual numbers for Skipton are usually 300,000-330,000 head of prime store and breeding sheep. Mr Oglen reports that averages for prime lambs were up £3 on the year, and similar for old season lamb in the early part of 2017.

“Breeding sheep were virtually the same average, as were store lambs, although store lambs were generally a shade smaller due to wet weather,” adds Mr Oglen. “Cull ewes also recorded exactly the same average.”

Good trade
Further west and also covering into Wales, the sheep sector has experienced a more challenging period through 2017, but Hereford Auction Market has seen a good trade throughout the year: “We have experienced an appreciable increase over 2016 figures, averaging around 8,500 head per week,” says Richard Hyds of Hereford Market Auctioneers.

Heading north east, Darlington Farmers Auction Market also reported on a good demand and increase in values. “Last year was steady through most sectors, and store sheep were as good as any,” explains senior auctioneer Andrew Armstrong.

“Numbers have been similar to 2016, but value has been slightly up with a very good demand. The back-end of the year has been much stronger than expected. We may have witnessed slightly less sheep on the ground, figures show 73,000 more store lambs and breeding stock were sold through auction marts in 2017, but more buyers have been in and that is what has been leading the market trend and values.”

Alastair Brown of Blaistoe, operating out of both Thrapston and Stratford-upon-Avon markets, witnessed similar trends and believes this has in part been achieved by bringing customers back from deadweight.

“Things have drastically changed for us over the last 12-18 months, we have sourced new buyers, particularly wholesalers, and this has given good confidence in the market,” explains Mr Brown. “We have also seen a younger demographic using the market to sell stock, which is encouraging and numbers have been up quite a lot, certainly over the last two years.”

Encouraging figures
As supermarkets have leaned back to British lamb, in part due to public demand but also to trading conditions in the southern hemisphere limit what has been coming into the country, averages have continued to rise post-Christmas and into 2018.

Chris Dodds, LAA Executive Secretary, is encouraged by the figures as markets are drawing more customers back to the live sales ring. He says: “Livestock auction markets are pivotal to the supply chain, providing market transparency and competitive marketing forum for the red meat sector. It is pleasing the sheep sector has performed so well in 2017, and continues to do so in the early part of 2018, with high demand.”

Ted Oglen agrees, as he concludes: “Firms are looking to source specific requirements and want to pick and choose exactly what they want. The auction mart enables that to happen.”

Care needed to determine if ‘staff’ are employed or self-employed

By Natalie Hallett, Old Mill Accountants

With more and more workers now being self-employed, there is an increasing focus from HMRC on the employment status of individuals.

In considering whether or not an individual is truly self-employed, current HMRC guidance places great emphasis on the following:

• Taking responsibility for the success or failure of the venture
• Having more than one customer (ideally several)
• The exercise of self-determination around how, when and where work is performed
• The ability to delegate work to others, or substitute yourself
• Use of own equipment and tools
• Acceptance of ‘risk’ (associated with having to make good unsatisfactory work)
• An agreed fixed price for work (the ability to profit or make losses)
• Existence of a profit motive

In any related enquiry, the first thing HMRC is likely to consider is the contract for the provision of goods or services. Where relevant, they will seek to establish that the contract is indeed one for a contract of employment (as opposed to being a contract that governs the terms of service, similar to a contract of engagement).

Often, such an enquiry is opened as part of an HMRC PAYE compliance check into the provision of goods or services.

HMRC will seek reassurance (and proof) that the status of an individual has been considered. This will often entail being able to demonstrate the use of their toolkit at www.gov.uk/guidance/check-employment-status-for-tax.

Ambiguity
While helpful, the toolkit isn’t conclusive and it is difficult to provide straight yes or no answers to all of the questions. For example, answering no to the question around there being an ability to delegate to others could be extremely difficult in context.

The more correct answer may be ‘not really applicable’ (in which case one might answer yes and, when printing out a paper copy of the result, annotate it to say why the question had been answered in this way). Similarly, while there may only be one customer currently, what is the position if an individual is actively advertising and seeking additional work from others?

Use of the toolkit and retention of a paper copy of the result (together with annotated comments) can be used as proof of having taken reasonable care in the event that, for whatever reason, ‘penalties’ become relevant.

We recently saw a case where the tax status of a herdsman was challenged. At first glance the PAYE inspector wanted to conclude that he was employed by our client, although we were arguing that he is self-employed. A detailed contract for services was produced along with the results of HMRC’s own toolkit supporting a conclusion that he was self-employed. Although he had never had to substitute himself, this was covered by his contract and proved very useful in arguing his ability to do this. The argument that he was self-employed was accepted by HMRC.

