

SHEEPFARMER

JUNE / JULY 2019

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



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A changing climate means changing farms

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive


INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER
JUNE / JULY 2019
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So far in 2019 we have survived Veganuary, battled with Eat Lancet and done our best to defend sheep farming against criticism as Parliament approved a motion to declare the UK is now in a climate change emergency.

Now the United Nations has released its nature report, claiming the world's biodiversity is in crisis with one million species at threat of extinction. This UN report blames the relentless pursuit of economic growth, general development, population growth, plastics and, of course, food and agriculture. All of these reports and campaigns highlight farming and food as key contributors to the problems the planet faces.

Pressure

I've said on many occasions we can't ignore the environmental pressure growing around us. We must defend ourselves where we are misrepresented but we also have to respond and play our part to mitigate the problems we all face.

To an extent our reputation depends on the response we make and there is a lot of work ahead to secure commercial farm viability through what is likely to be a turbulent time.

What is most frustrating is that we yet again see our UK extensive livestock sectors wrapped up within statistics and data gathered from 'global agriculture', which includes feedlot type and intensive systems common in other parts of the world. There appear to be few accurate measurements for our unique ways of sheep farming.

Indeed, with an average consumption of sheep meat in the UK around 2-3kg per head per year (a measly 5.5-8g a day), and a product that is not generally tangled up in the processed meat categories, I don't see us causing great health problems – in fact quite the reverse. This is all the more frustrating as we hear the calls to reduce ruminant production and the consumption of red meat.

Regarding agricultural research, I recently heard the UK spends more than most other nations on agricultural research and development, yet

our productivity levels have fallen. We are regularly criticised for sitting on research and not implementing it on farm. There is undoubtedly truth in this and it is a wasted opportunity. But it is also true to say that in the past too much research and development has been research-led and hasn't adequately considered what the farmer needs or wants.

And then there's the subject of productivity itself. For decades the farming industry has been measured on production volumes - ewe numbers, tonnes produced, tonnes exported, lambing percentages and so on. The conversation as we start to flesh out our future farming policies has all been about increasing productivity and improving the environment at the same time.

I'd bet nearly every farmer read that as a criticism, suggesting we weren't producing enough and needed to produce more, relating to a growing global population and underpinned by policies of economic growth. It's only been very recently that policymakers have become clear the measure of productivity is not about production volumes at all – it's a measure of profitability or margin.

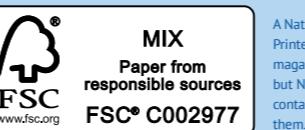
Profitability

Making a profit is what we all need and, in order to know where we should be investing and in what, or where we could cut expenditure, it is essential to measure and have a few key performance indicators.

Armed with this information it can be highly valuable to then compare with others. It's been around for years and we've called it benchmarking, and a bit like the word 'biosecurity', it's managed to confuse people and turn them away.

This issue of Sheep Farmer is, as usual, packed with helpful, informative, and practical articles. You will find extensive coverage promoting the five major NSA sheep events our regions are running during May, June and July, and I look forward to meeting many of you at whichever is most convenient.

These are great days and will allow you to contribute to some of the topics I've written about above as well as pick up on a host of others. There can't be a better or easier way to update yourselves, ask those questions you've never quite got around to, to see what is new and on offer, and catch up with people you've not seen for a while. Make the effort to attend – it will be worth it.



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First NSA membership prize winners



Rob and Susan Small with their prize.

intends for the prize to be put to good use combatting any foot problems that might occur in their flock. He concludes: "The footbath will be very useful to help prevent foot problems, something we consider to be one of the biggest causes of loss of productivity in the sheep industry."

All new members joining NSA this year will automatically be entered into the JFC Agri prize draw, and existing members have a chance of winning one of the three remaining prizes in 2019 too, by recommending a friend, neighbour or family member to sign up to become an NSA member.

[More at \[www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw\]\(http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw\)](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw)

Hampshire Down breeders Rob and Susan Small are the first lucky winners of this year's NSA membership prize giveaway.

Rob and Susan have farmed sheep near Ashburton, Devon, since the 1980s, but decided to join NSA in early 2019 as they recognised the importance of membership in what are uncertain times for the sheep industry.

Sheep breeders

Rob comments: "We thought it important as sheep breeders to join NSA to keep up to date with legislation and new innovations affecting

the sheep industry and also to make our views known to Government, with this being even more pertinent with the changes that may come as a result of our exit from the EU."

Explaining their farming enterprise, Rob continues: "We started keeping sheep in 1984. After a few years of trialling different breeds, we started breeding pedigree Poll Dorsets to run along with a small herd of pedigree Hereford cattle and Ruby Red Devons. Then, in 2009, we were impressed with the Hampshire Down sheep at the Royal Cornwall Show and, as a result, now own a small flock of pedigree Hampshire Downs which we enjoy showing at shows in South West England."

The couple win a prize of a JFC Agri foam footbath and 20 litres of hoof solution. Rob

Notice of NSA 2019 AGM

Notice is hereby given that the 126th Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held at United Auctions, Stirling Agricultural Centre, Stirling, FK9 4RN, on Friday 9th August 2019 at 10.30am to transact the following business:

1. To approve the Minutes of the 125th Annual General Meeting.
2. To receive the Trustees Report to year ended 31st December 2018.
3. To receive the Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2018.
4. To adopt (2) and (3) above.
5. To elect officers for the ensuing year; President and Honorary Treasurer.
6. To elect Vice President(s).
7. To appoint Auditors.

By order of the Board, members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form, or appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. Proxy forms and all documents referred to will be available against the diary entry for the AGM at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by post or by attaching a signed scanned copy by email no later than 10am on Thursday 8th August 2019.

For full details of the use and completion of proxy forms please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or call NSA Head Office.

Displaying the best of the industry

With shearing well underway, NSA is again reminding members to ensure they shear to the highest standard, not only for the welfare of the animals, but to show the best of our industry. Following controversy last summer NSA, along with a number of other farming organisations, has written some shearing guidelines to help ensure every farm meets the best possible standards.

Find the guidelines at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work.



NSA Welsh Sheep 2019

As this edition of Sheep Farmer goes to print, NSA Welsh Sheep 2019 will be taking place at Rhodri Glynnllifon College, North Wales. The event promises to be a busy and insightful day showcasing the best of the Welsh sheep industry. Thanks go to all sponsors and we hope everyone has an enjoyable day. Look out for a full event report in your August/September edition of this magazine.



Forging a positive path for the future in an uncertain time

Despite uncertainties surrounding Brexit and the future of farming support, there were positive forward-looking discussions at the 2019 NSA Breed Society forum, hosted near Rugby, Warwickshire, in early May.

Attendees from NSA affiliated breed societies heard from a range of speakers covering everything from flock accreditation and its potential future role in the UK's stratified system, to changes to the Signet programme, and British Wool's forward plan. These discussions came alongside updates from NSA Head Office.

Workshop

The afternoon session was an interactive workshop led by NSA Livestock Researcher, Nicola Noble, who gave an update on NSA's work to help maintain the UK stratified sheep system, as well as an open discussion on accreditation schemes.

Mrs Noble comments: "Following NSA's stratified sheep system meeting in early January, where it was agreed there was a need for some kind of health assurance for breeds moving down the hill, we thought it would be a sensible next step to consult with the UK's wide variety



Attendees came from across the country to represent their breed societies.

of breed societies on this issue."

As a result of this discussion, it was found that Johnes, maedi visna and enzootic abortion came out as the top three diseases of interest when buying in stock, closely followed by OPA, scab, scrapie and nematodes.

Health assurance / accreditation schemes are available for some of these diseases, but there are issues with misconception of their value and uptake, and not all breed societies recognise these schemes.

Conclusions

Mrs Noble floated the idea of whether compulsory health schemes or even NSA accredited health schemes should be introduced to our sector, with the majority being in favour of more improved monitoring and potential rewards for farmers demonstrating proactive

management when it comes to animal health and disease monitoring.

As with all change, there is rightly concern over simplicity, practicability, uptake and acceptance in an industry where plenty of rules and regulations already exist. Mrs Noble continues: "It would be better for organisations like ourselves and breed societies to encourage and promote good practice, rather than force another stipulation."

The forum also gave NSA's new Activities and Campaigns Officer, Chris Adamson, an opportunity to introduce himself. Mr Adamson comments: "NSA works closely with its affiliated breed societies, but I'm hoping to take that further and strengthen our relationships to benefit the wide range of members, all producing very different breeds across the country, but within one united sheep industry."

PREVIEW

NSA Eastern Region Next Generation Event

NSA Eastern Region's fourth Next Generation event on Saturday 8th June, promises to be bigger, better and more exciting for all young people interested and involved in the sheep sector than ever before.

There will be demonstrations and seminars on a range of subjects, some specifically focused on starting up in the sheep industry and others of wider interest to all sheep keepers.

These will focus on financial assistance for new enterprises, grazing arrangements, alternative career paths within the sheep sector, new handling and recording systems, setting up new flocks (breeds and systems), parasite

control, working sheepdogs and marketing lambs (deadweight, live auction and direct selling).

Competitions

Participants will also be able to enter the region's Next Generation Shepherd Competition, with young shepherds aged under 27 participating in five out of six sections to test their skills.

The day is open to all and Goldolphin Stud will run a farm walk around its high-performing commercial flock and offer a chance to see the thoroughbred mares and foals.

The doors will open at 12pm, and the Next Generation Shepherd competition will start at 1pm. The day will finish with some fun



competitions and a children's competition will run through the day. Catering will be available.

The event venue is Godolphin Stud, Newmarket, Suffolk, CB8 9RS. NSA thanks Goldolphin Stud Management for hosting and the large list of sponsors. Contact Jonathan Barber (details on page 2) for more information.

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Excitement builds for NSA North Sheep 2019

Sheep farmers from across the North of England and further afield will gather at NSA North Sheep 2019 on Wednesday 5th June at New Hall Farm in Settle, North Yorkshire.

NSA North Sheep has not been held in this part of the region for 10 years. Visitors attending in June will hear how the family operate a diverse mixed farm and hugely successful sheep farming enterprise on the edge of the North Yorkshire Dales National Park - one of the wettest parts of the UK. They will also learn first-hand how the hosts, the Frankland family, are growing a sheep farming business that will be robust for future challenges.

Packed schedule

The Frankland family, who are renowned for their calibre of commercial sheep, have a flock of 1,200 ewes, 120 head of suckler cattle plus 350 replacement and store cattle, and milk 220 head of dairy cattle. The Frankland Farms partnership is headed by brothers Richard and Chris Frankland who farm 360ha (900 acres) across three holdings. The family focus on producing top quality prime lambs from Texel cross and Mule ewes put to Beltex rams.

Along with major sponsor, Agri-Lloyd, mainline sponsors include l'Anson Bros, AHDB, British Wool, Crystalyx, Booths, Roxan ID, the Beltex Sheep Society, MSD Animal Health UK Ltd and CCM Auctions. Townson Tractors and Walter Watson Trailers are sponsors of the farm tours taking place throughout the day.

As many as 40 breed societies will be represented alongside 155 trade stands and a series of seminars, workshops and demonstrations. This major event covers all aspects of sheep farming.

The range of seminars, focusing on the key issues and challenges currently being faced by the sheep and farming industry, will offer opportunities for open discussion and debate (see panel).

Demonstrations

A new key element of the day will be the Booths Supermarkets' Lamb Corner. Colin Porter, Customer Experience Manager at Booths and trained butcher, will discuss the versatility of

the different lamb products available and offer lamb dishes to taste.

Demonstrations include cheese making with sheep milk by Andy Swincote, sheepdog handling by James Dewhurst, crook making/dressing by Dennis Wall, lamb carcase dressing by the Beltex Sheep Society, and dry stone walling by Peter Halliday.

The Next Generation Shepherd Competition, sponsored by Carrs Billington, provides an opportunity for aspiring shepherds and shepherdesses to demonstrate skills across different elements of shepherding. The stockjudging competition, supported by Dugdale Nutrition and run by Rathmell Young Farmers Club, will give young people a chance to test their skills in this important aspect of farming.

Find more information and enter competitions on the website.



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ADMISSION £12
STUDENTS & UNDER 16 FREE ENTRY**

NorthSheep 2019

WEDNESDAY 5TH JUNE: 9am - 5pm
NEW HALL FARM, RATHMELL, SETTLE, NORTH YORKSHIRE, BD24 0 AJ

**FARM TOURS ALL DAY
SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS
BOOTH FOOD DISPLAY AREA
DEMONSTRATIONS**

**BREED SOCIETIES
COMPETITIONS
TRADE & INDUSTRY STANDS
INDIVIDUAL BREEDERS**

Major Sponsor
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FURTHER INFORMATION:
M: 07966 699930 E: heather@nationalsheep.org.uk www.northsheep.org.uk

Seminar Programme

10am
Share farming and/or obtaining a tenancy
Presentation by Robyn Peat & Simon Britton of GF White.

11am
Sheep exports
Panel: Phil Hadley, AHDB; Mike Gooding, Farmers Fresh; Randell Parker, TBC.

12.45pm
The future for Environment Land Management Schemes

Panel: Adrian Shepherd, YDNPA; Julia Aglionby, Foundation for Common Land; Thomas Binns, NFU Uplands Chairman; James Le Page, Defra. Chairman: Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive.

2.30pm
Sheep health and welfare – how does it help us?

Panel: Christine Middlemiss, UK Chief Veterinary Officer; Fiona Lovatt, sheep vet; Sarah Baker, AHDB Analyst; Robin Manning, Defra – Future Farming Land Use Team. Chairman: Eddie Eastham, NSA UK Policy & Technical Chairman.

