

SHEEP FARMER

OCTOBER / NOVEMBER 2019

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INSIDEYOUR SHEEPFARMER
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Getting back to fundamentals amongst Brexit mayhem

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

They say men can only concentrate on one thing at a time while women multi-task to their heart's content. I've never believed a word of it, but have concluded most people struggle to get their heads around multi-functional things.

heard of more cases of upland sheep farmers having sheep numbers driven down. It feels that politicians are talking up the value of sheep in the hills at the same time as flocks are being reduced to a level where the whole system is being put at risk.

Scotland, the Lake District and Dartmoor are areas that have particularly been highlighted and water companies, conservation bodies and stewardship schemes are commonly blamed. My concerns were increased recently when a senior Defra official commented to me, very sincerely, that they didn't think we could meet the Government's global warming targets without taking a significant amount of agricultural land out of production.

Environment

While science may point in this direction, I have no doubt the majority is not based on entire life cycles, is not adequately comparative and is again looking at single outcomes rather than multifunctional ones.

It's ironic that in reducing sheep numbers in the uplands, where land tenure and agri-environment schemes make this easy, they are pushing the most benign land out of production which is likely to have no positive effect at all. It is no accident that some of the region's most important areas for sheep farming are the same areas that are so revered by visitors, locals and artists alike. Indeed, it's not hard to imagine that with some 5,000 years of sheep farming in the hills having shaped the landscape and ecology in a pretty harmonious way, the removal of sheep will cause degradation. With a few wildfires thrown we could quickly turn a very stable ecosystem into an environmental disaster.

It is right that any landowner should have the right to make their own decisions about how they manage their land – within legal boundaries of course. If someone chooses to plant a wood, re-wet an area or get rid of their sheep, it is their right to do so.

What is wrong though is that decisions appear to be being forced on farmers, affecting their livelihoods, negatively affecting grassland communities and the wildlife they support, and creating serious wildfire risks and environmental damage - and there is a serious risk that the evidence they are using to justify their decisions is not based on truly comparative or holistic science.

It's become part of our nature to specialise and to be labelled as one thing or another. We in farming are guilty too and have been taken in that direction by much of our agricultural training. Interests come into play too, and there are plenty of examples of livestock professionals not being the best with a grease gun and a socket set - but if I'm right then it's something that is giving us a problem.

It's not done us any favours in that most farmers have ended up in a different camp to environmentalists and even animal welfare enthusiasts, when farmers are far more closely engaged in both areas than those who carry the label. How we've not ended up firmly owning those interests, I'm not sure, but I suspect exclusive specialisation has not helped.

Specialisation

Specialisation may well lead to improved efficiency and performance – although often in a very narrow sphere, and quite often, the consequences come back and bite us. Particularly for sheep farmers, the move towards multiple, and high quality outcomes, including more productive sheep enterprises alongside the delivery of a wide range of public goods, means we have to be thinking more holistically to connect our farming activities to providing great landscapes, environments and feeding people with healthy food, even more than we have previously. Moreover, we don't have to just do it, we have to talk about it and be proud of it too.

I'm a firm believer in grass-based sheep farming delivering multiple outcomes – food, landscape, soil life and carbon storage, wildlife habitats and much more. However, nowhere is this more the case than in the uplands and it is gravely concerning that over recent weeks I've

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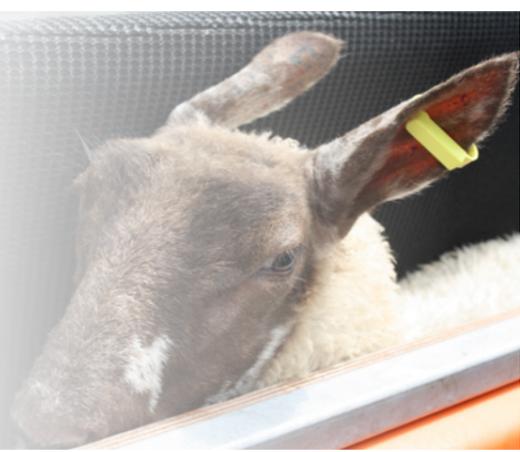
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NSA lends support to #LoveLambWeek

Now in its fifth year, Love Lamb Week returned at the beginning of September, this time choosing to focus on the flavour and sustainable nature of sheep farming in promotional work aiming to increase consumption of lamb in the UK.

Championing lamb as part of the campaign this year was Charlie Beaty, recipient of an NSA Samuel Wherry Memorial Award travel bursary. Alongside levy bodies, farming organisations and retailers, Charlie helped deliver the message of the nutritional benefits of lamb. *More on page 24-25.*



NSA Samuel Wherry Memorial Award winner Charlie Beaty was the face of LoveLambWeek2019.