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**Action needed on resistant scab**

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

If you need to treat sheep for sheep scab, there are only two choices available – an endectocide (injectable) or an organophosphate dip (diazinon). That is why confirmation of cases where sheep scab mites have been confirmed as resistant to endectocides has come as a big blow to the sheep industry. Reports that endectocides have not always been fully effective have been circulating for a while, but with 8,000-10,000 cases of scab estimated in the UK every year, we need to act quickly if we are to maintain control over scab in the future. So what can you do?

Dip disposal costs

As Sheep Farmer was going to press, the Environment Agency had just released its response to the consultation process on increasing fees for dip disposal licenses. It appears the agency had ignored the robust evidence provided by the sheep sector that making dip disposal more expensive would put more pressure on endectocides to control scab, potentially increasing the likelihood of resistance. However, the response was published in a format that was not easy to understand and NSA was forced to enquire further on exactly what had been decided. We will keep members informed via the NSA Weekly Email Update. If you do not currently receive the update, please send your email address to membership@nationalsheep.org.uk.

**No need to worm at lambing time**

A three-year research project by the Animal Plant and Health Agency (APHA), funded by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), has found no advantage in blanket worming ewes at lambing in the hope of lowering levels of infections in their lambs. Faecal egg counts from lambs reared on ewes that were wormed with either a short-acting or long-acting wormer were not lower than faecal egg counts taken on ewes that were wormed with either a short-acting or long-acting wormer.

Jane Learmount, lead research on the project, says: “Over-use of anthelmintics is a major factor in the development of resistance and treating adult sheep unnecessarily only adds to the problem. We had the opportunity to see if the widely adopted practice of worming ewes at lambing really was beneficial to the lambs by analysing data from a long-term project involving 16 commercial farms. The bottom line is that we could not demonstrate any clear benefit in terms of worm infection levels in lambs as a result of worming ewes.”

This research provides further support for SCOPS recommendation to use a targeted approach to worming, including leaving the fittest ewes untreated around lambing.

Lesley Stubbings of SCOPS says: “SCOPS has been working with a number of farms for several years and they are not seeing any downside to worming only a small proportion of their ewes. We have been advising farmers to leave 10-20% of ewes untreated, but now with the support of the findings of this large project, we can confidently tell farmers they only need to treat ewes below ideal body condition, immature shearlings and ewe lambs.”

More at: www.scops.org.uk.

1. Get a diagnosis before you treat. Remember sheep scab is not the only reason sheep itch. The other most common cause is lice, and endectocides do not kill lice. Before you treat, get a diagnosis from your vet. There is an Elisa blood test available as a diagnostic as well as the conventional inspection/skin scrape, and this makes it easier to get the correct diagnosis. If you have used treatments as an ‘insurance’ in the past, you can now use the blood test before there are any clinical signs. This means you can be sure the sheep have been exposed to scab rather than guessing and overusing treatments.

2. Always apply any treatment effectively. For endectocides, this means making sure you use the right dose rate and injection. Also, check whether or not clean pasture post-treatment is needed and/or you need to give one or two treatments with the product. If you use an OP dip, it must only be used as a plunge dip (immersion for one minute with proper replenishment etc.). Showers and jetters are not fully effective against sheep scab and should not be used. Not only do you risk resistance developing to the OP, but the sheep will need treating again costing you time and money.

3. Report any suspected lack of efficacy. If you use a product and think it has not cleared the sheep scab (i.e. sheep are still itchy) you should report this to your vet or merchant. They have been supplied with a simple protocol to take you through to ensure correct dip disposal costs

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The good news is that resistance in sheep scab mites is not the same as in worms. If we can get a hold of the cases where there is a lack of efficacy, use diagnostic tests to confirm and dip properly, it is possible to maintain the future efficacy of the endectocides – but only if we diagnose accurately and treat appropriately. Turn over for more on scab, and visit www.scops.org.uk.
New scab diagnostics developed through use of smart engineering

By Valentina Busin,
Moredun

Sheep scab is the most important ectoparasitic disease of sheep in the UK and represents a significant threat to both animal welfare and farm economics.

In the current climate of widespread antibiotic and anthelmintic resistance, and especially after the first report of resistant sheep scab mites to injectable treatment, it is definitely no longer appropriate to apply whole flock treatments without a confirmed diagnosis. At the same time, farmers are extremely busy and the prospect of waiting days for a diagnosis or having to gather animals more than once is not exactly appealing, meaning that rapid and accurate diagnosis would really make a difference in the battle against this and other diseases.

'Smart' farming
Something that has been at the core of agricultural research and that should really be exploited to its full potential, is the use of the modern technologies to make farming more efficient and less labour intense – what is now called ‘smart farming’. Among the emerging technologies, one in particular can be applied to disease diagnosis, by allowing diagnostic labs to be transferred into the field. The technology has been developed from engineering methods for the fabrication of microchips (which are commonly used in the electronic industry) and consist of a fabricated plastic platform that can analyse extremely small amounts of fluid (just a few drops of blood, for example) using interconnected networks of channels measuring less than a few millimetres. These ‘pocket’ laboratories have the potential to automate all the processes involved in performing a diagnostic test and can provide reliable (comparable to the centralised lab), rapid (within minutes) and on-site results.