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Anticipation rises for NSA Highland Sheep



The county of Caithness will this year host NSA Scottish Region's biennial Highland Sheep event on Wednesday 12th June 2019.

The event, to promote the Highland sheep industry, will be hosted on Sibmister Farm, which overlooks the north coast of mainland Scotland, four miles east of Thurso.

Sibmister, and the nearby farm of Stainland, is home to the 690ha (1,700-acre) family farming business of Kenneth and Elspeth Sutherland with their sons Stephen and Kenneth, alongside Stephen's fiancee Alix and Kenneth's wife Fiona. The farm is one of the most renowned sheep and beef enterprises in the north of Scotland.

Lambs from the farm are regularly prominent prize winners in the commercial sheep classes at the Royal Highland, Caithness, Black Isle and Turriff shows.

The flock

Stocking on the two all-grass farms comprises 1,500 ewes, predominantly Texel cross Cheviot Mules, which are crossed with Suffolk and Texel rams, and pedigree flocks of 50 Suffolk and 50 Texel ewes.

It has been a busy times for the family in the run-up to NSA Highland Sheep with lambing having started in late-February with the purebred ewes and 200 cross ewes, followed by the main flock in March and hoggs and a further 250 cross ewes in April. All lambs are sold deadweight to Woodhead Bros, Turriff, for Morrisons. Host Stephen Sunderland comments: "We are honoured to be asked to host NSA Highland Sheep and look forward to welcoming visitors to Sibmister."

NSA Scottish Region's recently elected Chairman, Lanarkshire sheep producer Jen Craig says: "We are delighted the Sutherland family has agreed to host NSA Highland Sheep 2019. The reputation of the farm will be a big attraction for sheep farmers throughout the Highlands and Islands, as well

as providing an ideal opportunity for those from further afield to view a well-managed sheep farm showcasing agriculture in the very far north of Scotland."

Sponsors

Animal feed and health product specialist Harbro, along with its key distributor W&A Geddes, has been confirmed as major sponsors of the event.

"We are delighted to once again be supporting NSA Highland Sheep along with W&A Geddes," says Harbro Beef and Sheep Director David MacKenzie. "The event plays an important part in highlighting the sheep industry in the north of Scotland and is a great opportunity for visitors to see a progressive family farm."

Other mainline sponsors confirmed include ANM Group, British Wool, Caltech Crystalyx, MSD Animal Health and Shearwell Data. The event will be supported by Quality Meat Scotland.

The event will include a comprehensive seminar programme (see panel), shearing, grading, spinning, felt making, crook making, lamb butchery and cooking demonstrations, stockjudging, NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition, sheepdog trial, and show and sale of ewe hoggs.

[More info on the event website.](#)

NSA MEMBERS / STUDENTS £6
ADMISSION £12
UNDER 16 FREE ENTRY

Seminar Programme

Seminar building sponsored by SRUC/SAC Consulting

11am – Lamb trade & marketing in a climate of in/decision

NSA Scottish Region committee member John Fyall chairs a panel of specialists working in the lamb trade.

1pm – Impact of Brexit in relation to the Scottish Sheep Industry

Jennifer Craig, NSA Scottish Region Chairman & Jeremy Moody, CAAV Secretary and Adviser.

3.25pm – Meet the Farmer Q&A

Willie Budge, SAC Consulting & NSA Highland Sheep 2019 Event Chairman, speaks to host farmer Stephen Sutherland.

Workshop Programme

Workshop area sponsored by Innovis

9.30am & 12.30pm – What does research prove?

Representative of Caltech-Crystalyx.

10am & 1.30pm – One small step for 'ewe', one giant leap for your flock

Bridget Girvan, MSD Animal Health vet advisor.

10.30am & 2pm – Combining the best nutrition and management with epigenetics to shape the future of sheep

Harbro specialists David Mackenzie and Jill Hunter.

11.40am & 3.10pm – Practical guide to soil health, grass utilisation and genetics – joining the dots to make money

Emily Grant, former grassland advisor, and a representative from Innovis genetics team.

12.10pm & 3.30pm – Selecting prime lambs

Robert Gilchrist and Declan Marren of the Farm Profit Programme and Colin Slessor Deputy Head of Livestock, ANM Group.

highland sheep
NSA SCOTLAND 2019

WEDNESDAY 12TH JUNE: 9am - 5pm

SIBMISTER FARM, MURKLE, THURSO, CAITHNESS, KW14 8SW

FARM TOUR
TRADE & SHEEP BREED STANDS
SHOW & SALE EWE HOGGS
SEMINARS & WORKSHOPS

DEMONSTRATIONS
NSA NEXT GENERATION
SHEPHERD OF YEAR &
STOCKJUDGING COMPETITIONS



W&A Geddes

FURTHER INFORMATION:
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Plans advanced for NSA Sheep South West

NSA Sheep South West will focus on how producers can improve the health of both their flock and bank balance in a practical situation.

Bryan and Liz Griffiths, hosts of the event on Tuesday 18th June, have applied practically-trialed science to their fields and flock for the past 15 years at Southcott Farm, Burrington, North Devon.

They have worked closely with Torch Vets and Liverpool University on issues varying from lameness and colostrum quality to worm and antibiotic resistance. The resulting facts and advice have been applied through changes in management practice over the years.

The ensuing efficiency in flock health will be there for all to see on the farm tours taking place throughout the day. Seminars explaining the science behind the changes in management will run in tandem.

Collaboration

Bryan, who is NSA Chairman, among a wealth of other roles, says: "There are so many positives that have come out of this collaborative work. What has evolved is the appliance of science in the field; a real situation, not a theoretical one." Liz has worked closely with Torch Vets on worm burden and resistance, and is a keen follower of SCOPS initiatives.

A record 150 trade stands are booked, with Shearwell Data coming forward as NSA Sheep South West's major sponsor. Main sponsors include AHDB, Crystalyx, Harpers Feeds, Jaspers in conjunction with Dalehead Foods and Waitrose, Mole Valley, MSD, Towergate Insurance and British Wool.

Shearing

With wool's popularity as a sustainable natural fibre continuing to rise, Bryan is looking forward to hosting a talk on the history of shearing. He will be joined by Alan Derryman who, at 60 years old, sheared 413 sheep last year in nine hours to raise £11,000 for the Exeter Leukemia Fund (ELF), and world shearing champion Matt Smith. The interactive presentation will demonstrate a range of shearing techniques, including regional

shearing styles, as well as showcase the history of shearing machinery from the hand shear to today's equipment.

A photographic competition is open for all to enter. The subject matter must be sheep-related. It will be judged on the day by a well-known regional photographer.

Nearly 50 breed societies will be on site for the day, many running their own competitions. There will also be the popular and professionally-contested Next Generation Shepherd and Student competitions, sponsored by Mole Valley and Volac respectively. The fleece competition is also a qualifier for the Golden Fleece 2019 final.

[Find more information and enter competitions on the website.](#)



Guests enjoying NSA Sheep South West 2017.

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TUESDAY 18TH JUNE: 9am - 5pm

SOUTHCOTT, BURRINGTON, UMBERLEIGH, DEVON, EX37 9LF

**SHEEP
SOUTHWEST
2019**



WORKSHOPS
COMPETITIONS
SHEEPDOG SALE
DEMONSTRATIONS
HISTORY OF WOOL

TRADE & BREED SOCIETY STANDS
AUCTIONEERING COMPETITION
FLEECE COMPETITION
NSA NEXT GENERATION YOUNG SHEPHERD
NEWS THIS YEAR - PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

FURTHER INFORMATION:
M: 07967 512660 E: suem@nationalsheep.org.uk www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk

Seminars and Workshop Programme

10am - Torch Vets

South West initiative in sheep husbandry.

10.30am - Crystalyx

What does research prove? Results from two decades of research in sheep nutrition.

11am - MSD

Simple steps to stamp out lameness.

11.30am - Innovis

Joining the dots to make money. Practical guide to grass growing, utilisation and genetics.

12.30pm - Torch Vets

Reducing antibiotic use without compromising welfare or performance.

2pm - NSA

Adapting sheep farming in a changing world.

2.45pm - North Wyke

What we measure and what you should measure. An overview of research undertaken at North Wyke Farm.

Busy schedule at NSA Sheep Northern Ireland

NSA Sheep NI 2019 will be held in Ballymena Livestock Market on Monday 1st July. The livestock market has superb facilities and staff which makes it an ideal venue for the event.

Gates will open for the public at 9.30am and run to 6pm with a packed programme to keep visitors entertained all day long.

Attractions include workshops, clinics, demonstrations and seminars running alongside the mainstay of our event, which are the trade exhibits and breed society stands. The central area of the main market building will see a variety of workshops and clinics from weedwiping by NI Water to the control of wildfires by NI Fire Authority and everything else in between.

Competitions

The main competition will be the NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition, sponsored by Ceva UK, where young people will show their ability to handle a series of tasks involved in working with sheep. Ulster Wool will be holding a fleece competition and invite sheep farmers to bring along their best fleeces for appraisal.

NSA Sheep NI cannot run without the ever-popular sheepdog sale, which always attracts a vast crowd. For some it is a handy place to buy or sell a sheepdog and for others it is a form of entertainment watching the skills (or lack of) of

the shepherd and his dog demonstrating how to handle a flock of sheep.

For some the most informative place will be the calf ring where the four seminars will be held starting at 11.30 am and running every hour (see panel for programme).

Seminars

The seminars have a focus on soil and grass management as crucial elements of agricultural production, climate change mitigation and adaptation, urban development, and flood risk management.

Neglecting the health of our soil could lead to reduced food security, increased greenhouse gas emissions, greater flood risk and damage to public health. We have heard that some of the most productive agricultural land in the country is at risk of becoming unprofitable within a generation due to soil erosion and loss of organic carbon, and the natural environment will be seriously harmed.

Additionally, the lower associated cost of production of grazed grass relative to alternative feed sources provides an opportunity for producers in temperate grazing regions to produce lamb from a primarily grass-based diet in a cost-effective manner.

NSA NI is a fun-filled family day out where old friends and new can meet and discuss their common interests and find out what's new so as to make informed decisions for the future as we look forward.



Seminar Programme

11.30am

Looking at Soil Health

John Bailey, Head of Agri-Environment at AFBI.

12.30pm

Is there a place for multi species swards on a sheep farm?

Dr Tommy Boland, University College Dublin.

1.30pm

Grass utilisation

Dr Elizabeth Earle, Agri Search.

2.30pm

The work of NSA in influencing policy

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive.



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Countdown to early ram sale

The NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale on Monday 5th August at the Royal Showground is the venue of choice for early lambing flocks wanting the pick of rams ready for tupping, with a choice from 500 across five or six of the major early lambing breeds.

The sale traditionally sets the price for top quality, healthy, vet-inspected rams and is one of the few places to source tups for the early lambing trade.

Last year's headline price of 2,800gns for a Corrie cravie Texel shearing (pictured) was a fitting 65th birthday present for vendor Paul Johnson. He and his wife Anna have been attending the early sale for many years and were delighted.

The price was well up on the previous year's 1,750gns top price, with an average of £637.29 for Texel shearling rams also up, as was the top Charollais price at 1,900gns for a ram lamb, with the average for Charollais ram lambs reaching an increased £552.75. A Suffolk ram lamb made 1,050gns, with breed averages again generally higher than 2018.

Despite the positive performance, NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Chairman Richard Gwilliam has appealed to politicians and opinion formers



to protect the sheep industry for the future.

He says Brexit and wider political issues around climate change mean the sector is 'holding its breath'. However, Mr Gwilliam stresses that confidence in the NSA Wales & Border Ram sales and currently strong lamb prices bode well for the early sale.

He warns: "We are holding our breath as an industry to see what is happening with regard to Brexit and our relationship with Europe. If we don't have support, people who are totally dependent on sheep will be left out in the cold. Those who can influence anyone in authority should do so. Our producers are still working to the highest standards and we hope our governments will acknowledge this."

The online entry form, introduced last year, is now a much-valued feature of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales website, and applications close on Wednesday 3rd July. There is also an online catalogue and gallery of pictures.

Busy sale expected for SW Region

The NSA South West Region ram sale is being held on Wednesday 14th August at Exeter Livestock Market, Devon, EX2 8FD.

Following on from the introduction of ring four solely for the sale of non-MV accredited sheep last year, this ring will be used again featuring improvements based off feedback gathered.

Society shows will be held on the Tuesday evening from 4pm and anyone is welcome to attend. All vendors must be NSA members and membership forms can be downloaded online. Entry forms will be sent automatically to anyone who has sold in the previous three years as well as being available to on the NSA website and from Kivells. Entries close on Monday 1st July. The ballot is being held on Monday 8th July and catalogues will be available from early August. These will be mailed to vendors and previous purchasers and will be available on the sale website.



Preparations start for Melton ram sale

NSA Eastern Region will be at Melton Mowbray on Friday 20th September for its 34th annual ram sale at the venue.

The sale has seen average prices rise over the past few years and clearance rates for correct, well-fleshed tups are very high. For those who do not know the market, it has undergone extensive modernisation over the past couple of years, with modern, excellent livestock facilities and an innovative link-up with North West Auctions in Cumbria.

The Friday date for the NSA sale has the added attraction of the farmers' market running at the same time, so come along and buy your pork pies and much more! This sale usually attracts an entry of 250-270-head of various terminal sire breeds and the quality continues to improve year on year. Thanks go to Tom Greenow and all the staff at Melton for their continued support for this event, as well as to Melton Mowbray Council, which supports the show classes at the sale and for its continued interest and support for this town centre market.



All set for Wales & Border main sale

NSA Wales & Border Main Sale will be held at the Royal Welsh Showground on Monday 23rd September.