Scottish hosts for NSA AGM

In early August NSA board members, NSA President Lord Inglewood, NSA Head Office staff and NSA members gathered in Stirling Auction Mart, as guests of United Auctions, for NSA's 2019 AGM.



Attendees at NSA's 2019 AGM.

With Lord Inglewood re-elected to his position, the meeting resulted in no change to current officeholders. The NSA Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ending 31st December 2018 were also adopted.

The meeting was followed by a session bringing together world experts in iceberg diseases in sheep, continuing NSA's involvement in potential practical approaches to reduce insidious losses on farms. Lord Inglewood applauded this and all work by NSA to provide a voice for sheep farmers. He said: "We cannot stem the tide of change, but we can continue to do what we can to make sure the new world we find ourselves in has a place for sheep farming."

NSA Eastern Region 2019 ARMM

Members in Eastern Region will be gathering for their Annual Regional Members Meeting in early October. Members will be updated on the region's activities throughout the last 12-months and officeholders will be reconfirmed. If you are reading this in time, you can attend the meeting on Wednesday 9th October 2019 at the Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket, Suffolk, at 6pm.

Job opportunities at NSA

NSA will soon be opening recruitment for a maternity cover position based at its Head Office in Worcestershire, anticipated to last until autumn 2020. We are also hoping to recruit for a part-time position based in Scotland, working with NSA Scottish Region. Find information about both posts on the NSA website.

NSA Lambing List 2019/20 open for business

Opened at the beginning of October, members can now use the NSA Lambing List if they wish to advertise for lambing help for the forthcoming season. The lambing list works as a directory for members to 'matchmake' with students looking for experience. Members wishing to use the list can do so by going to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or contacting NSA Head Office. Those visiting the website to place their advert are encouraged to read the updated 'guidelines for farmers' for advice on how to use the list and for tips on how best to advertise your placement.

NSA member in Lancashire wins top prize

NSA is pleased to announce the third winner of a JFC-Agri foam footbath and 20 litres of hoof solution is Stephen Robinson of Dunsop Bridge, Clitheroe. The draw had been running throughout 2019 as an incentive for new members to join NSA and existing members to refer new sign-ups. It has now closed, with the fourth and final winner to be announced soon, and plans for similar initiatives in 2020 will be shared soon. *Details of past winners at visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.*



Job change at Head Office

Having joined the NSA team last year as a communications officer specialising in sharing messages around NSA's work on policy issues, Eleanor Phipps has recently had her job role changed to NSA Policy Officer. The job change will allow Eleanor to be more actively involved in policy work, as well as ensuring members and others are kept up-to-date.



Eleanor Phipps.

Sheep Breeders Round Table

The Sheep Breeders Round Table, a world class event for sheep breeders, is still taking bookings. For more information visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/SBRT.

NSA regional reports

Northern

Late-August saw the region host a visit from Defra officials. NSA Northern Region Committee members John Geldard Geldard (pictured), Thomas Carrick and Eddie Eastham, showed senior civil servant Robin Manning and his team around a hill farm and lowland farm to demonstrate how current and potential payment schemes may affect them.

The day was rounded off with a discussion with farmers and advisors, and the Defra team noted how useful they had found the visit and the promise of further potential interaction. Regional officeholders said it was refreshing to see many of the visitors had some agricultural experience or



Northern Region hosted Defra officials to discuss the impact of schemes to the region.

knowledge.

The region thanks Rathmell YFC for its help running NSA North Sheep 2019 including the open stockjudging competition where they raised £465 from entry fees. Many members also helped in the run up to the event and on the day. As a way of thanking the members, NSA North Sheep Committee rounded up the money collected to £500 and donated this to the club. Jonathan Booth received the cheque on behalf of the club from event chairman Thomas Carrick at the final organising committee meeting last week. Jonathan said the club was very grateful for the donation.

South West

NSA South West Region sends its thanks to David and Richard Rossiter for hosting a walk on their picturesque South Devon farm in August.

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Richard and his father David treated more than 50 participants to an engaging and informative tour of their impressive enterprise of more than 1,300 breeding ewes. Visitors saw the flock of Exlana ewes on the cliff top traveling back to the farm through fodder crops, their pedigree Poll Dorset ewes and their Suffolk ewes and ram lambs hearing. Finally, we were shown an impressive display of rams and ram lambs back at the farm buildings followed by a delicious cream tea. Attendees went away impressed with the passion, expertise and dedication David and Richard put into their business.