Paper revolution
A particular smart evolution of these technologies is the use of paper to fabricate these devices. Paper is cheap, easy to source and biodegradable. Chips made from paper are low-cost and do not require external power sources, while fabrication techniques and machinery for production are usually less expensive, with minimal technical expertise required. In the specific case of sheep scab, the recent introduction of a blood test for early (sub-clinical) diagnosis of the disease has considerably improved the tools available to combat the disease. The game changer now would be the possibility to diagnose the disease at the animal-side (a pen-side test), especially at markets or before incoming stock join the main flock.

Therefore, this disease represented an ideal model to evaluate how smart engineering can be adapted to solve relevant problems in a practical way. A PhD project in collaboration between the Moredun Research Institute and Heriot-Watt University, allowed the sheep scab blood test to be transferred onto a paper device. The fabrication technique used for these devices was based on a combination of paper cutting by laser machine and packaging through thermal lamination. The device was fabricated at a very low cost (30p), with a simple, rapid and versatile method that did not require special expertise. The next step will be validation of the test results on the paper devices and the final design a paper device that will be available to farmers and vets as a pen-side test for sheep scab.

Collaboration
The most important outcome of this collaborative project was the process of thinking outside of the box (by exploiting available technologies in new ways), promoting the collaboration between experts from different fields and, most importantly, targeting the research at the end-user. This ensured the project looked at what needs should be addressed and made the outcomes available as practical solutions to challenging situations.

A pen-side test for sheep scab would be useful at point of sale or arrival of new/returning stock on farm.
Protect your flock by knowing the different worms and fluke species

By Dave Armstrong, Zoetis Animal Health

There are more than 20 different species of worms and fluke that affect sheep in the UK. Knowing what they are, when they pose a risk to your stock, and how you can control them is vital for minimising production losses. There are several species of gastrointestinal worms to be aware of:

- **Small brown stomach worm (Teladorsagia)**
- **Barber’s pole worm (Haemonchus contortus)**
- **Nematodirus**
- **Black scour worm (Trichostrongylus colubriformis/vitinus)**
- **Small intestinal worm (Cooperia curticei)**
- **Hookworm (Bunostomum trigonocephalum)**
- **Threadworm (Strongyloides papillosus)**
- **Large bowel worm (Oesophagostomum venulosum)**
- **Whipworm (Trichuris suis)**

Propensity to cause disease varies depending on worm species, the number of worms present and other factors such as age of the animal, nutritional status and body condition. For example, in sheep, the small brown stomach worm, barber’s pole worm and Nematodirus tend to be the most pathogenic, meaning they can cause disease.

**Lifecycles**

Animals become infected by grazing pasture that contains the worm larvae. Once ingested, the larvae develop into adult worms in the host within about 14 days. These adult worms then produce eggs, which are excreted out in the dung of the host. The whole cycle in the host tends to take about 16-21 days to complete. The eggs then develop into larvae on the pasture over two to 12 weeks and the whole cycle begins again.

**Gastro-intestinal worms cause diarrhoea, loss of appetite and reduced weight gain.**

The main exception to be aware of is nematodirus, as Nematodirus larvae develop within the eggs and release of the larvae from the egg is dependent on climatic conditions (usually a period of cold weather followed by a consistent temperature of more than 10°C). The lifecycle is also a lot slower, meaning infection can be passed from a lamb crop one year to lambs born the following year.

**Rapid impact**

Nematodirus typically occurs between April and June and a mass hatch can be seen. If this happens to coincide with when lambs are between six to 12 weeks old and are grazing, but still haven’t built up immunity, severe and rapid disease can occur. In recent years nematodirus has also been reported later on in the summer. Trichostrongylus (black scour worm) is most commonly seen in the autumn in store lambs, but can occur earlier. For most other gastro-intestinal worms, spring onwards is when you will see problems.

For most gastrointestinal worms, the main symptoms include diarrhoea, dehydration, loss of appetite and reduced weight gain. However, there are some exceptions:

- **Small brown stomach worm.** At medium/low levels they reduce appetite in lambs, which lowers growth rates and causes general ill-thrift. Levels can peak in mid-summer, causing diarrhoea and death.
- **Barber’s pole worm.** This blood sucking worm causes anaemia.
- **Nematodirus.** When lambs aged six to 12 weeks graze ground infected with Nematodirus larvae that are hatching out, significant losses can occur. Death can occur within days.
- **Black scour worm.** This is most commonly seen in the autumn in store lambs, but can occur earlier. It causes rapid weight loss, scouring and death.