The sale is regarded as the venue of choice for vet-inspected, quality stock. It enjoys an international reputation as the biggest sale in Europe and regularly attracts vendors and buyers from across the UK and beyond.

Last year's 40th anniversary sale saw a solid trade, despite the unpredictability of the political climate and the vagaries of the weather. There was an 80% clearance of the 4,727 rams forward. Turnover was £1.84million.

The highest price went to a Bluefaced Leicester ram. The 12,000gns male was sold by Vale of Glamorgan couple, semi-retired Tudor and Janet Harris, and was the highlight of a day that saw good rams sell well.

The closing date for sale entries is Wednesday 7th August.



For more information about the NSA ram sales, contact the respective sale organiser, whose contact details can be found on page two.



Plans underway for Rugby ram sale

NSA Eastern Region's Rugby ram sale will take place on Friday 30th August at Rugby Farmers Mart, Stoneleigh Park, Warwickshire.

The sale is aimed at early lambing flocks and those who want to settle in their tups well in advance of the breeding season.

There will be an anticipated entry of over 120 rams including Charollais, Texel, Suffolk and Beltex. The sale is held on the same day as a major commercial ewe lamb sale, so there are plenty of buyers at the venue.

Sale Organiser Johnathan Barber says: "At both NSA Eastern Region sales the rams are inspected for the three Ts - teeth, toes and testicles - meaning buyers can be reassured that they are bidding on correct animals of good quality that will do a first-class job for them. The penning facilities at Rugby are perfect for a ram sale, with easy unloading and plenty of space to present your rams to potential customers."

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Meeting with Minister Goodwill

In late April NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, along with NSA English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison and NSA Communications Officer Eleanor Phipps, met with the new Farming Minister. Robert Goodwill (pictured) replaced George Eustice following his resignation earlier in the year.



The meeting was an opportunity to introduce the Minister to NSA as an organisation, as well as inform him on which issues and topics were of particular concern to the sheep industry.

Mr Stocker explains: "We only had the normal 40 minute window with the Minister, which didn't much time to brief him on issues that matter to the sheep industry. However, we gave him a good introduction and were pleased with the outcome."

Farming background

Mr Goodwill has a good background in farming, having an arable farm of his own. This allowed for a good discussion on the benefits of sheep in arable rotations, also opening the door to other areas where sheep can work well in integrated systems.

The agenda also covered future farm support and what an emergency payment may look like in the event of a no deal. Mr Stocker continues: "This was a tricky topic, and the Minister was determined no deal preparations are first and foremost focused on us reaching a deal. Accordingly, there was little enthusiasm for any detail to be discussed on this subject, however the Minister did indicate he was of a pro-free market persuasion. This may be interesting moving forward, as he will have a huge say on what our future farm support will look like."

Slaughter tag use to remain unchanged

NSA is pleased to report the UK has secured a positive change to the wording of the EU Draft Animal Health Law Delegated Act, which now proposes that farmers can continue to use single slaughter tags in the same way we currently do. The consultation on the draft law closed on the 22nd May.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker explains: "Currently we have the option to use a single electronic slaughter tag on lambs intended for slaughter irrespective of the moves they make before going to an abattoir. The early draft of the wording of this new law would have prevented this and only allowed the use of the single slaughter tag if lambs were going direct from farm to an abattoir."

NSA raises concerns over future of migrant workers

NSA has become increasingly concerned by the Government's current definition of a 'skilled worker'.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker explains: "The Government tests proposed for skilled workers and the salary threshold of £30k means most of the migrant workers in abattoirs would not qualify to be here."

"The principle of this changing policy is that free movement of people is ending; there will be

"The draft being consulted on now allows the single slaughter tag to be used as long as lambs are intended for slaughter and places no restrictions on whether they go through live markets first or to other holdings for finishing."

NSA has worked closely with a number of industry partners, as well as with Defra staff, Ministers and MEPs to push for an amendment to the draft. Mr Stocker continues: "We are thrilled to see this has been changed, and Defra has confirmed with us that the Act will now allow us to continue to use slaughter tags in the way we do. Again, it goes to show how much can be achieved by uniting with other organisations and Government to consolidate our voices and make a strong case for practical regulatory solutions."

This Act is planned to be implemented in April 2021 and it is probable the UK will adopt it irrespective of its relationship with the EU.

a single immigration system for all nationalities except British and Irish nationals with an emphasis on talent and skills."

Inadequate scheme

NSA is concerned the Government is intending to solve these issues by introducing a temporary workers scheme, which NSA has been clear will not suit the way abattoirs source, train and retain staff.

Late in 2018, the Government released an immigration White Paper, which was informed largely by the work of the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC). The paper is now entering a consultative phase and it is planned that whatever happens in the Brexit process the new rules will come into force on 1st January 2021.

NSA has been raising its concerns at meetings and will shortly begin to formally request meetings with MPs and Ministers to address the issue.

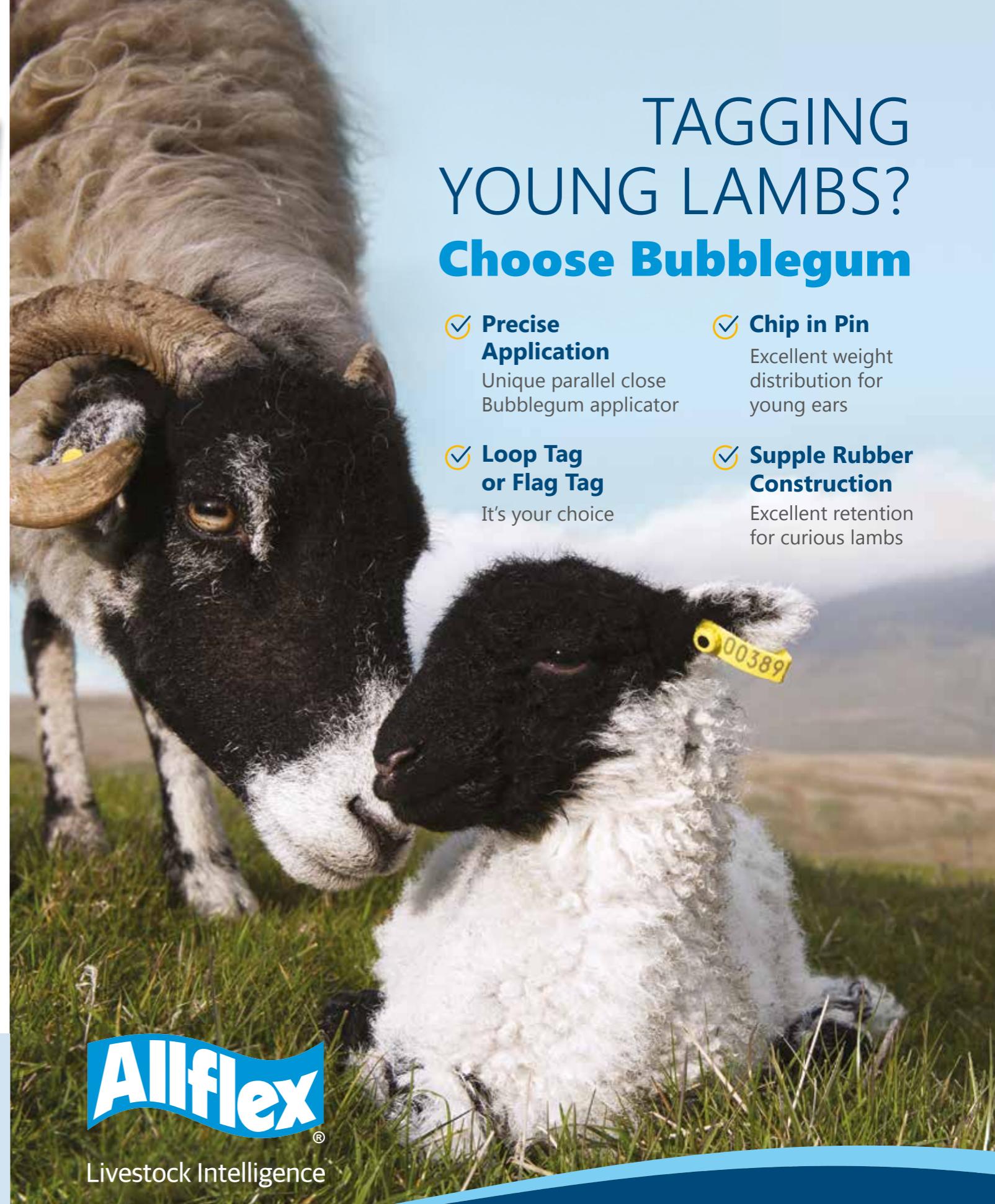
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NSA defends UK industry against false climate change accusations

Members will have seen increasing media coverage in recent months calling for the reduction of red meat consumption. NSA has been consistently responding to these claims to dispute the suggestions and to right the record.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "It is really frustrating for NSA and sheep farmers to see our extensive livestock sectors so frequently caught up within criticisms of agriculture and their impact on climate change and biodiversity. Particularly when there is little mention of genuinely damaging activities that may be less popular to criticise."

Unbalanced

NSA has been clear it supports the need for measures to reduce global warming and address species decline. However, it is concerned some of the recommendations in recent reports, such as that from the Committee for Climate Change, relating to agriculture and food are unbalanced, based on inadequate science and understands little about the UK sheep industry in its criticisms of red meat production.

Mr Stocker explains: "Livestock farming appears to be an easy target that is fashionable to attack, but the reality is that farming methods in the UK

can contribute positively, and could do even more with the right incentives. In particular, the role of grazed grassland, rotational and permanent leys, in building soil organic matter, soil biology and storing carbon is ignored.

"Many of the climate change assumptions regarding ruminant livestock farming are based on global systems of production that are very different to our mainstream methods here in the UK. Our systems are predominantly grass based and grazed, and operate in harmony with wildlife, rather than a feedlot style production based on crop production, feed processing and transport."

Greenhouse gases

NSA is also calling for more distinction between different greenhouse gases. Mr Stocker continues:

"While we can't ignore methane, if we take it out of the equation for a moment you can easily argue that sheep farming in the UK helps combat climate change. It absorbs and stores carbon, reduces risks of wildfires and enhances soil conditions.

"When methane is added to the equation, the old methods of greenhouse gas conversion to carbon equivalents will inevitably make things look bad. But methane acts very differently to carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide and in comparison has a short, rotational life cycle which means, as long as livestock numbers stay stable, methane levels don't build."

It can be argued reducing livestock numbers

will have a cooling effect over time. But livestock are not the only emitters of methane and they provide a wide range of other multi-functional benefits including converting grasslands that cannot be cropped into high quality protein and nutrients, building soil fertility for subsequent crop production, adding to mixed farm environments that are good for biodiversity, and a landscape that people enjoy.

NSA will continue to counter these claims and to share its research work into sheep integration through its reports that highlight how upland and lowland regions, grassland and arable and woodland can benefit from the integration of sheep.

Copies of these reports are available online or from NSA Head Office.

Update on splitting

As widely reported, NSA was very disappointed by the decision to abort this season's planned change to sheep aging in relation to carcase splitting.

The initial delay was due to the Government not wanting to risk the UK's third country status, which would have been essential to trade goods with the EU in the event of a no deal Brexit. By the time the immediate risk of a no deal had declined it was agreed it was too late to make the regulatory changes required to implement the change for this season.

Having agreed we had little choice but to accept this delay, NSA is now calling for Defra to maintain progress over the next few months, while we are still within the EU, with the aim that the change to an end of June cut-off date can be signed off before this summer's store lamb sales begin. There will be farmers who have lost out financially due to this abandonment and, this time round, we need store lamb buyers to be confident of the situation before the sales begin.



Release of sea eagles anticipated

Shortly after the previous edition of this magazine went to print, Natural England announced its decision to release 30 breeding pairs of white tailed (sea) eagles onto the Isle of Wight over a five-year period, beginning this summer.

NSA was extremely disappointed at the news, having opposed the release on the grounds these large apex predators are known to cause problems for farmers, as has been seen since their release in Scotland. NSA continues to voice concerns and has questioned Natural England on its decision, as the approval for release suggests there is a greater abundance of natural wildlife for prey than has previously been suggested within criticism of agriculture and its impact on biodiversity.

NSA has also requested to sit on the industry steering group for the release, which will allow it to continue to voice sheep farmers' concerns and help guide the release in a way that limits the damage to farmers as far as possible.

Range of policy work in devolved nations

Dog worrying research to help tackle the issue in Scotland

By Jen Craig, Regional Chairman

UK Government to find ways of facilitating lamb exports was highlighted as a priority, and increased funding for lamb promotion and marketing was also suggested.

However, if the politicians can do their jobs and find a Brexit compromise that the majority can support, there will be no need for a compensation scheme.

In view of the delay to Brexit, it was also agreed the postponed changes to the hogg mousing regulations should now be progressed and finalised as soon as possible. It is disappointing this won't come this season, but we will continue to push for this change to come into place before next season.



A busy few months ahead for NSA in Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Show season is up on us again and, although a meeting of the shows and Welsh Government took place at the end of last year, the quarantine unit rules still apply and continue to affect entries at some events.

In fact, it had an impact on NSA Welsh Sheep with some Welsh breeds not attending this year as it followed straight after the Spring Festival at Builth. Although NSA Cymru/Wales Region agrees with the principle of quarantining livestock, the criteria needs to work for the industry.

The region is looking forward to the Royal Welsh Show and would like to remind all members they are most welcome to come and see us on the stand or at the reception on the Monday afternoon.

Carcase splitting

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is disappointed to receive official confirmation from Welsh Government that the change from toothng to a calendar date in the carcase splitting decision has officially been delayed. However, it welcomes that a decision has been made, offering clarity to producers.