Central

NSA Central Region sponsored the supreme sheep championship at Hope Show and congratulations go to winner Mr D. Beech with his prizewinning Cheviot.

The Eccleshall Speed Shear event was also supported by the region again, which more than 1,500 people attended, 50 of whom took part. The main event for the region this summer was a well-attended farm walk to the JCB Farm in Staffordshire in August, hosted by Matt Haydon, Head of Livestock and NSA Next Generation Ambassador. As well as their Lleyn flock, which ranks in the UK's top 1% with both rams and replacement ewes homebred, it supplies its own Daylesford farm shops and restaurants in London. A good day was had by all attending.



Central Region visited the JCB farm in Staffordshire.

Cymru/Wales

In early September NSA Cymru/Wales Region held a farm walk in Newtown, Powys, by kind permission of John and Sarah Yeomans.



The Yeoman's have been reclaiming the hill.

Attendees were treated to in-depth discussions about everything from flock health to grass management and were able to see the hard work the Yeomans have been putting into reclaiming land within their hill areas. Despite the damp and chilly weather, there was an excellent turn out for the tour. Visitors said it was brilliant to see the mix of new grassland on the hills with the sheep and cattle grazing amongst the wind turbines. The region thanks the Yeomans and their team - and Dunbia for providing some lovely lamb steaks for the BBQ.

YOUR NSA REGION

Don't forget, NSA devolved regions also dedicate time to policy work. Read about this on page 14.



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Northern Ireland

Regional Chairman Brian Jamieson attended the CAFRE prizegiving day where he presented the NSA award for the best performing student in the sheep sector to Alexander Boyd of Newtownabbey, County Antrim.

Alexander is no stranger to NSA, having come second in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition and qualifying to represent Northern Ireland at the national final next year. Brian was also active in Love Lamb Week attending photo shoots and promoting lamb at a Belfast Tesco store where he engaged with urban shoppers explaining the virtues of lamb.

The 'Future proofing your sheep enterprise' conference, jointly organised by NSA Northern Ireland Region with UFU, LMC, AFBI and NIMEA, was a successful event for those in the sheep industry. The conference took place in



NI Region celebrated LoveLambWeek.

early October in Greenmount Campus, CAFRE, and Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh, and was focused on a number of topics including 'maximising market returns'.

Speakers Duncan Nelles, former Farmers Weekly Sheep Farmer of the Year finalist, sheep vet Patrick Grant and independent consultant Liz Genever gave those present plenty of food for thought.

South East

NSA South East Region hosted a farm walk at Lambert Farm, Plumpton College, East Sussex, in mid August.

Members enjoyed a farm walk led by Daniel Hird, Farm Manager. The college farm has clear objectives to provide a first-class example of modern farming practice in order to support the educational development of the

students while being a fully commercial enterprise, not always an easy task. Daniel gave an informative tour of the farm explaining how he meets the daily challenges of managing a mixed farm and outlining his aspirations for the future. Fortunately the heavy rain which had persisted all afternoon eased, and the tour ended on top of the South Downs with a chance to appreciate the spectacular view.

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Ram sales show strong clearance for good stock

South West sale

With an increase in the number of females at the NSA South West Region Ram Sale in mid-August, there were some good prices for both ewes and tups. Top price of the day across all four rings was 1,000gns for the reserve Texel champion from Robert and Rebecca Jordan.



The sale saw a healthy 73% clearance.

The top price for a crossbred was 600gns to Robert Hopper selling a Charollais cross Texel tup. The first official Blue Texel sale at Exeter had a lot of interest for females with shearlings selling to 340gns for Andrew Bishop and Messrs Smith and Maynard.

With 73% clearance, shearlings averaged £500.50 – up £20 on 2018. All in all another good sale for NSA South West Region with purchasers appreciating the robust inspection that sheep have passed before going through the ring.

Wales & Border early sale

Buyers were generally pleased and relieved with the prices achieved at the NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale in early August. The headline prices at the sale on the Royal Welsh Showground, topped by a 1,400gns Texel, were good and supported by strong averages.



The headline price was 1,400gns for a Texel.

Turnover was £152,929.30 and 282 rams were sold, representing 71.39% of the number forward compared to 54.36% in 2018.

The highest price of the day went to the Chave family, whose breed champion shearling Peacehay ram made 1,400gns. He sold by phone bid to Phil Uglow who had been impressed by the tup family at the Devon County Show.

The highest priced Charollais, a ram lamb, was sold by Gethin and Eleri Gibbin for 1,350gns and a Suffolk ram lamb out of Phil Poole's Salopian Flock topped the breed at 800gns, selling to 12-year-old Guto Price.