**Prevention of worm infection and control**

- **Whether there’s mixed grazing.**
- **Age of the animal.**
- **Which worms are present on your farm and their resistance status.** It is important to utilise products that are as effective as possible, including the newer wormer groups where needed, and combination products where appropriate.

**Wormer resistance**

Before reaching for any wormer it’s important to know the resistance status of your farm. Reduced drench performance due to resistance is more likely to occur in sheep than young lambs or yearlings. Reducing the number of wormers can have a rapid disease can occur. Conducting a post-drench test is a crude, simple test, but can give an indication of any resistance or under dosing issues in a flock.

A worm control plan should be constructed with your vet, advisor or SQP. Things to consider include:

- Which worms are present on your farm and their resistance status. It is important to utilise products that are as effective as possible, including the newer wormer groups where needed, and combination products where appropriate.
- **Meat withdrawal periods.**
- **Age of the animal.**
- **Whether there’s mixed grazing.**

It is vital treatments are administered at the right time and dose and should be based on informed decisions made with your SQP, vet or advisor. They should not be based solely on time of the year.

**Liver fluke**

In addition to various worms, fasciolosis (liver fluke) is a common parasitic disease of sheep in the UK. It is caused by Fasciola hepatica. All farms that contain wet areas could be at risk of fluke, as these conditions favour their intermediate host, the mud snail. This can include wet areas around gateways and water troughs. The once ingested fluke are present from other worm species, because it involves the mud snail host, and has a devastating effect on sheep.

**Prevention of liver fluke infection**

- **In sheep as it can develop into adult worms in the host within about 14 days. These adult worms then produce eggs, which are excreted out in the dung of the host. The whole cycle in the host tends to take about 16-21 days to complete. The eggs then develop into larvae on the pasture over two to 12 weeks and the whole cycle begins again.**

Having a planned grazing strategy in place can also help. For example, to reduce the risk from nematodirus, grazing lambs on pasture that didn’t contain lambs the previous year can help. Likewise, for Teladorsagia weaned lambs should be grazed on clean pasture that didn’t carry sheep earlier in the season.

Pasture contamination can be reduced by grazing cattle and sheep together. This reduces the stocking density of the host and helps prevent a rapid increase in temperature which is prime conditions for a mass hatch of Nematodirus worms.

**Product rotation**

Triclabendazole is effective against fluke from two weeks old while other products, such as closantel and nitroxynil, are effective on fluke over six weeks old. To decide when to use which product, and how to use them in rotation to target different stages of fluke and to prevent encouraging resistance to products, it is important to seek advice from your vet, SQP or advisor.
Disease surveillance figures show huge risk to sheep from gut worms

By Amanda Carson, APHA

One of the roles of our Small Ruminant Species Expert Group (SRSEG) is to regularly analyse data collected from veterinary diagnostic submissions, including looking at infectious diseases and other health problems identified in sheep.

We categorise these syndromes by body system, so circulatory, enteric (of the intestines or gut), muscular, musculoskeletal, nervous, reproductive, respiratory, skin, systemic and urinary. Within each syndrome we define health problems identified in sheep.

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Tips for effective electric fencing to optimise grassland utilisation

Cheaper set-up costs than permanent post-and-wire are far from the only reason why farmers should consider electric fencing, according to Rob Massey, Tru-Test Managing Director.

He says there are significant gains to be made in terms of grassland utilisation, as electric fencing allows stocking rates to be increased by more effective management of grazing. “Being able to move a fence quickly and easily as seasonal growing conditions change means you are much more likely to graze grass at the optimum time,” Mr Massey says.

“This particularly applies to ryegrasses that have a short window for optimum regrowth. If ryegrass is grazed with less than two leaves, the plant suffers significantly, affecting vigour and growth. If you wait and graze with more than three leaves, the productivity of the plant is compromised as lower leaves are overshadowed.

“Having a grazing system that allows you to manage this effectively will significantly influence the productivity of that grassland, allowing you to potentially double stocking rates in some cases, increasing productivity per hectare by up to 60%.

“Electric fencing systems, if managed correctly, give the farmer a comprehensive understanding of their grasslands potential and that also helps with long term planning such as reseeding programmes.”

To get good results, Mr Massey recommends getting advice, researching and talking to other farmers to find out what works best and to design your own system.

Different mind-set

“Managing an electric fencing system is a different mind-set to other forms of grazing management, and its important you know how to use it effectively,” he says. “It is important to invest in quality components. This will lead to less maintenance problems and increase the fence life-expectancy.”

He reminds users that, when used near a footpath, electric fencing must near a public right-of-way with the local authority.

Online payments

Hectare Agitech, the company behind www.sellmylivestock.co.uk, has launched a new farmer-to-farmer online payment system called FarmPay. The first electronic payment system specifically developed for farmers, it guarantees funds by holding transaction monies securely.