The move to a calendar cut off day would hugely help the market and not doing so is a hinderance to store producers. Brexit has been used as an excuse to not make the changes needed, and we hope this will be rectified and sorted in time for the 2020 season.

There are several consultations out now which need members' input in order that we can put a full and meaningful response in. NSA Cymru/ Wales Region has already tabled a response on the proposed EU animal health law, as the revised text favours the UK as a result of the lobbying UK officials and industry representatives have had with the European Commission (more on page 14). The other consultation is about new proposals to boost security for tenanted farmers. Welsh Government wants to better understand of the views of both tenants and landlords on agricultural mortgages agricultural mortgages and repossession proceedings.

Further details can be found at www.gov.wales/agricultural-tenancy-reform and the consultation closes on 2nd July.

What can you do to improve your farm's ecology and natural diversity?

It is now widely accepted that future UK farming policies will have an even greater focus on environment and ecology.

But does this mean sheep farmers will have to fundamentally change what they're currently doing - or would a flexible approach, as advocated for by NSA, mean practices already being implemented on some farms could be more widely adopted?

This article introduces a variety of different concepts in a range of areas to get people thinking, starting with John Fyall of the NSA Scottish Region Committee.

Ambitious steps

John has taken ambitious steps to improve the environment since taking on a tenancy at Sittyton, Aberdeenshire, 10 years ago.

He says: "Since arriving at Sittyton we have planted more than 2km of new hedgerows and a small area of woodland. We have chosen to cut nutrient hungry ryegrass from our seed mix in favour of diverse and durable swards of fescues, clovers, plantain and chicory."

"In last year's drought, these deep rooting species did very well compared to productive grasses. This year we are trying a field of sainfoin for high quality hay for the cattle and follow on grazing for the sheep. This will also benefit the soil and offer a valuable source of nectar for pollinators."

Mr Fyall rents some land as well as running his home farm. He adds: "We would like to do much

Swaledales suit the local environment in the Yorkshire Dales.



more, such as planting small areas of woodland for wildlife but cannot do this because we only have short term licences on most of our land."

In England, farmers have continued to deliver significant environmental benefits on their farms despite many shunning the unpopular countryside stewardship scheme. They believe it makes economic sense to provide 'public goods' such as healthy soil and enhanced biodiversity.

Neil Hestletine exemplifies this approach. He farms at Hill Top Farm on the edge of the village of Malham in the Yorkshire Dales National Park. The land lies at 365-545m (1,200-1,800ft) above sea level and so Mr Hestletine's choice of Belted Galloway cattle and pure bred Swaledale sheep suit the local environment.

Mr Hestletine has land in the higher tier scheme, the old higher level scheme and the mid tier scheme. While the schemes make a valuable contribution to farm income, he is adamant each enterprise on the farm must stand up in its own right.

Productivity

"The environmental side of what we do is very important to us but I have to make sure each enterprise is paying. We want to show the meat we are producing here makes a positive contribution to the environment and in mitigating climate change," Mr Hestletine says.

As a member of Pasture for Life, Mr Hestletine is committed to finishing his beef and lamb from grass with almost no bought-in inputs. He explains: "We have reduced our sheep numbers significantly to just 150 purebred Swaledale ewes and we no longer use sprays or fertiliser and we ▶

Setting the scene

By Phil Stocker, NSA

Some may feel it is dangerous territory to use Sheep Farmer magazine to write about improving conditions for wildlife and biodiversity.

Should our magazine not be all about sheep husbandry, sheep related politics and sheepmeat markets?

It was my decision to run an article like this and the reasoning was simple; NSA believes in the environmental benefits of sheep farming and good environmental performance is important for our reputation.

Providing environmental goods already provides important income for sheep farmers and its likely to become even more important.

Natural resources and environmental conditions are clearly under pressure. The health and wellbeing of people is increasingly recognised as being affected by environmental factors. Sheep farmers can do more to improve our environment and we must do more to show the public how beneficial sheep farming is.

The regular observations I've heard from within our ranks is that our own wildlife is getting scarcer. For us it could be the hedgehog or the cuckoo, bees or moths but this is being amplified by other species across the globe.

This article was commissioned to take a look at what is going on already on sheep farms in terms of environmental by-products from the sheep farming system, what people are doing to benefit from environmental payments, and what some people are choosing to do additionally just because they think it's right.

It should get NSA members thinking in preparation for what is likely to be coming down the line in future years regarding farm support schemes and it may just spark a bit of interest and some good ideas that will only help our image and reputation.

While most sheep farmers are passionate about their environment it is also a fact most agricultural education and training has evaded the subject of ecology, so it shouldn't be a surprise that it's not always considered as part of management decisions, or that agricultural ecology isn't well integrated into farm policy support. However, this is where we are heading now, and we'd be better placed if we grasped the concept and made it our own.

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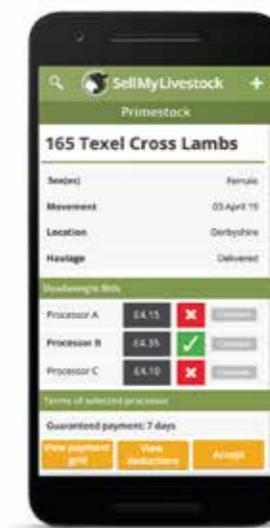
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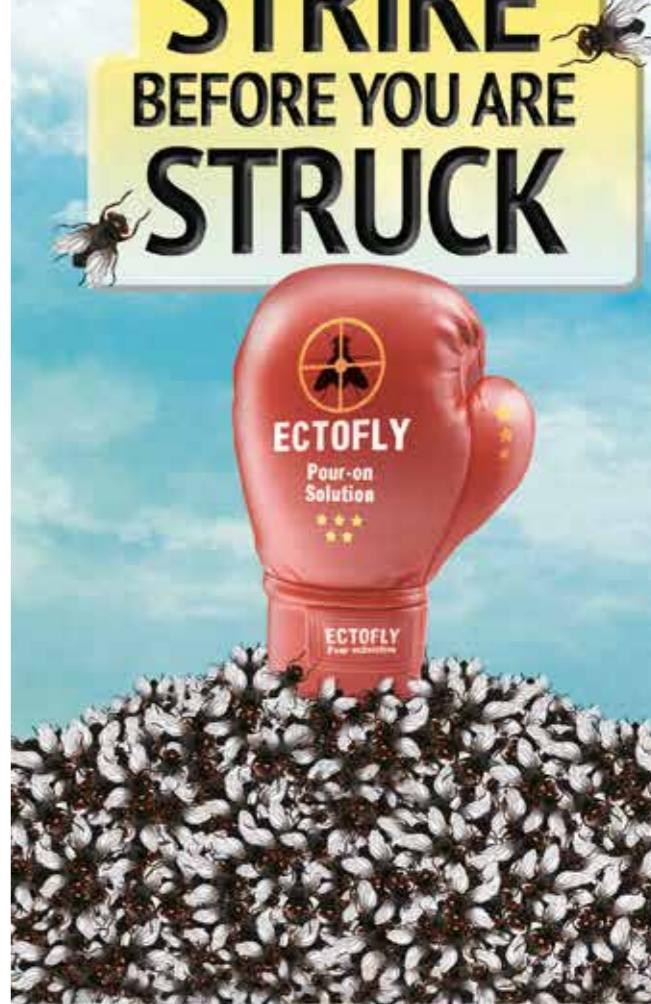
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Additionally, Mr Hestletine is actively involved in the Limestone Country Project which aims to conserve some of the iconic species in this precious part of the Yorkshire Dales. He says careful stewardship of the upland limestone pasture has contributed to the recovery of rare plants such as the birdseye primrose.

Andrew Keiley and his partner Hannah Fawcett farm together in Wensleydale and the flock of 500 purebred Swaledale ewes is the mainstay of their farm business. They are involved in the 'payment by results' pilot agri-environment scheme led by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and are enthusiastic advocates of this new approach.

Pilot scheme

Mr Keiley says: "The payment by results scheme is a means of securing more income without having to go off farm, while at the same time improving the environment. We have land in both elements of the scheme; the habitat for wading birds and the traditional hay meadows.

"We have an oxbow lake and floodplain as the River Ure runs through our land and it is a haven for waders such as curlew, lapwing, redshank and oystercatcher. The sheep help to produce the right habitat for these species which

need the close grazed turf during the breeding season. If there is too much rush in a field they will not breed there."

Mr Keiley believes by paying for results the onus is on the farmer to do the right thing to benefit the species that the scheme is designed around. He comments: "The scheme is more flexible than traditional agri-environment schemes because you can tweak the management to suit your farming system and it takes into account local knowledge. If you do something damaging that impacts on the habitat your score will be reduced so you will receive less income from the scheme. If you do the right thing and manage in a way which encourages the target flora or fauna, you will secure a higher score and be paid more."

Agri-environment payments are essential to the survival of hill farmers, he says, and play a vital role in keeping important native breeds such as the Swaledale on the hills. He adds: "The Swaledale is an environmental tool for the uplands and is a premium product but they are disappearing. The payment by results scheme will help us to keep these vital breeds because it directs the funding to the active farmer. It has the chance to be groundbreaking and hopefully will be rolled out at a wider scale."

There are increasing numbers of farmers who adopt approaches to lamb production which set

sustainability as the principal goal.

Andy Wear is a first generation farmer who bought Fernhill Farm in the Mendip Hills, Somerset, in 1997 with his wife Jennifer. Describing himself as 'passionate about regenerative agriculture', Mr Wear adopts a planned holistic grazing regime across the 1,200ha (3,000 acres) where he grazes his flock of 1,850 ewes.

He says: "I have been practising rotational grazing with sheep for more than 30 years. I started off by all winter grazing the land we rent using electric fencing to enable us to move the sheep regularly and the feedback from our landlords was there was much more grass. We extended this approach into the summer months and it worked extremely well so now we use this regenerative format across all the land we graze.

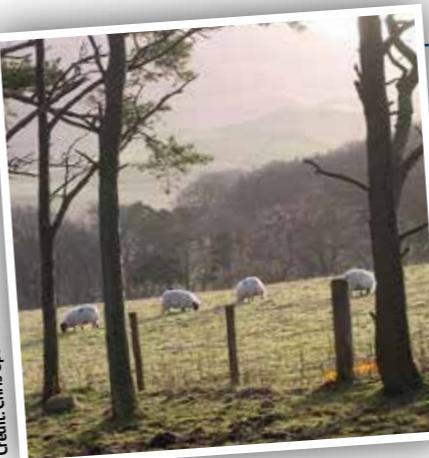
"Regenerative agriculture improves soil health because there is an increased number and variety of microbes in the soil. We see increased plant diversity and more species with deep roots, which aids soil structure, allowing water to percolate through the soil profile during periods of heavy rainfall.

Rejuvenation

"We took on some arable land which was an environmental desert. After reverting it back to grassland and mob grazing, three years on it is buzzing with activity and the soil surface is thick with worm casts."

To improve his efficiency, Mr Wear has simplified his business as far as possible and says holistic grazing is a key part of this. Ensuring there is always fresh grass to turn ewes and lambs onto reduces the worm burden and means sheep are more likely to thrive in testing climatic conditions.

Mr Wear says: "We suffered with the drought last year like everyone and our Romney ewes lost some condition over the summer months. But when the rain arrived in the autumn they did very well and lambing percentages at scanning were up on the previous year."



Credit: Chris Upson / Sheep and Pine Trees

Trees and sheep

Trees can provide many environmental benefits but can also work well within a sheep enterprise.

Diana Fairclough and her partner Ben Anthony farm at Frown Farm, Whitland, Carmarthenshire, and have 14ha (35 acres) of woodland within the 60ha (145 acres) of owned land alongside an additional rented 40ha (100 acres). They run a flock of 750 Aberfield cross Tregaron ewes and 15 suckler cows.

They first looked at the Glastir Woodland Creation grants when they wanted to fence part of the farm boundary. Diana says: "Because we have woodland around much of the farm we were able to secure funding towards new fencing if we were willing to carry out some additional tree planting."

"We also looked at Glastir Woodland Management grants to help us improve our existing woodland. This funded thinning, more tree planting, grey squirrel trapping and fencing within and around our existing woodland."

"It enabled us to fence the sheep out of woodlands which helps us to manage them as they always go there if they are ill or injured. The work we have done has enhanced the woodland for wildlife; we see more birds now and the native woodland flora is now regenerating."

*NSA supports the integration of trees into the farm landscape, rather than turning large areas of agricultural land over to forestry.
More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work.*



Credit: Steven Ward, Wikimedia Commons

Encouraging barn owls

A key reason for the decline in barn owls in the UK is loss of nesting and roosting sites because they are not well adapted to cold and wet weather.

The Hope Valley Farmers group in the Peak District has linked up with local bird enthusiasts John Ellicock and Lester Hartman to put up barn owl boxes on their farms. Each site is assessed to ensure the boxes are erected in an appropriate location surrounded by suitable habitat.

Mr Ellicock says: "The farmed landscape has far fewer derelict buildings than in the past and modern barns are frequently completely sealed. But there is much we can do to help barn owls overcome the loss of their nesting sites."

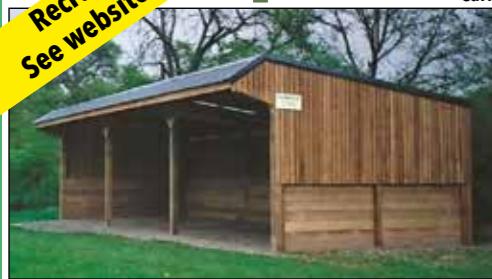
"Where a concerted effort has been made in counties such as Cheshire and Lincolnshire, populations have been restored. Here in the Hope Valley, by working with farmers, we hope to make a difference so more people can witness the magical site of a barn owl in the British landscape."