Good prices were achieved for quality stock.

Melton Mowbray sale

Pressure of field work contributed to a smaller number of buyers present at the NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale in late September, with some regular buyers absent.

The first pen of Texel shearlings into the ring, from Philip Weaver of Newark, Nottinghamshire, enjoyed the best trade of the day. Their leading price of 800gns was offered by local buyer G.W Painter. The same buyer took three further rams from this pen at 720gns, 680gns and 660gns. Gates Farming Partnership from Oakham, Leicestershire, took two from the same breeder at 700gns and 680gns. Next best came from the pen of Texel shearling rams from D.M. Blakemore, Bedfordshire, who sold for 680gns and 660gns. The top 10 prices were achieved by these two vendors.

Chris Timm from Yorkshire took the champion salver for the best pen of rams with his Charollais shearlings and also the award for the best pen of ram lambs with his Suffolk entry. His Suffolk ram lamb achieved the top lamb price at 500gns selling to R.A. Harrison, Lincolnshire.

NSA Wales & Border main sale

A highest price of 7,000gns and averages well above expectations were the headline figures on a successful day at the NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale at the Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, in late September.



The highest priced ram was a Texel sold by Chris Armstrong for 7,000gns.

Vendors and buyers were in good form and the mood was upbeat. The turnover was £1,827,255 and the percentage sold was 85.7%. The overall increase in average prices was up 4.5% on the previous year, with an overall average of £533.51.

The highest priced ram was sold by Chris Armstrong who, for the first time, had a Hexham & Northern Marts ring selling Texels. The shearling ram bred by Jonathan Watson of Berwick on Tweed was the ring champion and sold to Eifion Morgan, Morgan Family Blaencar Farm, Sennybridge, for 7,000gns.

All the non-society Texels sold through the new Hexham ring contributed to an average of £772.77, while society Texel shearling rams sold through their usual ring averaged £766.60, an increase of £84.43 a head.

Good prices

But the greatest increase on last year was for non-MV Suffolks, which saw an increase of £160 a head to average £729, with a top price of 1,650gns. The accredited MV Suffolk ram lambs average increased by nearly £58 per head to £454, with a top price of £1,050. The Charollais had a top price of 3,200gns, for a shearling ram sold by Jonathan Wales to David Robert. The Blue Faced Leicester shearling rams averaged £573.34, an increase of £70.95, with a top price of 4,200gns for Frank Johnson's ram lamb. The highest priced Lleyn from Derek Steen sold for 3,800gns and breed averages were up £41 at £439. The South Country Cheviots averaged £514, an increase of £96, with a top price of 2,000gns. The North Country Cheviots averaged £433, with a top price of 1,000gns.

Full reports from all five NSA sales at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

Rugby sale

Rugby Farmers Mart welcomed members to Stoneleigh Market in late August for NSA Eastern Region's 11th annual ram sale there. Entries for the sale were up by 40% to a catalogued entry of 162 rams from a variety of breeds and crossbreeds.

Success came for Cheshire-based vendor Geoff Biddulph (pictured) when judge Johnny Metticola named him winner of the best pen of three rams, before he went on to average £592.20 for the trio.

There was an excellent crowd of potential buyers at the ringside and spirited bidding for the tups on offer. A very satisfactory clearance of 75% was achieved with an average price of 456gns for a total of 116 tups sold. Barbara Smith from Slapton, Northamptonshire, topped the sale with her pen of Texel shearling rams with a top price of 660gns.



Geoff Biddulph won best pen.

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1. The production costs of anthelmintic resistance in sheep managed within a monthly preventive drench program I.A. Sutherland, J. Shaw, R.J. Shaw Veterinary Parasitology 171 (2010) 300–304.



International relations bring opportunities for UK sheep sector

With Brexit putting a question mark around the UK's export market into the EU, NSA is pulling its weight to help the UK become a more serious global player for both sheep meat and genetics.

This summer has seen NSA representing the UK on a worldwide stage and supporting several trade missions to potential new international markets. NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths and wife Liz travelled to South America visiting both Uruguay and Brazil to learn more about opportunities there. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker went to Canada to meet with a group of sheep industry leaders from big lamb producing countries to see how we could increase global efforts to defend the sheep industry. Finally, at the time this magazine went to print, NSA English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison was in China for his third visit to the region to build friendships and promote British lamb.

Building a global future

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

In July, I attended a Global Sheep Breeders summit conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, by invitation of the Canadian Sheep Federation.