The company says the 30,000 farms registered on its two websites listed almost £40million of livestock and cereals in 2017, and the new payment system removes nervousness by allowing the seller to see the purchaser has genuine buying intent by ‘holding’ their money, but allowing the purchaser to only send the money once they’ve seen the stock on-farm and finalised the transaction.

It’s CLiK…but with extra clout

Cheaper set-up costs than permanent post-and-wire are far from the only reason why farmers should consider electric fencing, according to Rob Massey, Tru-Test Managing Director.

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Online payments

Hectare Agitech, the company behind www.sellmylivestock.co.uk, has launched a new farmer-to-farmer online payment system called FarmPay. The first electronic payment system specifically developed for farmers, it guarantees funds by holding transaction monies securely.

The company says the 30,000 farms registered on its two websites listed almost £40million of livestock and cereals in 2017, and the new payment system removes nervousness by allowing the seller to see the purchaser has genuine buying intent by ‘holding’ their money, but allowing the purchaser to only send the money once they’ve seen the stock on-farm and finalised the transaction.

Kale variety

Limagrain UK has released a new kale variety, Bombardier, claiming improved digestibility and feed value over some older varieties of the crop. The company says Bombardier (pictured) has a softer and more digestible stem, contributing to energy value and crop utilisation. Trials have shown it has a digestibility of 72.2% and dry matter content of 13.5%. It is best drilled in May or early June at a seed rate of 5kg per hectare, to be used any time from September to February. It is club root resistant and the seed can be supplied treated for flea beetle protection.

Fencing post

A new electric fencing post is being sold by Gallagher. Constructed from a PVC protected polyethylene exterior around a fibreglass core, it is fully insulated and weighs 1kg. A flanged footprint means it becomes as securely grounded as a driven wooden post, but can be installed manually without post driving machinery and, therefore, easily removed and relocated. It is also flexible, so will return to a vertical position when knocked by stock or implements. Movable clips suitable for fencing tape, wire or cord can be height adjusted for different types of stock.

Product news

Kale variety

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Boosting health and productivity within agri-environment schemes

By Kar Strycharczyk, Black Sheep Farm Health, Northumberland

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has had a profound influence on British agriculture – and while certainties on what will replace it post-Brexit remain scarce, the tone of the Secretary of State suggests agri-environment schemes will continue in some guise.

The requirements of agri-environment schemes are often perceived as a barrier to achieving greater efficiency in sheep enterprises, but environmental stewardship by farmers is valuable. The farming of the future will not only have to be economic, but environmental and ethical as well. So how can conflicts between agri-environment schemes and animal health be managed? And could environmental work on farm be used to improve animal health, and therefore farm profitability?

Profitability

Money from agri-environment schemes are key for many producers, meaning the difference between profitability and making a loss for some. But that does not mean a profitable sheep enterprise is unrealistic. Figures show a great disparity between producers in the top and bottom thirds and, across flock types, producers in the top third achieved a positive return from their farming activities.

Common themes in top third flocks include low ewe mortality, low feed costs and low labour costs. Therefore, any change that has the potential to cut fixed or variable costs, while maintaining or improving outputs, should be seriously considered.

Liver fluke is a major disease of sheep, often worsen conditions for liver fluke, sheep that can be fatal if severe enough. It also has a significant impact on sheep growth, fertility and carcass quality (through liver condemnation), with predictable consequences for welfare and profitability. A changing climate has also made fluke less regional and less seasonal than it once was, with more sheep vulnerable to infection for a greater period of the year.

Wet pastures

The fluke lifecycle requires the mud snail as an intermediate host. This means wet pastures, especially with watercourses running through them, are typically high risk for fluke. In addition, wet ground encourages the survival and spread of bacteria, causing lameness including footrot and CODD.

Veterinary advice is typically to either drain or fence wet areas, breaking the link between sheep and snail. However, this raises conflicts with environmental management: draining bogs cannot be realised, farmers should carefully consider the severity of fluke challenge on a farm-specific plan.

Tree planting can be one way that environmental stewardship can add in sheep health and productivity. In addition, if upland farmers are encouraged to participate in flood mitigation by keeping water in the hills, they may inadvertently create perfect fluke habitat at the same time. It is hard to know how to overcome these risks when experience of managing environmental and livestock requirements together, both academic and practical, is sparse. Moreton Research Institute is currently working on several relevant projects that examine the fluke risk of wader scrapes and salt marsh habitats. The Pontbren Project, a farmer-led group of 10 hill farms in mid-Wales, has fenced off the wettest margins and given them over to ponds and tree-planting.

If sheep grazing high-risk pastures is unavoidable, farmers should carefully monitor the weather and use flucloxacilin appropriately. Parasite forecasts are also very useful and the National Animal Disease Information Service (NADIS) provides a monthly forecast that predicts the severity of fluke challenge on a regional level; the SCOPS website also provides interpretation and advice on

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typical lambing losses</th>
<th>Lowland spring lambing (%)</th>
<th>Hill lambing flocks (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.1 6.0 5.2 4.4</td>
<td>13.6 7.9 3.8 4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.7 45.1</td>
<td>16 34 30.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: HCC

Tree planting can be one way that environmental stewardship can add in sheep health and productivity.