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Extensive grass-based system priority for new Central Region Chairman

By Eleanor Phipps, NSA

With 2,000ha (5,000 acres) on one of the most recognised estates in the UK, managing the in-hand farms at Chatsworth certainly provides a challenge for Farm Manager and NSA Central Region Chairman David Howlett.

David moved to Derbyshire from Norfolk in 2014 with his wife Sara and young family to take over the running of Chatsworth Farms, owned by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire.

The set-up came with an established herd of pedigree Limousin cattle, and David has since added a small pedigree Hereford and Luing herd.

The sheep flock is made up of 2,000 Mule ewes, 900 Lleyns, 500 Swaledales, 200 Aberfield cross Lleyns, and associated replacement ewe hoggs for all the different flocks. The diversity of breeds across the estate work well as different parts of the farm requires different management. David comments: "Each breed has its strengths and weaknesses and we can use these to have the right outcomes across the farm."

The farm is run much the same any other farming enterprise and has to prove its viability

alongside other businesses within the Devonshire Group, whilst doing its bit for the landscape at Chatsworth. David says: "The parkland and surrounding landscape would not look as it does without the grazing animals, and it's our job to maintain that."

David's ambition was to farm an extensive grass based system but his biggest concern when he arrived at Chatsworth was the cost of out-wintering the main Mule flock with concentrates on some of the parkland grazing.

The estate runs from 400ft to 1100ft above sea level with a large proportion of the land being marginal permanent pasture. David adds: "The Mules had the run of the grazing and were on concentrates, but we just couldn't keep the condition on them throughout the winter months."

Lleyn flock

David therefore made the decision to introduce some Lleyn ewes, as he believed the breed would thrive on the unimproved pastures with little input. To date, David says his theory has proved successful. He comments: "The Lleyns have wintered with no feed and scanning at 180%. The biggest challenge had proved to be reducing condition score prior to lambing."

Furthermore, David says his system of operating a closed flock is also starting to have its advantages. He adds: "Once the Lleyn flock was established the decision was then made to use the Aberfield ram on the Lleyn. The lambs grow quickly, grade very well and we have retained the ewe lambs as the crossbred ewes are really good

mothers with plenty of milk. This enabled us to produce our own crossbred ewe and resulted in our own stratification system within the different flocks."

Terminal sire

The current terminal sire of choice is Beltex cross Charolais rams, which produce 19-20kg carcases for the Chatsworth Estate Farmshop and Cafe, with any surplus lambs sold to Dunbia and other abattoirs. David says: "The carcases we produce off of the Lleyn and Aberfield ewes are exactly what our outlets require, so this works well for us."

The main lambing at Chatsworth takes place from early April, with a small percentage of ewes lambed in February to ensure an all year-round supply for the farm shop. The Mule flock lamb indoors over a three-week period to Suffolk and Texel tups, followed by the Lleyns and Swales outdoors at the end of April.

David doesn't benchmark on output per hectare, instead he focuses on the output per labour unit. He comments: "We have large areas of moorland and marginal grazing, which is all in environmental stewardship with stocking restrictions, so we would struggle to set meaningful targets. We have created a system where we do not stock too hard, the sheep look after themselves with minimal concentrate feeding and in turn look after the environment through reduced inputs such as fertiliser."

The farm employs two full time shepherds, Ben Randles who oversees the Lleyn and Swaledale flocks and Neil Priestley who shepherds the Mule ewes and Aberfield flocks. Extra help is brought

Each breed has its strengths and weaknesses and we can use these to have the right outcomes across the farm.

David Howlett



Chatsworth is home to 2,000 Mules.



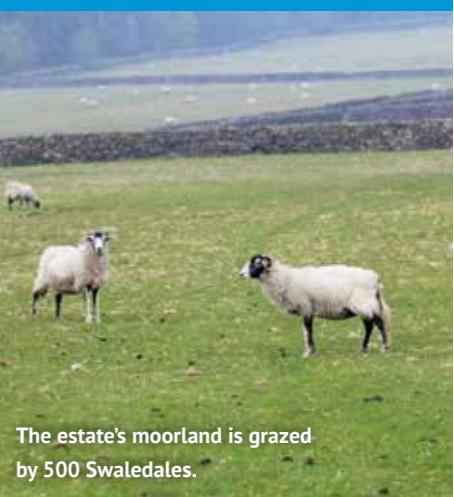
The future for the farm in the current climate has got to be about producing beef and lamb from grass and forage crops. This farm grows grass and we have to utilise it efficiently while being sensitive to the environment at all times.

David Howlett

David crosses his Aberfield cross Lleyn ewes with a terminal sire to produce lambs for the estate's farm shop.

Farm facts

- 2,000ha (5,000 acre) farm.
- Herd of 300 Hereford and Limousin suckler cows, as well as Luing cattle on the moor.
- Flock comprised of 2,000 Mules, 900 Lleyns, 500 Swaledales and 200 Lleyn cross Aberfields.
- Marginal land ranging from 400ft to 1100ft.
- Involved in wide range of stewardship schemes.



The estate's moorland is grazed by 500 Swaledales.

producing beef and lamb from grass and forage crops. This farm grows grass and we have to utilise it efficiently while being sensitive to the environment at all times."

First recipients of NSA Next Generation travel bursaries announced

Following a flurry of applications, a tricky shortlisting process and then some grueling interviews, the first ever winners of the NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation have been announced.

Thanks to generous support from the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, the award takes the form of two travel bursaries to support overseas study trips.

Joanne Briggs, NSA Operations Director, reports: "This is the first time NSA has awarded a bursary and we are thrilled with the outcome so far. The awards are in memory of Country Antrim sheep farmer Samuel Wharry, who was NSA Chairman when he passed away suddenly in May 2017. Samuel was an advocate for the application of science and technology on farm and we are confident he would be pleased to hear of the study tours our selected recipients will take. All at NSA hope Sam's enthusiasm, curiosity and practical nature will live on through this scheme."

Shearing welfare

Selected from a high calibre group of short-listed applicants, Marie Prebble from Kent and Charlotte (Charlie) Beaty from Warwickshire can now begin to firm up travel plans as both have been chosen to receive bursaries of £2,750 to explore sheep farming enterprises overseas.

Marie, who NSA members may already be familiar with as she is also an NSA Next Generation Ambassador, farms 550 Romney breeding ewes in Kent. Alongside managing her flock, Marie also works as a contract shearer and plans to keep shearing and sheep welfare central to her journey.

Marie plans to use her bursary to travel to Norway and Iceland following a trip to compete



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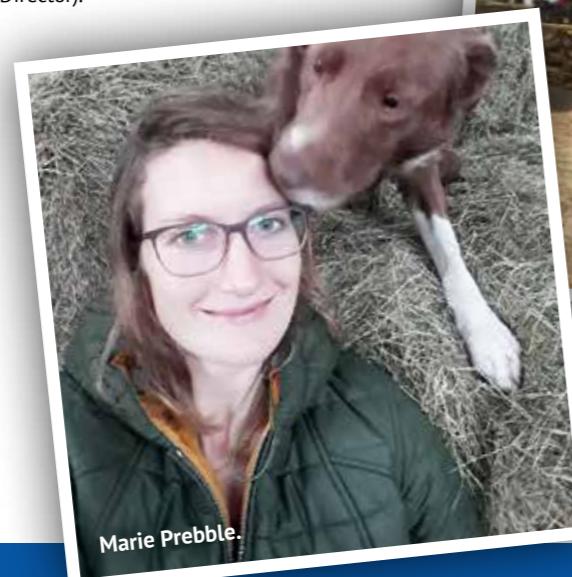
at the world shearing championships in France. Marie says: "I am looking forward to putting my environmental sciences background to great use in studying practical considerations for welfare during shearing in the Northern Hemisphere by connecting animal, social and environmental sciences with their practical applications on farm. I am so pleased and grateful to both NSA and the Staple for providing me with this opportunity and look forward to feeding back from my trip on my return."

Grassland management

The second recipient, Charlie Beaty, farms 300 North Country Mules in Warwickshire alongside her family's arable and beef enterprise and is planning on travelling to New Zealand to explore ways of improving grassland management.

Charlie explains: "With the current uncertainty facing the UK sheep industry I feel sheep farmers should be looking to lower production costs by maximising the potential of the cheapest feed available to them – grass. I have chosen to travel to New Zealand as I don't believe grassland management can be seen better in any other country. I am now very excited to plan each stage of my trip and look forward to working with NSA and the Staple to make the most of this opportunity."

Marie and Charlie were selected following interviews with Edward Adamson (NSA Northern Ireland Region Development Officer and close friend of Samuel Wharry), Stephen Fell (Company of Merchants of the Staple of England Charitable Trust), Professor Lee Innes (Moredun Principle Scientist and Communications Director) and Jane Smith (NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales Executive Director).



Marie Prebble



The NSA travel bursaries are generously supported by the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England.

Mr Fell comments: "I was very impressed at the interest shown in the new award and at the quality of the applicants. The eight applicants we interviewed demonstrated a good involvement in the sheep sector and the challenges facing it. The subjects they wished to study were wide ranging and very pertinent to those various challenges."

Enthusiasm

"The process was well structured and fair and, as a major supporter, we in the Merchant Company of the Staple of England are delighted with the result. Marie and Charlie were brimming with ideas and enthusiasm and I'm sure will prove worthy recipients of our new award."

Marie and Charlie both plan to set off for their information-gathering trips later in 2019 and will report back to NSA on their findings in Sheep Farmer magazine and at NSA events and meetings across the UK.



Charlie Beaty

Determination and adaptation help young county council farmers kick-start careers



to improve and make the farm more productive, through soil and grass and fencing and trying to do these things while building stock numbers."

However, some of these challenges were helped by an accommodating landlord. Tom adds: "The county council as a landlord has been very accommodating for us and helped sort drainage and ditches when we moved in, and it also provided concrete for us to improve the yards."

Despite this, however, Tom is facing uncertainty as more and more county council farms are being sold off to raise funds for councils that are strapped for cash. Tom adds: "I'm currently having to make serious decisions about the future as my council farm is one of the 16 the council plan to sell this year."

However, Tom still says it is worthwhile. He comments: "If I had a time machine and could go

back in time to advise my younger, more exuberant self, I would tell him to do it all again. I've really enjoyed this opportunity to farm in my own right and for the lifestyle it's provided for me and my family."



Tom's farm is at risk of being sold this year.

If I had a time machine and could go back in time to advise my younger, more exuberant self, I would tell him to do it all again.

Tom Chapman

Further down the line is Jim Beary, who started his career on a county council farm, which he used as a stepping stone before moving on two years ago.

Jim says: "I took on a council tenancy about seven years ago and began by making and selling hay and silage and grazing other people's sheep until I had raised the funds to start building up my own stock."

At his peak point during the tenancy, Jim was running 600 ewes and 230 calves. However, he had to make a decision when he was told his farm was up for consideration to be sold. He adds: "The county tenancy really got me going, but after five years there was uncertainty about the future of the farm. When another opportunity came up, I was able to use the experience and business I had built as a springboard to really launch my career."

Jim says despite its difficulties, the county tenancy gave him opportunities he wouldn't have had otherwise. He says: "I grew up in a farming

family, but we didn't have a family farm I could take on. Taking on the county council farm really gave me the opportunity to get my foot on the farming ladder. It's hard but doable, you just have to make the best of what you have, keep your eyes open for any opportunities and, most importantly, don't give up."

Considerations

He adds: "When you're getting started it's important to ensure the rent is realistic, the farm is in a decent state, or the landlord is willing to make investments, and to really think about your end goal."

With much uncertainty around many county council farms and their future, Jim says it's essential for young people taking on the contracts

Jim farmed on a county council farm from five years at the start of his career.



to be prepared with a plan and a goal.

He says: "A county council tenancy is a great way to help you get started in a field where opportunities are few and far between. But sadly, we are in danger of losing them at the moment. For those young people looking to take one on, it's a must to have a plan in case their farm is sold, and they have to find another route."

A county council tenancy is a great way to help you get started in a field where opportunities are few and far between.

Jim Beary

Protecting livestock from airborne predators following license changes in England

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

Nobody can have missed the alarm caused by Natural England's unexpected announcement in mid-April that it would be revoking three general licences following a legal challenge.

Hitting particularly hard was the withdrawal of GL04, which gives permission for authorised persons to kill or take wild birds to prevent serious damage to crops, livestock and feed. The main piece of legislation governing what, when and how farmers can control wild birds and other species is the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (W&CA).

At the time of writing this article, the devolved administrations in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland had not made similar announcements and, for Wales at least, the National Resources Wales general licences look to be compliant in a way the English licences were not. Starlings are no longer covered by general licences.

Schedule one of the W&CA lists birds that enjoy additional protection. These include the white tailed (sea) eagle (to be re-introduced on the Isle of Wight from this summer), the golden eagle, the red kite and harriers, and many other much-loved species (barn owl, kingfisher etc.).

There are no general licences available that allow any of these species to be controlled, but it is possible to apply for an individual licence, as it is for any other wild birds not listed in general licences. Licences to kill schedule one birds are rarely issued, and applicants would have to demonstrate the species concerned is causing damage and what kind of damage, that other

New born lamb with damage from a corvid attack.



lethal methods are ineffective or impracticable.

In other words, they are a useful 'blanket permission' for someone to carry out pest control that would otherwise be unlawful. A general licence saves repeat applications for individual licences, with attendant delays and administrative burden. But they are far from a free-for-all.

The 2001 case of RSPCA v Cundey looked at what a general licence issued under the W&CA covers. Mr Cundey was prosecuted for attempting to shoot starlings in his garden and argued that he had authority under a general licence.