This was the start of an ambitious initiative organised by Corlena Paterson, Canadian Sheep Federation Executive Secretary, to create an alliance of sheep farming nations to share common issues and challenges, and to evidence that sheep farming is 'good' - both for the planet and for people - and to use this to fight back against the growing level of criticisms we face.

The conference occurred following exchanges between delegates on subjects like meat labelling standards and differentiating this from plant-based meat substitutes, sheep farming and global warming, the role of sheepmeat in healthy diets, global concerns over antibiotic use, and bringing young people into our industry.

In attendance were delegates from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, UK, USA and Uruguay. Several other South American

countries had expressed interest but were unable to attend.

Following a discussion over the principles, where we agreed we should avoid market related and competitive trade subjects, each participating nation was invited to give an overview of their industry, the challenges they face and any initiatives that are underway or examples of solutions.

Key exporters

It was pleasing that we had a lot to contribute. We are rightly recognised as the third-largest exporting nation, with production and processing sectors that are good at their jobs. Our genetic diversity and sheep quality relating to a largely grass-based system are a strength, and we are leaders in defining sheep farming approaches that deliver optimum levels of production alongside high welfare and environmental management.

The conference also extended to a trip to the All Canada Grasslands Sheep Show



and Sale, where we were warmly welcomed and saw a great selection of Canadian sheep along with shearing competitions and demonstrations, and a range of trade stands.

It makes you realise that we are part of a global community with shared interests and common values that include hospitality and friendship - aspects of our industry that should be better recognised and celebrated.



By Kevin Harrison, NSA English Committee Chairman

Relationships expand in China

I write this as I sit in the airport waiting for my flight to Xi'an, an airport in North West China and an area I do not know.

As a result of my previous visits to China I have been invited to speak at a conference in Qing-Yang before heading across to Viv China in Qingdao and then to Beijing to talk at a Department of International Trade-funded conference at an expo with a meeting at the

British embassy.

It is always an anxious moment waiting to travel to China. A journey into the unknown. You never get much information before you leave about what will happen on your trip. However, if my previous two visits are anything to go by there will be elements that will open my eyes to the Chinese sheep industry with amazement.

The Chinese don't do things by halves and, when they want something, they generally go out to get

it. It is a critical time to go out and encourage trade with other countries outside the EU, and the enthusiasm that I see in China for British products is very encouraging.

All we can do as NSA is build relationships in these countries, promote what we have, get people talking about British sheep products and hope our Government and its arm's length bodies do their bit to push for future trade deals that will benefit us all.



British potential in South America

By Bryan Griffiths, NSA Chairman

With the UK already in possession of the necessary health certification to export genetics to Brazil, our trip to Brazil and Uruguay involved farmers, breeders and embryologists aiming to develop semen and embryo sales.

The focus was entirely on the Expointer Agricultural Show in the south of the country, an event to rival the best of the Royal shows at home. The British Honorary Consul facilitated meetings with every conceivable dignitary and trade organisation while an interpreter helped us work the sheep lines, approaching most of the top producers.

Imports

When compared to beef, Brazil's lamb production and consumption are tiny with 70% being imported from its near neighbours. Soya production is a significant part of Brazilian agriculture, and livestock farmers complained of being priced off the better land by high rents being offered for further soya expansion. Everyone we met was desperate to defend the environmental credentials of their farmers, with a variety of explanations for the current fires ranging from political protest to arid conditions.

Liz and I continued to Montevideo, the capital of Uruguay at the southern tip of the country, with a slightly broader brief to learn more about the

structure of the sheep industry for Brazil's southern neighbour. This we were able to do with significant help from the British Consul, which arranged visits to a coastal pedigree breeder, an in-country commercial research farm and an agricultural show.

The Uruguayan livestock industry is almost wholly dependent on extensively grazed natural pastures that provide enough nutrients for hardy Hereford, Angus and Shorthorn suckler cows and, historically, 12 million fine-wool Merinos. With the fall in wool prices the flock has recently reduced to around six million, 25% of which are still Merino, with approximately 50% now being Corriedale, a dual-purpose breed capable of producing a valuable fleece and a reasonable hogget carcass while surviving on unimproved native pasture.

The national weaning percentage was believed to be as little as 60%, a consequence of the extensive practices used, un-prolific breeds and predation. The experimental farm was running a trial with twin bearing ewes, Texel terminal sires, clover leys and closer monitoring at lambing time, but even the chief researcher questioned whether any gain in meat sales might be negated by increased costs and a loss in wool value from the end hogget.