Farm-specific plans

It is critical to remember that effective use of trees will require a farm-specific plan. Each farm has a variety of microclimates and only with careful planning will the benefits of tree planting be realised. For example, leaving gaps in shelter belts funnels wind and can be counterproductive. Tree species chosen needs careful consideration depending on site conditions and, to provide cover for lambs, should be dense at ground level.

There is no doubt that agri-environment schemes influence sheep health and welfare, as well as farm profitability. Some conflicts can arise, which are often unintended, but these can be managed. With careful planning, agri-environment schemes may be used to improve farm resilience.

When undertaking new environmental projects, consider the impacts on sheep health and be proactive in discussing plans with your vet. When policy makers consult farmers on agri-environment schemes, they should be made aware of the impacts on animal health and welfare.

Find Nadis forecasts at www.nadis.org.uk, liver fluke advice at www.scoops.org.uk and the Pontbren Project at www.woodlandtrust.org.uk. There is also a joint Woodland Trust and NSA booklet at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work.

Sheep health and productivity should be considered within environmental stewardship.
Practical use of lamb growth data

By Menna Williams, Farming Connect

A lamb’s performance in early life will be determined by the quality and quantity of the mother’s colostrum and milk. Peak milk yield occurs three to four weeks post-lambing, so meeting the energy and protein requirement of ewes at this point is crucial in influencing the total amount of milk produced. A lamb’s rumen will develop as they take in solid feeds such as grass and creep, and are likely to be fully functioning by eight weeks. As a result, weighing lambs at eight weeks of age provides a good indication of how well ewes have been lactating, as delaying weighing until weaning will miss the direct influence of the ewe’s maternal ability on early growth rates.

Eight-week weights

By weighing at eight weeks of age, performance can be monitored and targets can be set. Collecting this sort of data can also provide information to help make better decisions next year, as a high percentage of underperforming lambs at eight weeks would suggest ewe nutrition, body condition score and/or health need to be looked at.

In addition, having a plan of action in place for the small lambs at eight weeks of age will hopefully reduce the number still left on the farm at the end of the season. For example, you might decide to wean lambs early onto good grazing, introduce creep feeding, or sell lambs as stores.

For lambs born at 4kg, the targets below can be met with a 285g daily liveweight gain:
- 20kg for all lambs at 56 days (eight weeks)
- 30kg for all lambs at 90 days (12 weeks)

Is there a need for more sulphur?

By Gethin Prys Davies, Farming Connect

As a result of the decline in heavy industry and more stringent pollution control measures, there has been a significant decline in sulphur dioxide emissions since the 1970s. This in turn has had a significant impact on the amount of sulphur deposited on land from the atmosphere, with current levels less than 10% of what they were in 1980. Averaged deposition across the UK is around 6kg/ha. Sulphur is quite prone to leaching and, given the recent wet winters, this information spurred Farming Connect demonstration farmer Paul Williams to take a detailed look into the sulphur status of his farm.

As part of the nutrient management plan at Cae Haidd Ucha Farm, Llanrwst, Conwy, inorganic sulphur has been applied to grazing and silage fields annually for the last six years. However, as it is not shown on the standard soil test that typically includes the pH, phosphorus (P), potassium (K) and magnesium (Mg) status, Mr Williams wanted to get a clearer picture of sulphur levels. This was done by taking herbage samples from four fields and sending them to a lab for analysis – see table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Nitrogen:Sulphur ratio</th>
<th>Sulphur DM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13.3 : 1</td>
<td>0.180%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.8 : 1</td>
<td>0.237%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.9 : 1</td>
<td>0.317%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>13.3 : 1</td>
<td>0.180%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sulphur applications can boost grass, and sending them to a lab for analysis – see table.

Using figures

Sulphur deficiency is indicated by a nitrogen:sulphur ratio of 13.1 or above, or sulphur levels of less than 0.25% DM. As the table shows, despite annual sulphur applications, sulphur levels in one field was well below the desired 0.25% DM and another marginally under. As a result of these findings, Mr Williams will be sampling more fields this year and amending his sulphur application policy accordingly.

Rethinking ‘typical’ fluke habitats

By Catherine Nakielny, Farming Connect

As part of its liver fluke project, Farming Connect is working with IBEERS, Aberystwyth, to help improve habitat detection and develop grazing plans that avoid high risk habitat at key points during the year.

This project, which started in summer 2017, worked with five farms across Wales to better identify:
- Specific locations on the farm where the mud snail can be found.
- Whether mud snails found are infected with liver or rumen fluke.
- How the presence of mud snails or fluke species varies over the summer and autumn.