The magistrates acquitted him, but the High Court found they were wrong to have done so because he could not show his purpose was either the protection of public health or the prevention of serious damage to livestock, feed or crops.

Starlings are no longer covered by general licences.

alternatives have been tried, that the proposed action is proportionate and that the conservation status of the species will not be negatively affected.

Considerations

That is a high bar. It is not that licences are never granted; licences to control buzzards preying on pheasant pouls have passed the tests, and air safety considerations have led to licences being issued to control red kites and other protected species. But, being realistic, applications for licences to control sea eagles on the Isle of Wight are unlikely to meet with success, even on the back of sporadic lamb deaths.

Advice for farmers:

- Always act within the confines for the licence you hold.
- In an emergency, where immediate action to protect livestock must be taken outside the confines of your licence, notify your national administration as soon as possible. This doesn't cover the killing of any schedule one species.
- Where no general licence is available, and no individual licence is in place, if you deem it necessary to shoot a bird, you must have applied for an individual licence prior to and must notify your wildlife body as soon as possible after shooting.
- Be cautious when allowing others to shoot on your land. Check they know what they can and cannot shoot, and their gun licences and insurance. It is best if you know who they are.



Latest FEC technology

FECPAKG2 technology is becoming a routine part of consultancy services being offered to sheep farmers by SQPs, according to the company supplying the faecal egg count (FEC) tool. Techion says SQPs are playing a crucial role in effective and sustainable parasite control, improving prescription of wormers by having new technology within stores. The FECPAKG2 kit is internet connected and image-based, meaning FEC results can be obtained within a couple of hours. This can provide an immediate guide to whether lambs need to be wormed and support a discussion with a trained SQP around other issues that may be affecting growth rates. [To find out if your local animal health merchant offers the service, or enquire about using the technology on-farm, go to www.techiongroup.com/FECPAKG2.](http://www.techiongroup.com/FECPAKG2)

Fencing solution

A new dropper post is now available from Gallagher. The dropper, Gallagher claims, offers a system that allows farmers to erect fencing easily and with fewer posts, while staying properly tensioned. The Line Post Dropper is a floating post that is designed to keep the fencing between two posts at the right height. Gallagher says it is cheaper to purchase than full fencing and allows the use of tape fencing as well as smooth wire, cord or poly wire. [Visit www.gallagher.eu for more information.](http://www.gallagher.eu)

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Organic support

A support service has been launched to provide free advice and technical guidance to organic farmers and those considering organic conversion. The Organic Advice, Support and Information Service (OASIS) has been developed collaboratively by independent farm consultancy Abacus Agriculture and OF&G (Organic Farmers and Growers). The organisations say they are aiming to help farmers decide whether organic conversion is right for their farm business, as well as providing existing organic farmers with the latest management and technical guidance. [For information about organic conversion visit www.organicinfo.org.uk website or call 08448 000091.](http://www.organicinfo.org.uk)

Livestock auction marts are supporting the rural community

Sponsored by LAA



Livestock auction markets across England and Wales are contributing at least £3.42 billion, supporting over 3,000 jobs, and helping sheep farmers achieve fair prices in-line with market demand, according to a new report from independent economic analyst, Sean Rickard.

The report, commissioned by the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA), reveals the sheep sector in particular benefits hugely from the transparency of the live sales ring. Over 10 million sheep were traded through livestock markets in England and Wales in 2017, making a significant contribution towards the £1.76 billion direct turnover generated across all species in the same year.

Contribution

The report investigates the total economic contribution generated by livestock auction markets in England and Wales, and how this stretches beyond the direct support to the livestock industry and farmers. It also investigates the benefits to buyers, vendors and the livestock industry in general, as well as animal welfare within livestock auction markets.

Sheep farms are small businesses and as such have little market power when compared to large scale, corporate food companies. Put simply, they are weak sellers if entering into private negotiations with powerful buyers and risk a transaction that under-values their animals. In contrast, selling livestock in an open-cry auction

market will guarantee a fair price.

Mr Rickard comments: "Auction markets are not only intuitive and transparent, but as neither buyer or seller can unfairly influence the price, they ensure the price is 'fair' – it accurately reflects current demand based on available information."

This is perhaps best illustrated by the return of liveweight sheep sales following the foot-and-mouth crisis in 2001. Farmers were quick to feel the benefit when they were able to return to the marts once they re-opened, having been squeezed by abattoirs when forced to sell direct.

The growth of direct and deadweight selling was largely driven by supermarkets in the 1990s, but the power of these same supermarkets to dictate trends is increasingly facing challenges from consumers wielding their considerable clout.

The report reveals that, in response, the supermarkets have all adopted 'corporate and social responsibility strategies', involving a greater focus on more traditional farming methods, a heightened interest in traceability and enhanced animal welfare.

This mindset aligns well with the role and contribution of auction markets, offering cautious optimism of upward trends in liveweight sales of sheep in coming years. The ability of the live sales ring to rapidly respond to demands of specific

markets, such as for halal meats, makes the auctions the lifeblood for trade.

A further advantage, particularly considering the increasing consumer demand for traceability, is the opportunity to enhance a buyer's reputation. Being seen to purchase high quality animals is likely to generate good publicity for a farmer. And attending a sale is an efficient way to meet and assess the buying and selling of other farmers.

The process of engaging in a transparent and fair process of price discovery also delivers the value of much reduced transaction costs. In an auction market, animals with different genetics from alternative breeders and finishers are on offer in one location, thereby reducing the costs of search.

Reduced costs

Watching and listening to other buyers reduces the costs of seeking information on value. The auction market guarantees the trade will be honoured, reducing the costs of enforcement. The result is that buyers, in making better, more satisfying choices, with purchases closely aligned to preferences, do so at minimum cost.

Farmers have long used markets as a benchmarking tool, being able to see the differences in stock, condition and quality. If lambs are not achieving the best price, and the farmer can't see why, they can ask the buyer the question, there and then. It also remains the case that only auction markets can allow buyers to satisfy themselves as to the integrity of the animals being offered for sale by directly engaging with sellers.

A significant proportion of sheep populations will necessarily be relocated during their lives. Lambs born in hill and upland areas need to move to lowland pastures where grass is more plentiful for finishing. It is the existence of livestock auction markets that facilitates this necessary movement of animals to the most economical sources of finishing. It is not only necessary if consumers are to be offered affordable, high quality meat, but also it helps ensure the country's agricultural land is used productively.

Markets provide social hubs for farmers to catch up.



Many auction marts now provide other functions for the community, such as event venues.



Livestock auction marts allow fair prices in a competitive setting.

Key findings

- Both buyers and sellers benefit from fair prices, accurately reflecting current demand.
- Sheep farmers, as small businesses, gain the advantage of equality when selling in a public auction.
- Without auction markets, sheep populations in England and Wales would be smaller.
- Animal welfare responsibilities are essential to the success of livestock markets.
- Livestock markets are at the centre of an agricultural network, providing both a social and business hub.

figures don't consider the total contribution of ancillary businesses, such as farm supply stores located on-site or nearby.

"The estimated expenditure and employment set out in the report is a significant underestimate of the total contributions of auction markets, because the values do not include the expenditure and employment generated by businesses located within their sites or in close proximity," explains Mr Rickard.

Rural network

Livestock auction markets are now increasingly found at the centre of a network of rural businesses that not only includes livestock-related activities such as feed companies, farm machinery sales offices and land agents, but also non-farming activities including retail outlets, conference facilities and venues for social gatherings.

At the heart of these hubs, livestock auction markets also carry a social responsibility. Farming has become an increasingly isolated and lonely occupation, and the social networking the auction

market provides should not be underestimated.

Mr Rickard says: "Auctions not only provide an opportunity to socialise, but it is now common for auction markets to provide facilities where farmers can meet with trained social and health workers to share their concerns and, if appropriate, directly address issues raised by stress and illness."

David Kivell, LAA Chairman, adds: "While this report clearly confirms the importance of the live sales ring in securing fair prices, and a transparent and traceable marketing system for the sheep sector, it also highlights the often-missed benefits to the wider rural economy.

"The report clearly identifies that without livestock auction markets farmers would be in a far worse position due to lack of competition, and livestock numbers across England and Wales would inevitably fall. Knock-on effects to the wider rural economy would be devastating. The farming community must get behind and support its livestock auction markets."

The full report is published on the Livestock Auctioneers Association website at www.laa.co.uk/news.

Working together to keep the sheep industry healthy



Did you know, as an NSA member you're also an associate member of Moredun and can access the Moredun online portal? Find Moredun magazines and disease factsheets, as well as new features such as webcasts and an online members noticeboard.

www.nationalsheep.org.uk/moredun
www.moredun.org.uk

You will need your NSA membership number to access the Moredun Portal. Contact NSA Head Office if you need assistance or do not have internet access.



How to present your fleeces to maximise clip and competition value

As British Wool launches details of its 2019 National Golden Fleece competition, it is pleased to see in recent years wool has seen a rise in popularity, with the skill of presenting a fleece becoming the key to success.

It is important for producers to present their fleeces well, both for competition entry and for delivery at the depot, the organisation says.

David Swinton, British Wool Business Support Manager, who has judged throughout the UK including prominent shows such as the Royal Highland and the Great Yorkshire, comments specifically on competition fleeces. He says: "First and foremost, choose the best fleece you have. A nice white or naturally coloured fleece rolled neatly are desirable, and remember first impressions matter. As a judge, when you look inside the fleece, you test the strength of the staple - it needs to be strong and uniform. We don't want to see weakness in the fleece, and remember some breeds, such as the Blackface, Herdwick and Rough Fell should be rolled flesh side up."

Presentation

"When presenting a fleece for judging, excellent presentation is crucial. You can get up to 20 points for the presentation alone, so take some time to get it right. Select a fleece which is as white as possible, or strong colour if naturally coloured, and roll it well with a gentle tuck in."

Last year, the British Wool Bradford Depot graded five million kilos of wool, with six graders completing more than six tonnes of wool per day during the peak season. Ian Brooksbank, Senior Head Grader, says: "We handle fleeces day-in and day-out, and if I had to advise on one aspect of fleece management it would be to ensure you roll the fleece."

"A lot of our producers do a really good job of presenting their fleeces well, but we do still see some that aren't rolled. Simply rolling and tucking in gently is best; not too tight as that can make it slower to grade, but enough to ensure you can pack the sheet efficiently."

"In recent years, we have found trends in wool marketing are following those of other aspects of farm products – where buyers are looking more and more towards consistency – be it meat, crops, or milk."

Optimising value

British Wool advice is to try and keep coloured fleeces separately to white fleeces, as grey fibers or natural discolouration makes it more difficult to dye the wool and so it becomes less valuable in the market. Therefore, separating and avoiding cross contamination will make a difference to the overall value of your clip.

Mr Brooksbank adds: "With more than 100 grades of wool there is a lot of variety. As graders we are looking for uniformity, both in type and length with a strong and regular staple. The best part of the fleece is the back of the neck and down the shoulders, roll so the grader sees that first – it makes a good impression. Presentation is key, which any sheep farmer looking to maximise returns from wool should certainly bear in mind."

The National Golden Fleece competition is designed to showcase the exceptional quality of wool and British Wool is expecting incredibly high standards again this year. Being selected as one of the best exhibiting fleeces in your country is something to be immensely proud of but taking home the title of National Golden Fleece Champion really is the ultimate



accolade of superb quality wool.

Fleece competitions at various shows, including some NSA events, are qualifiers for the Golden Fleece Competition. The 2019 winner will receive a salver and £1,000 prize money, with £500 for the reserve champion.

For more information about British Wool, including details of the National Golden Fleece competition, visit www.britishwool.org.uk.

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Strengthening the Welsh hill sector for a sustainable future

HCC has launched a Hill Ram Scheme to advance and champion the Welsh hill flock through genetic improvement.

The scheme is part of the Red Meat Development Programme, a five-year strategic initiative funded by the EU Rural Development Programme and the Welsh Government.