In common with their neighbours in Brazil, the top end pedigree breeders in Uruguay were very keen to introduce new British genetics but

were frustrated by the lack of progress or perhaps the reluctance of their government to grant the necessary licences. For the time being they are compelled to use Australian and New Zealand imports or something that might have come 'under the wire' from Brazil.

Opportunities

In both countries, Texel appeared the favourite among the European sires. Several breeders complained of a reluctance, even refusal, of the flock book organisations to register sheep with black markings and thus potentially black fibres.

Other prominent breeds were Poll Dorset, Hampshire Down and Suffolk in equal measure, followed by Romney and Ile de France, with Charollais notable by its inexplicable absence.

In Uruguay, sheep meat holds a curious status of being the 'meat of the workers' as historically large numbers were butchered on farm to feed staff. This may be the cause of a seemingly less well-developed supply chain than we are used to.

The beef sector dwarfs the sheep industry in Brazil and Uruguay, but with lamb prices comparable to those in the UK there appeared to be scope for expansion. Great Britain is highly regarded, and there are clear opportunities to export genetics and technical knowhow.

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NSA regional event previews



Attendees will look at the beneficial role sheep have on the landscape.

NSA meetings to defend the extol sheep farming positives

NSA is proud to present a series of evening meetings, running in every region in the UK and open for all sheep farmers to explore positive facts and stats.

With the theme of 'Setting the sheep farming record straight', the evenings will defend the industry against the multiple attacks being levelled at it. NSA speakers will look at the positive role of sheep farming in the environment, British Wool will focus on welfare (specifically shearing and recent responses to animal rights extremists) and levy body speakers will cover the nutritional benefits of eating red meat. Details of the meetings, which all start at 7pm, can be found at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or from NSA Head Office. They are open to members and non-members so please invite friends, neighbours and family to come along too.

- **Wales:** Thursday 24th October at Welshpool, Powys.
- **Northern:** Thursday 31st October at Penrith, Cumbria.
- **Scotland:** Thursday 7th November at Forfar, Angus.
- **Central:** Thursday 14th November at Long Eaton, Nottingham.
- **Eastern:** Thursday 21st November at Colchester, Essex.
- **Northern Ireland:** Thursday 28th November. Location TBC.
- **South West:** Thursday 5th December at Frome, Somerset.
- **Marches:** Thursday 12th December at NSA Head Office, Worcestershire.
- **South East:** Thursday 9th January at Alton, Hampshire.



The Sheep Health, Welfare and Production Conference returns to South East Region in November.

South East

NSA South East Region is hosting its third Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Conference on Wednesday 20th November at Surrey University Vet School, Guildford.

An impressive line-up of speakers will address topics including getting to grips with scab, extracting the best from vaccines, maximising basic records, disease surveillance and laboratory investigations when managing flock health. A session exploring the potential of mixed-species swards in sheep systems will follow, with the final presentations looking at consumer requirements and contrasting ways to market the ultimate product, lambs and ewes.

NSA members local to the event will find a flyer in the polybag this magazine arrived in. Anyone else wanting to attend will find details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

South West

NSA South West Region has arranged an afternoon visit to the Rothamsted Research North Wyke site near Okehampton, Devon.

During the tour, attendees will have the opportunity to see the new sheep facility and hear about the research being carrying out there and elsewhere on the site. The date is still being confirmed, but to find out more, or if you're interested in attending, please contact Regional Manager Ian May.

YOUR NSA REGION

To attend or enquire about events in your region or raise a sheep farming issue you want discussing at a regional committee meeting, find your regional representative on page 2. Don't forget, devolved regions also dedicate time to policy work. Read about this on page 14.



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Uncertainty regarding lamb price stability with a no-deal Brexit continues.

Brexit continues to dominate policy agenda

As predicted, a lot has changed since the last edition of Sheep Farmer went to print. NSA has, as ever, been working hard to ensure the voices and concerns of sheep farmers are heard at this trying time.

No-deal contingency continues to be a high priority and, at the time of printing, with less than a month to go until the anticipated Brexit deadline, this work is taking a front seat. This will continue as NSA pushes for the advancement of the Agriculture Bill, which provides a framework for agriculture in a post-Brexit era.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker explains: "Despite the Brexit fatigue that has well and truly established itself across the nation, Westminster and all the devolved nations, have teams of civil servants working with industry to move policy forward. We're hopeful the

Agriculture Bill and related devolved legislation will be moved forward before too long. However, this is in Ministers' hands, and there isn't a great deal of civil servants can do until the Ministers give them direction."

Targeted support

NSA is continuing to call for provisions to be in place and believes these should be targeted to ensure support goes to those that will be worst affected. Recently received correspondence from Farming Minister George Eustice says the Government remains in favour of a one-off ewe headage payment, but hasn't discounted other measures.