While snails are seen in areas of wet habitats such as ponds, stream edges and ditches, not all suitable snail habitats on a farm will be inhabited by snails and only a minority of snails will actually be infected by liver fluke. Therefore, the initial stage of the project has led results back to farmers and helped to identify areas of fields which should be avoided at the higher risk times of year – see diagram.

Snail preferences

It has been interesting to note that mud snails require ‘bare’ mud to survive and have not been found in the type of habitat typically associated with liver fluke.

Controlled creep feeding increases profit

Young lambs and calves require a developed rumen to digest pasture and convert it into weight gain. Without a developed rumen, early pasture (that is highly soluble) will leave the animal before it is digested, wasting your cheapest source of energy and protein.

To get the most from your pasture, begin creep feeding early. Supplemented starch (pellets or gran) to lambs at 2 weeks of age and calves at 4 weeks will transition the rumen to help digest pasture and convert into weight gain.

After the rumen is developed (lambs at 8 weeks of age and calves at 16 weeks) you are able to increase profit by controlling the supplement (200g/day for lambs and 750g/day for calves) to complement the rumen and maximise pasture digestion.

Download this guide at www.businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect.
Mastitis is one of the most important diseases affecting ewes and is estimated to cost the UK sheep industry £120 million per year. It can cause loss of function, reduced milk yield and quality, and lead to the premature culling of affected ewes.

Mastitis is typically caused by bacteria but can also be caused by a viral infection. There are two forms of mastitis: acute and chronic.

**Acute mastitis** may present as a red, hot and swollen or cold and swollen udder. In severe cases, it can cause the udder to discolour, turn black and develop abscesses in the udder, as they may spread to other ewes by cross-suckling.

**Ewes** may hang back from the flock, look lame due to udder pain, require to feed for longer and multiplication.

Mastitis has a significant economic impact for farmers, so it is important to reduce the risk and spread of infectious diseases.

Dr Liz Genever, AHDB Beef & Lamb Senior Scientist, says: “It’s important to make sure ewes’ energy and protein requirement are met in early lactation so they produce plenty of milk. Well-nourished ewes are better able to fight infection and underfeeding can trigger bacteria normally resident in the mammary gland to become pathogenic.

**Teat damage**

Hungry lambs can cause damage to the teats and udder from over-eager suckling, which can lead to mastitis. Dr Genever explains: “If a ewe’s teats are damaged, the mastitis defence mechanism will not be as effective as it should be. It is possible these lesions or abscesses in their udder, as they may spread to other ewes by cross-suckling. It is possible, (as lambs may spread infection affected ewes and their lambs (if present), as lambs may spread infection.

First-time lambers may be more prone to these kinds of lesions, as the skin on their teats has not hardened up yet. Their mammary tissue is still developing and so lambs need to feed for longer or more often to obtain sufficient milk, making teat lesions more likely.

Good hygiene

“Good hygiene at lambing reduces the risk and spread of infectious diseases,” advises Dr Genever. “Wet and dirty bedding, and high stocking densities provide the perfect conditions for bacteria in the environment to multiply, increasing the chance of infection.”

AHDB has funded a significant amount of research work on mastitis at Warwick University in recent years. One PhD and one project have been completed and two PhDs are ongoing. The work has highlighted the need to think of mastitis as an infectious disease, so it is important to separate affected ewes and their lambs (if possible), as lambs may spread infection to other ewes by cross-suckling. It is also important to cull ewes with lumps or abscesses in their udder, as they may burst and cause re-infection.

Healthy future for British Wool with new chairman at the helm

By Trevor Richards, British Wool Chairman

I am the third generation to farm at Lacton Manor Farm, Ashford, Kent, a mixed arable and sheep enterprise, now run in partnership with my wife Jane.

We have 400 Suffolk cross Mules and pure Romneys, with all their lambs sold through Ashford Market.

As the new British Wool Chairman, I will do my absolute upmost to ensure we continue to run a very successful business for our thousands of producers and raise the profile of British Wool amongst consumers, increasing the value of wool and the volume we process. I am under no illusion there will always be challenges, but I know we are in a good position to meet these head-on in a clear and focused manner.

New role

From the outset, my aim was to immerse myself in the business and to represent the interests of producers. I want to improve the return for producers and reduce our costs. The improvements we have made in the last two years show how this can be achieved with any financial savings returned to the producer.

Looking ahead

None of us know what the future holds post-Brexit, and while any new trade deals will not directly affect wool, anything that sees the price of lamb drop will reduce the national flock and, therefore, have a major effect on the volume of wool produced in the UK. The EU is the most important market for UK lamb producers, but British Wool is a globally recognised brand – so let’s be positive and maximise potential. I am looking forward to a healthy future for wool production and the impact of British wool on the world markets, and will be working to ensure this superb product is collected, processed and marketed effectively.