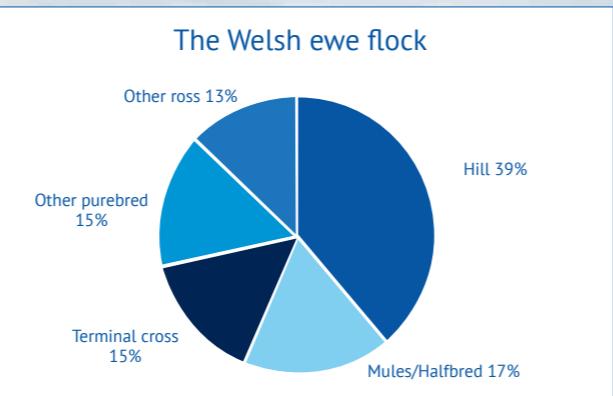
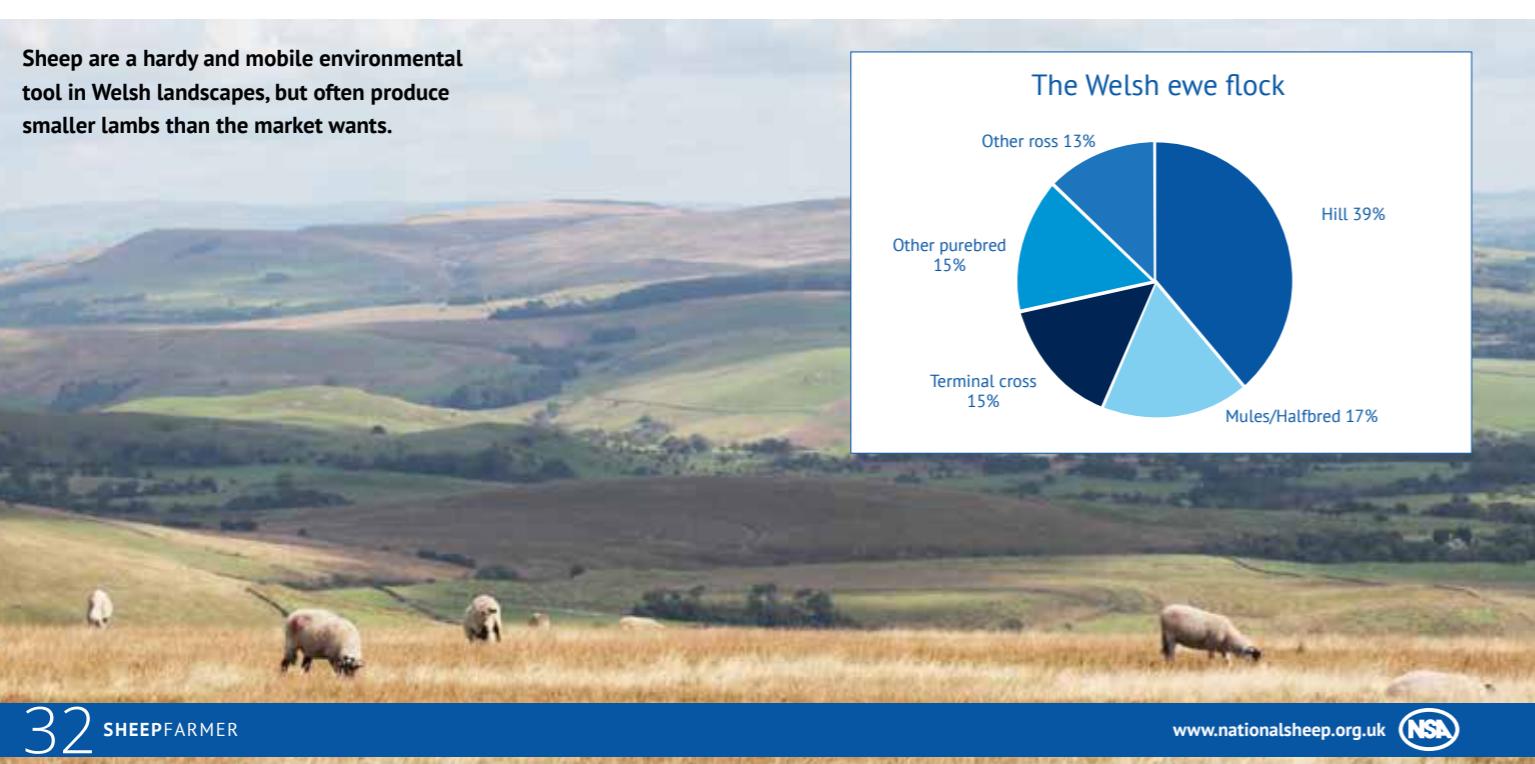
As coordinator of the project, HCC's Gwawr Parry says it will look to generate long term genetic improvements in the Welsh flock through engagement with hill ram producers and utilising DNA-based technologies to enable performance recording to take place in extensive hill environments.

Approximately 92% of the breeding flock in Wales fall within these upland areas and 72% within regions classified as severely disadvantaged areas. The majority of the sheep grazing these areas are traditional and hardy Welsh hill breeds. Adapted to their surroundings and following a diet made up largely of foraged grass, hill lambs tend to be smaller than a typical lamb reared on lower ground. These lighter carcasses have previously been in demand in Mediterranean export markets such as Greece and Spain.

Consumer demand

However, over the last decade many of these countries have suffered economic difficulties

Sheep are a hardy and mobile environmental tool in Welsh landscapes, but often produce smaller lambs than the market wants.



and their consumer requirements have changed. This, combined with UK retailers favouring larger carcasses, has meant a fall in demand for lighter lamb carcasses.

Despite this, these Welsh hill breeds and their sub-types, have remained popular within the farming sector and account for almost 40% of the Welsh ewe flock. This means these hill breed ewes can significantly influence the efficiency and sustainability of Welsh sheep farms and consequently the supply and quality of Welsh lamb.

Ms Parry says it is easy to understand why they are so prevalent; they provide high quality

protein from land that isn't suitable for crops or other species. They are an environmental management tool, maintaining species-rich habitats. They are hardy and mobile, make good mothers who need little assistance at lambing time and are able to rear their young from limited resources.

It is with this in mind HCC has launched its Hill Ram Scheme. Seven leader flocks have been appointed within the first year of the project. The leader flocks are a core and geographically diverse network of hill farmers who produce a variety of native hill sheep breeds, including north Wales mountain



Gwawr Parry is coordinating the Hill Ram Scheme.

type and improved Welsh. By the end of the project at least 35 flocks are expected to have joined the scheme.

Genetic performance

Flocks that join the scheme will be offered support and help with monitoring genetic performance. Typical details which will need to be recorded include: which ewes go to which ram, pregnancy scanning results, ewes needing assistance during lambing, weights of all lambs at eight weeks, and an ultra-sound backfat scan of the lambs at 16 weeks. All of this data will be submitted for genetic evaluation.

Participating farmers will also set key performance indicators (KPIs) in order to monitor genetic trends and better understand their business. Training and support will be offered on improving KPIs as well as understanding EBVs and using the DNA technology.

Ms Parry continues: "Through this project we are encouraging more farmers to use genetic data to their advantage. Performance recording does add additional work at farm level, but the results are cumulative, sustainable and permanent."

She continues: "The project will allow hill farmers to better utilise their understanding of their flock, using the best genetics to increase their finished lambweight without using more feed or losing the hardness of the breed."

There are also plans to establish performance-recorded ram sales, offering participating farmers the opportunity to highlight the genetic success of their flock and raise the profile of performance recorded rams within the sheep sector.

Support and training are going to be offered to project participants in the run up to these sales as well as how to market and integrate their rams into traditional long standing and well-respected breed society sales.

The long-term goal is to establish increased number of performance-recorded hill flocks in Wales as well as stand-alone performance-recorded sales.

But, the legacy of the project will be in the realisation of the importance of genetic improvement within the hill sector and the wider industry and ultimately allowing Welsh upland and hill farms to become resilient and thrive in the future.

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Tutting weight key driver for replacement performance

Covering both sheep bred as ewe lambs and shearlings, AHDB's Challenge Sheep project is tracking 9,000 replacements from 13 English farms over seven years to understand how flock performance can be improved.

The project will generate new knowledge and highlight existing information on managing ewe replacements. Challenge Sheep is now in its second of a seven-year project and will track replacements in future years to inform management decisions for both incoming replacements and mature ewes.

Initial findings

The research so far has revealed shearlings reaching target weight at tupping are twice as likely to scan in lamb as those who are under target weight. In addition, both ewe lambs and shearlings that reached target weight at tupping (60% and 80% of mature weight respectively) weaned heavier lambs.

Compounding this, the research also found shearlings at target body condition score

The research is investigating the relationship between ewe BCS and finishing lambs.



By Hayley King, AHDB Beef & Lamb



(BCS 3.5 for lowland ewes) at tupping are twice as likely to scan in lamb too. Knowing the improved outcome for ewes selected with these characteristics will allow the participating Challenge Sheep farmers to make better informed decisions for mating selection next year.

Though there are additional costs involved in feeding ewes to get them to target weight and BCS, this could be offset when taking into account the increase in weight of lambs produced.

These incredible results have come in the early stages of this projects. For our farmers to have achieved an additional 8.5kg of weaning weight (90 days) from their ewe lambs is much higher than we initially expected and just shows the importance of paying close attention to weight of livestock up to tupping. Again attaining an extra 4.8kg of weaning weight for shearlings is great news for farmers on all systems.

As we have another five years of the project still to go, we look forward to comparing year-on-year data to view trends and look for ways of improving efficiencies. Sharing our results at regular intervals throughout the seven years will allow us to continue to guide the sheep

industry on ways to increase efficiency and productivity through best practice.

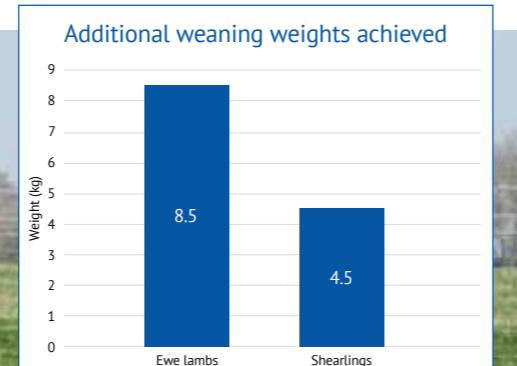
Choosing well-grown replacements that can reach target weight by tupping will achieve a more efficient business and evidence from New Zealand has suggested this will mean a higher lifetime productivity of these ewes.

Plus, while using data driven by research such as Challenge Sheep is ideal for setting standards and benchmarking in the first year, careful flock management and recording of data at key times will give farmers tailored information about their own flock allowing them to have a more accurate view of health and condition.

Female replacements

Selection and management of replacements is key in generating the highest possible return for any sheep farm. It will come as no surprise that livestock in optimum form yield the highest value.

However, it's important to consider well managed replacements not only perform better on their first breeding but are also more likely to survive longer and have a higher lifetime



Testing ewe body condition score can help ensure she produces strong lambs.

productivity level. Focusing on increasing survival rates is a major part in reducing the cost of replacements.

A key part in this is achieved through reducing the numbers of replacement ewes required. Yet, with so many variables at play, it is critical to monitor the weights and condition of your flock closely to quickly identify points which require intervention to ensure optimal performance.

A quick and effective method of data collection and analysis is through electronic identification. This can record information including weight, body condition score, lambing data and lamb.

Challenge Sheep is funded by AHDB Beef & Lamb and aims to understand the consequences of the rearing phase on the lifetime performance of ewes. For more information on Challenge Sheep or for information on upcoming events visit www.beefandlamb.ahdb.org.uk/returns/project-farms/challenge-sheep.



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Maximising lamb growth rates for an efficient finish

The most cost-effective time for lambs to grow is early in life when they are consuming maximum amounts of their mother's milk, the most energy-dense feed they receive.

The aim should be to capitalise on this early efficient growth. The longer the lambs remain on the farm the greater the risk of diseases as well as the inevitable inefficiency of reduced growth rates. Either of these factors will affect your bottom line.

As with other uncertainties, the lamb price at the time of finishing can of course be difficult to predict, but a sound knowledge of your growth rates, days on farm and costs of production can still help you make crucial decisions based around the optimum time to sell.

DWLG targets

Suckling lamb growth rate targets should be aimed at more than 250g a day to achieve 18-20kg liveweight at eight weeks of age or 30kg by weaning. Lambs achieving these targets are converting consumed feed efficiently and reflecting their mother's potential for producing

quality milk.

Initial results from an AHDB study suggest lambs failing to achieve the target of 17kg at eight weeks are destined to end up as light lambs. It is generally advisable to send these light animals as early as possible without attempting to feed to catch up or carry over the winter as stores.

Weighing lambs

It is really very helpful to weigh lambs when they are handled at six to eight weeks as well as at weaning time. Ideally weigh and monitor every lamb on the farm but, if there are not the facilities, it is still very helpful to track the growth rates of just a selection.

Lameness, coccidiosis, parasitic gastroenteritis (worms) and pasteurellosis are all real threats to the growth rates and finishing potential of growing lambs. It is important you have worked closely with your vet to put plans in place to monitor and prevent these issues. Once there is clinical evidence on any of these diseases the ongoing costs will be significantly greater than any well-spent investment in monitoring, prevention and protection, by vaccination for example.

The optimum time to wean depends on the

system and it is important to take a number of both ewe and lamb factors into account, as well as the availability of appropriate clean grazing for the newly weaned lambs.

In general, it is probably fair to say in a majority of British sheep flocks, lambs are weaned later than ideal. Work by ADAS back in the 1970s suggested lambs weaned at 12 weeks old grew better than those weaned at 16 weeks old. By 10-12 weeks old, milk is a very minor part of lamb nutrition and it is arguably better for them to concentrate on eating grass as a ruminant rather than pestering their mothers for a teat to suck.

Last year when we were faced with drought conditions, many flocks sensibly chose to wean early to avoid grazing competition between lambs and ewes and to reduce pressure on ewes and mitigate against significant body condition losses.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing dry conditions there continued to be a severe lack of grass in some areas with poor supplies for both ewes and lambs over the summer and many were faced with feeding forage as well as purchased feed at high costs.

Weaning

In a more usual year, timely weaning works really well when the lambs are moved directly onto



By Phillipa Page and Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health



Even if you only have a simple weigh-crate there is real value in weighing a few lambs to monitor growth rates.

Straggler lambs are usually best off the farm sooner rather than later.

good quality grazing of low worm challenge. For many, the most appropriate pasture is one that was shut up for cutting and that didn't carry ewes and young lambs earlier in the year.

Generally, it takes virtually a year of careful planning to organise this and we would strongly

recommend spending time this summer poring over maps of your farm with your vet or advisor to ensure, even if you have to manage with second best this year, you will be properly set up for weaning onto ideally appropriate land next year.

Weaning stress is short lived but its effects will be exacerbated by other compromises to the immune system such as a worm burden, lameness or otherwise inappropriate nutrition including the over or under-supply of trace elements, again demonstrating the essential requirement

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of an active and useful veterinary flock health plan that includes careful monitoring as well as appropriate preventative measures.

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Stats suggest increasing role of campylobacter in UK abortion

From the beginning of January to the end of March 2019, abortion due to *Campylobacter fetus fetus* was recorded on 109 occasions at APHA VIC and partner providers, and *Campylobacter jejuni* was isolated on one occasion.