Phil continues: "NSA has repeatedly put to Ministers that, while the simplicity of a ewe headage payment may seem appealing, it doesn't underpin trade and allow markets to keep moving. Neither does it safeguard lamb finishers who would not benefit from a ewe headage payment yet may be seriously affected by a no-deal and loss of market opportunities. We are continuing to discuss this with them and hope an announcement will be made soon."

Sea eagle release in Isle of Wight begins

Six sea eagles have now been released in the Isle of Wight. NSA attended several stakeholder meetings in August to again reiterate the concerns of farmers, but to also work with the release team to ensure support is offered to farmers impacted, every step of the way.

A key concern for NSA is the spread of the birds, which is an intention of their release and, owing to their size and ability to travel long distances, is very possible. As only the Isle of Wight was consulted, NSA has done its own work to gather views from further afield, inviting NSA members and sheep farmers from across the UK to share their attitudes towards and experiences of the birds. This survey has now closed, and the results will shortly be available on the news area of the NSA website and via the NSA Weekly Email Update.



Insurance options for market stability

Within NSA's work looking at contingency plans for a no-deal Brexit, we have become aware of commercial companies putting themselves forward as offering services that the Government is yet to commit to.

One example is Stable Price, an insurance company offering a package for farmers that underwrites prime lamb prices, protecting against market fluctuation. If lamb values fell below a specific amount, the insurance would kick in and make up the difference. This would work similarly to the 'variable premium scheme' style protection NSA has been proposing to Government. If a no-deal worst-case scenario occurs and lamb prices fall significantly, an insurance package such as this could help to make up the value.

With no certainty of what Government support might be made available, NSA is aware members may want to consider precautions such as this.

More information at stableprice.com; other products are available.

Consultations

NSA members are encouraged to feed in views to relevant Government consultations. While there are many open consultations ongoing, NSA has highlighted three key public consultations for members in England and Wales to be aware of. Individual responses can be submitted or contact your regional representative to feed into NSA's wider response. The consultations are:

England: General licences for wild birds: survey on management measures.

England & Wales: Ageing sheep at slaughter: introducing a new method.

Wales: Revised proposals for supporting Welsh farmers after Brexit.

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Scottish attention focused on Brexit support

As the clock ticks on, conversations are ongoing with various MPs and MSPs, following NSA Scottish Region meetings with them at the Royal Highland Show. These are mainly based on post-Brexit scenarios.

Willie Rennie MSP has written a letter on behalf of ourselves and the Scottish Gamekeepers Association, following our meeting at the Highland Show, to Cabinet Secretary Rosanna Cunningham highlighting predation issues and our mutual concerns over the change to fox control.

We have several meetings lined up in the next couple of months to touch base with the Government now Ministers are back from their summer recess. These will be updated on in the NSA Weekly Email Update and Sheep Farmer as they happen.

Strategy progress in Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



After more than two years of work, a sub-group of the Northern Ireland Animal Health and Welfare group, which includes NSA Northern Ireland Region, has produced a strategic framework for animal health and welfare policy in Northern Ireland.

Daera has finally put this out for consultation, though it may have to wait some time for final approval. The proposed draft framework recognises that an overarching and integrated approach to animal health and welfare in Northern Ireland is required.

It aims to provide a vision for animal health and welfare, using a set of five outcomes, agreed and delivered by the Government and stakeholders working together. It is proposed the framework will adopt the outcomes-based accountability model championed by the draft Programme for Government. The suggested lifespan of the Framework is 10 years.

Outcomes

The animal health and welfare framework proposes several outcomes: keep our animals healthy and treat them well; have a competitive, innovative livestock industry that contributes to our economic prosperity; protect public health and our food from animal-related disease; take

YOUR NSA REGION

As well as the policy work done by the NSA devolved regions, they also organise numerous events and activities for members. More on pages 4, 5 and 10.



By Jen Craig, Regional Chairman



NSA Scottish Region was glad to hear the convergence funding issue has concluded. We're hopeful the promises made in light of that will come to fruition – regardless of what happens on the political side of things in the coming weeks.

Replacing payments

We're also maintaining pressure on Scottish Government for a solution to the loss of LFASS payments and are pushing for answers as to how this will be addressed.

Also, on a personal note, I'm looking forward to hosting a farm visit for one of the NSA Next Generation workshops in the near future.

Wales considering scab approach

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Brexit or no Brexit? We will still not know by the time this issue of Sheep Farmer reaches you. NSA Cymru/Wales Region is part of a Welsh Government stakeholder group for contingency planning for the sheep sector in the event of a no-deal Brexit.