To do this, it is important producers present wool in a clean, dry state. Preparation is key and done properly will help to achieve optimum returns. Collaboration is also important and, where possible, producers should co-operate to reduce transport costs. Talk to your neighbours and share loads.

If I were to give British Wool producers one piece of advice, it would be to support their organisation, the only remaining agricultural commodity board in the UK. The more people who support it the better it will be. It’s a case of use it or lose it. You only have to look at the Milk Marketing Board as an example.

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Positive Next Generation session

The first delivery session for the 2018 intake of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors saw the 12 young sheep enthusiasts come together for three days in South West England.

As well as meeting each other for the first time, the group engaged with a number of industry experts and went on two farm visits to look at sheep health and genetics. This covered practical application of performance recording and EBVs, flock health planning and sustainable parasite control.

Martyn Fletcher, NSA South East Region committee member, hosted the first farm visit at Salisbury, Wiltshire, where he is shepherd for a low-input flock of mainly Romneys in a New Zealand style system. His honest and frank approach was welcomed by the group, who were able to look around his handling facilities and equipment.

Good discussion

The other visit was to Kevin Harrison, NSA English Committee Chairman, who is JT Baylis Farm Manager at Bath, Somerset. Kevin’s impressive indoor lambing set-up provided a platform for a good discussion among the group, particularly around his focus on not buying in disease when he sources replacements each year.

Joanne Briggs coordinates the NSA Next Generation project. She says: “This is the fifth intake of NSA Ambassadors and this year’s group once again proved the value of the programme from the very first day. They thrived in an environment of shared experiences and new information, and are already a close-knit group and looking forward to the next session in Wales in May.”

The NSA Next Generation Ambassadors exchange views

Each month, the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors are sharing their opinions as young sheep farmers. Here is just a taste; read them all at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

Q. What was the biggest surprise at the first NSA Next Generation Ambassador session? Joe Emmett, Norfolk. The biggest and best surprise was being in a room full of people who genuinely don’t mind talking about sheep all day.

Q. What’s the best thing about the clock’s going forward? Lauren Bird, Oxfordshire. Longer evenings to get back into training some young sheepdogs.

Q. Who would you swap locations with? Dafydd Davies, European Young Shepherd champion. The diversity of the farm systems everybody works with and also how well everyone got on, even on the very first day.

Q. If you could swap locations with one of the other NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, which would you choose? Zoey Symington, Shetland. I would introduce a fine for sheep worrying by dogs, as the problem isn’t getting any better and we need a deterrent.

Tom Chapman, Staffordshire. I would add another subject to the high school curriculum, encompassing the whole farm-to-


UK shepherds dominate in Europe

In a fantastic showcase of UK sheepfarming skills, four young competitors from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland dominated the European ‘Ovinpiades’ Young Shepherd Competition in Paris. Supported by NSA and AHDB Beef & Lamb, and sponsored by Randall Parker Foods, the UK competitors were required to demonstrate sheep husbandry and industry knowledge in quizzes and practical tests.

The winner of the whole competition was Dafydd Davies, 18, from Bala, Gwynedd, a student at Glynllifon College, North Wales. He qualified for the European final following success in the NSA Next Generation Shepherds’ Competition at NSA Welsh Sheep in May 2017, and gets plenty of practice working with more than 1,100 Welsh Mountain ewes on his family farm.

Great experience

Dafydd says “It was a great experience to take part in the Ovinpiades in Paris. The competition was challenging so I was really pleased to win the European section. I am now looking forward to competing in the final of the NSA Next Generation Shepherds’ Competition at the NSA Sheep Event in Worcesterhire.

Dafydd Davies, European Young Shepherd champion.

in July.”

Hot on the heels of Dafydd were two fellow UK competitors. Representing England, 24-year-old Robert Walker of Clitheroe, Lancashire, took second place, and Northern Ireland competitor Ian Wilson, a 21-year-old from Larnie, County Antrim, was third. Not content with just taking the gold, silver and bronze places, the entire UK team was placed, with Scottish representative Farquhar Renwick, of Ullapool, Rossshire, coming sixth.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: “Congratulations to Dafydd, Farquhar, Iain and Richard for representing the UK to such a high standard. They were a credit to themselves and our industry; it is heartening for the UK sheep sector to know we have such enthusiasm and skills coming through for the future.

The NSA Next Generation programme is all about encouraging individuals, such as these, and we are proud of the opportunity NSA Next Generation Shepherds’ Competitions offer at a regional, national, European and international level.”

All nine NSA regions run an NSA Next Generation Shepherds’ Competition. Two people qualify at each of these for the biennial UK final, and top placed competitors from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are also selected for the European and International finals, which tend to fall every four years depending on the host country. France hosted the most recent European final as part of the Ovinpiades Young Shepherds Competition, which it runs for agricultural students aged 16 to 24 each February at the Paris International Agricultural Show.
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