Campylobacter infection is one of the most prevalent causes of ovine abortion. In previous years it has been the third most common cause of abortion after enzootic abortion (EAE) and toxoplasmosis, however, this year it looks like it may be the second most common cause after EAE.

Ovine abortion

Campylobacter fetus subsp. fetus (*C. fetus*) and *Campylobacter jejuni* (*C. jejuni*) cause ovine abortion. Both may be carried in the intestines of asymptomatic sheep and infection can be introduced to flocks by carriers. *C. jejuni* may also be excreted by wild birds. Infection may be acquired when faeces contaminates feed or from infected placentae or foetuses. Losses can be severe, but the problem does not often recur in

future years.

Historically, *C. fetus* accounted for the majority of the campylobacter species associated with ovine abortion worldwide, but recent studies have indicated an increasing trend for *C. jejuni* infection in some parts of the world.

In the United States, the species shift (from *C. fetus* to *C. jejuni*) occurred during the early 1980s and, by the early 1990s, *C. jejuni* became the predominant species causing sheep abortion. Since 2003, a highly pathogenic, tetracycline-resistant *C. jejuni* clone has become the predominant cause of sheep abortions there.

Diagnosis

The dominance of this clone in sheep abortions is apparently unique to the United States, and the use of tetracyclines may have facilitated selection of this highly pathogenic clone.

Diagnosis is by isolation from fetal stomach contents or fetal organs and may require special campylobacter cultures. There is little evidence that flock antibiotic treatment reduces the number of abortions in campylobacter abortions. Tetracyclines have been used to control outbreaks of EAE, but if the cause of abortion is not identified and, if in fact campylobacter is the cause, a blanket approach of antibiotic use could

By Amanda Carson, APHA



contribute to the development of antimicrobial resistance.

Prevention

Providing there is no evidence of EAE and campylobacter has been determined to be the cause, it may be useful to mix ewes which have aborted with ewes which have already lambed (but not with those yet to lamb).

Alternatively, mixing replacement females with the main flock at least six weeks prior to tupping may help development of immunity. It is also advisable to prevent contamination of troughs with bird droppings. There is no vaccine licensed for use in the UK.

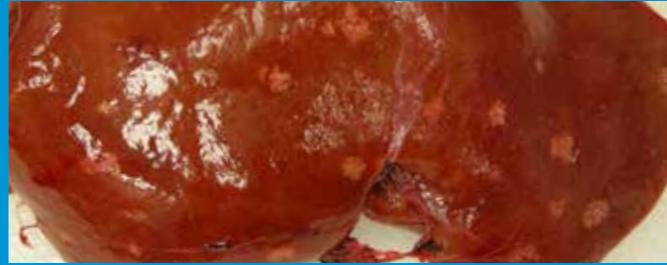
As part of APHA's surveillance, experts in the bacteriology team at Weybridge have sequenced campylobacter isolates and to date have found no evidence of the tetracycline-resistant *C. jejuni* clone. APHA's ability to continue to perform this surveillance depends upon submissions to APHA and partner post mortem providers.

To investigate losses consult your vet, and to find your nearest post-mortem centre please use the APHA postcode tool at www.ahvla.defra.gov.uk/postcode/pme.asp.



Campylobacter case study

A typical case was investigated by APHA VIC Carmarthen where three ovine foetuses were submitted from a 1,100-ewe flock with a reported incidence of 7.5% abortion in the shearing group. The affected dams were said to be clinically well and vaccinated against both EAE and toxoplasmosis. The shearlings were purchased last year and were put into three groups based on scanning results; abortions had been recorded in all groups. At post mortem examination lesions typical of campylobacter infection were found in the liver. Bacterial cultures identified *C. fetus* from the stomach contents.



A liver from an animal infected with campylobacter.

Lambing ears

Affecting people rather than sheep, another lambing shed issue to be aware of is 'lambing ears'. This transient inflammation of the ear has blister formation and crusting and occurs in 1-11% of people involved in lambing. Skin inflammation might arise through an allergic or irritant response to amniotic fluid, placental tissues or chemicals. Proteins can also cause allergic dermatitis and irritant contact dermatitis of the hands may be provoked by iodine solution and/or repeated handwashing. There are many occupational skin disorders associated with sheep and those who handle them, including orf and salmonella, but lambing ears maybe something to consider in vets, students and farmers showing similar signs during the lambing period.



Lambing ears it a skin inflammation of the hand, ears and nose.



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Tackling cobalt deficiency to ensure growing lambs thrive

By Jenny Hull, Black Sheep Farm Health



In ruminants, cobalt is used by the rumen microbes to manufacture vitamin B12 which is then absorbed by the animal. Cobalt deficiency (or 'pine') occurs UK wide where its concentration in the soil is low.

Other factors that can contribute to deficiency are heavy worm burdens, which can affect the absorption of vitamin B12, and high concentrations of iron and manganese in soil that can 'lock-up' cobalt and prevent utilisation.

Cobalt deficiency is very common, especially in fast-growing lambs. As a result, it is often a critical factor and can lead to significant losses in a sheep enterprise.

Vitamin B12

Providing the ewe is receiving adequate cobalt, vitamin B12 is secreted in milk which provides an early source to suckling lambs. As the milk supply is outstripped by lamb growth and the diet becomes more forage-based and the rumen develops, more cobalt is required.

Lambs can be affected from six to eight weeks of age when the diet switches to being majority forage. However, cobalt deficiency is most common after weaning when the lamb's diet is 100% forage-based.

Cobalt deficiency is less common in adult sheep, but when present can cause reduced fertility, poor mothering ability and poor body condition.

However, other conditions produce similar

Poor growth rate is just one of the clinical signs of cobalt deficiency.



signs, so producers should be aware of that with worms, nematodirosis (often in six to eight-week-old lambs), coccidiosis (often in six to eight-week-old lambs), poor grazing and under-nutrition, especially in unweaned lambs that are having to compete with ewes for grass.

Soil and forage analysis can play a role in assessing the cobalt status of farms. However, calling your vet to blood-sample lambs is the gold standard to determine the status of animals and therefore how much cobalt is reaching an animal's system.

Your vet will blood-sample six to 10 lambs and test for levels of vitamin B12 in the blood. These blood samples should be collected as soon as possible after the sheep have been gathered, as the blood levels quickly rise when the sheep have been off pasture and not eating.

Other production-limiting trace elements can also be tested for at the same time, such as copper, selenium and iodine, to generate a trace element profile for your farm.

Drenches

Sheep cannot store cobalt or vitamin B12. Therefore, any supplements need to be regular or continuous.

Drenches are the cheapest form of supplementation but need to be repeated every three to four weeks as lambs quickly become deficient again. Drenches often contain both vitamin B12 and cobalt; the vitamin B12 provides an immediate supply, which is beneficial in very deficient lambs, while the cobalt is then available to the rumen

microbes for synthesis of further vitamin B12.

Many benzimidazole (1-BZ white) based wormers contain additional cobalt and selenium. However, the amount is usually not sufficient to reverse deficiency. Mineral drenches can be given at the same time as a wormer but should not be mixed in the same bottle as this could lead to under-dosing or overdosing of wormer.

Short-acting injections are very effective at correcting deficiency but, as with drenches, will need to be repeated monthly. Boluses containing cobalt are another very effective way of providing a continuous supply of cobalt for up to six months. There are several different boluses available and it is often beneficial to resample lambs after bolusing to make sure

Clinical signs of cobalt deficiency

- Poor growth rates
- Lethargy
- Poor appetite
- Tear staining
- Anaemia
- Immuno-suppression and greater risk of other diseases such as parasites and pasteurellosis
- Poor wool growth and an open fleece'
- Scouring (often from associated heavy parasite burden)
- Emaciation and death



Taking blood samples from lambs will determine how much cobalt is reaching an animal's system.

sufficient cobalt is being released to the animal over the required duration.

Bolusing

The drawback of bolusing is the risk of bolus gun injury to lambs; great care should be taken in their administration, especially to small lambs. In research done by the AHDB Fallen Stock Project, dosing/bolus gun injuries were the fifth most common cause of death in adult sheep.

Pasture-dressing with hydrated cobalt sulphate can be used to increase the cobalt

content of the herbage but this may not be cost-effective. If the soil is very acidic, or high in iron or manganese, cobalt may still not be available to the sheep

Oral cobalt supplementation in drench form costs around 2p per lamb per month. By comparison, production losses from even moderately poor growth and delays to marketing may cost at least £10-£15 per lamb. This figure does not take into consideration the secondary effects of immuno-suppression such as parasites, pasteurellosis, and deaths.

Key messages

Cobalt deficiency in lambs is a common issue that affects the health and welfare of lambs and causes losses. Drenches are only a short-term treatment and need repeating monthly in deficient lambs. Investing in sampling of sheep and generating a trace element profile for your farm, followed by supplementing what is required can pay dividends.

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Martyn Fletcher
Shepherd at Dineley Farming

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Could your wormer be holding your lambs back?

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



There's no getting away from the fact lamb growth rate is a major component of profitably. Quite simply, the faster lambs grow, the more efficient they are and the less feed they need to finish.

There are two key periods when lamb weight tells us a lot about how well lambs are doing and whether they will finish efficiently or drag on into the autumn and winter. In the first period to eight weeks (56 days) of age, the main influences are the ewes milk yield, grass quality and quantity. The second period is from 56 to 90 days (12-13 weeks), when lambs are becoming more reliant on grazing and being exposed to an increasing challenge from worms.

Maintaining lamb growth rates means not only providing enough good quality grazing, but also controlling their worm burden effectively. For many flocks, this is where the performance slips. Making sure that when you drench lambs the wormer kills more than 90% of the worms is something you can control, making a big difference to performance. Using faecal egg counts to help determine the right time to drench is also an important part of effective worm control.

The problem is that wormer resistance builds up gradually on a farm over several years. Unless you test (see panel) the proportion of resistant worms killed by a drench can be 50% or less before you suspect anything is wrong. Unfortunately, by then it's too late and you've probably spent a lot on minerals, trace elements and the like, thinking they are the root of declining growth rates rather than worms.

For more information visit www.scops.org.uk

New Chair Elect



SCOPS has announced its new Chair Elect as Kevin Harrison, who is also NSA English Committee Chairman.

Kevin takes on the new position alongside SCOPS Chairman Peter Baber, who has led the group since its inception. Both Chair and Chair Elect will work together to help drive activities of SCOPS, supporting responsible parasite control management choices on farms throughout the UK and helping ensure messages are consistent and practical for sheep farmers.

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Step 2: Treat all lambs in the mob, taking care to ensure the dose rate is correct for their weight, the drench gun has been calibrated, and you get the wormer over the back of the tongue. Mark the date on the calendar when you need to collect your post drench test samples. It's exactly seven days after for yellow (2-LV) and 14 days for white (1-BZ) or clear (3-ML).



Step 3: On the re-test day go back and take faecal samples from the same mob as in stage one. It is very important you stick to the dates. If the reduction in egg count is less than 90% you may have resistance and should consult your vet or advisor.

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Following the flock

In this third edition of 'Following the Flock', we travel to Bristol, Cumbria and Powys to check in on various NSA officeholders. Longer versions of all these reports, and more, are available online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about.

Tim Ward

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman, Powys

Lambing is always an extended affair here, starting at the beginning of December with the Dorset Downs and finishing in March with the Kerry Hills although, this year, I did get a two week break in February.

A strict culling policy over the years means I had very few problems at lambing, although the number of lambs born was reduced. Grass growth is still relatively slow, probably as a result of cold winds and frosts, which has left me to have to feed more than I normally would. All lambs have had their first clostridial injection and will have a mineral bolus shortly.

The show sheep were shorn in March and I will shortly start preparing them for their first show, the Three Counties. I also have a full programme of judging this summer, which I thoroughly enjoy.



Tim Ward will be showing his Kerrys throughout the summer.

Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chairman, Bristol

Lambing took place from early March and was over in two weeks. I have never lambed sheep so fast with lambing usually spread evenly over three weeks.

This year more than 450 of our 770 North Country Mules had lambed in the first seven days. This didn't come as a surprise, as we change our raddle colour every week, but even when you know it's coming it will put pressure on man, beast and logistics.

Colostrum quality was good, and we turned out quickly at 24 hours to ease pressure. The grass got moving pre-turnout, but a cold wind did seem to slow that grass growth down post turnout. By keeping a keen eye on lambs for symptoms of nematodiasis and keeping an eye on the SCOPS website map I think we managed to get out timings spot-on for the lambs first worm treatment. Whilst we were doing this all lambs got their first dose of clostridial and pasteurella vaccine.



Kevin Harrison lambed 770 North Country Mules this year.



Thomas Carrick

NSA Northern Region Chairman, Cumbria

As I start my term as regional chairman I'm enjoying the best lambing conditions in my memory. April has rarely brought us as much grass in the North Pennines and the May forecast looks to suit us.

Satisfaction is derived from hearing hail stones pepper the shed as its occupants debate whether to lamb or die. I am pragmatic enough to know worse may yet arrive but, in the short term, the forecast is set to improve next week and the current conditions abate.

Scanning this year was very pleasing – ewes averaged 185%, hoggets 171% and, of the 230 forwarded, five were empty. An additional 36 Blackface ewes managed six empties – a reminder that our policy of purchasing older draft animals to run for a year is not without its perils. That said, the use of these animals to gradually inject Mule breeding into the main flock – a project now in its third year - would appear to be a contributing factor in the overall improvement of numbers.

It is my intention to provide only triplet lambs and 'at risk' lambs antibiotic assistance. Singles and strong twins will receive the obligatory spray of iodine and with, any luck, a healthy dose of sunshine.



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1. Clements et al. Veterinary Record (2014) 10.1136/vr.102161

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