However, no one can second guess the outcome at this stage, and perhaps there will be positive news in the New Year.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has met with partners in Wales to discuss the recent opening of the call for expressions of interest for a sheep scab eradication programme. This topic is central to NSA interests, and our input and involvement will be essential if the Welsh Government's £5m investment is to deliver the goods.

While eradication of scab is a real challenge, we feel it is still the right objective and it makes the need for similar actions, elsewhere in the UK, even more critical. We will keep members informed of how this programme develops.

Advisory role

NSA Cymru/Wales has been asked to be part of several HCC advisory groups, with the first meeting reporting on the Hill Ram Scheme. The project currently has seven leader flocks with 20 other flocks participating in the scheme. Another 20 flocks will be encouraged to become part of the project, which will increase the number of performance recorded animals within the Welsh hill sheep sector.

The regional committee has also had a presentation from David Ashford of the Welsh Government's Land Management Reform Division. David updated the committee on the consultation document 'Sustainable farming and our land'.

This gave a sound basis for discussion, and NSA Cymru/Wales Region can now start to put its response together. Your views would be appreciated to submit informed response by 30th October.

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Enthusiasm and positivity at NSA Next Generation events

A busy summer of NSA Next Generation activities is leading into an even busier autumn and winter.

Young sheep farmers from across the UK have benefited from engaging and informative residential Next Generation workshops. The two-day sessions were themed to cover a range of topics from flock health to profitable lamb production and included top name speakers and insightful farm visits.

Organising the events, NSA Communications Officer Katie James comments: "At the Cirencester 'Flock health' and Scottish 'Profitable lamb production' events we were pleased to be joined by an enthusiastic and engaged group of young sheep farmers. NSA is lucky to be supported by some of most experienced and knowledgeable sheep vets, consultants and

researchers in the country and their attendance at these events meant we were able to offer a truly valuable experience for our next generation of shepherds."

Workshops

As this magazine went to press, applications were closing for an NSA Next Generation-sponsored place at the Sheep Breeders Round Table conference, and plans were gathering pace for two one-day workshop events in November.

Auction marts will host the two winter events, one in South West England on Tuesday 5th November and the other in the North West on Thursday 6th November. These are open to all young people in the sheep sector and free to attend. Register on the NSA Generation website.

Also this winter, applications will open once

again for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme, where 12 young sheep farmers will be selected to take part in a series of personal and career development sessions in 2020.

Details at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk or follow NSA on social media.



NSA next Generation events will continue in 2020.



Bursary winners update on progress

As 2019 draws on, NSA Samuel Wherry Memorial Award Winners Charlie Beaty and Marie Prebble are well underway preparing their trips and executing their research, supported by NSA and the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England. Here Charlie and Marie tell us more.

Charlie

Being a mixed farm, harvest has meant that research for my upcoming trip to New Zealand, alongside much sheep work, has been on hold. However, focus is back on now and the tups are out.



I fly out to New Zealand on 2nd January and am spending six weeks away from home. So, while you are all stuck in the wet and cold back here, I'll be touring farms in the glorious New Zealand sunshine!

I want to identify and investigate the factors that are most limiting to UK grass production on permanent pasture, and ways we can address those factors. I'm doing this by talking to producers across the UK, as well as traveling overseas.

I'm aware factors will differ drastically, dependant on location and topography, but I should be able to get a top five factors.

While I want to focus on maximising production off permanent pasture, it has to be in a way that will reduce overall cost of production, primarily by reducing concentrate requirement. At a time when our future is so uncertain, we have to do all we can to minimise the risk in the business.

Marie

My project will explore issues surrounding best practice at shearing by looking at various practical approaches to the task.



This will assess whether any physical, financial and perceived limitations can be overcome to improve conditions for sheep, shearers and farmers alike. In October and November I am heading to Norway and Iceland. Both countries adopt a stringent approach to biosecurity and it will be interesting to look at shearing sheds and sheep housing, as well as exploring the wool supply chain.

I have visited British Wool to understand the challenges and opportunities faced by the wool industry in the UK. It will be interesting to see if subsidies paid to wool producers in Norway and Iceland impact practical decisions made on farm.

I spent a valuable week in Scotland looking at a few different sheds and shearing set-ups. The challenges faced in the Highlands around getting dry sheep will be a practical consideration for my project.

I would be very grateful if sheep farmers and shearing contractors would complete my short questionnaires. All survey data will be totally anonymous, and my report will be available next spring.

Take part in Marie's survey by going to surveymonkey.co.uk/r/shearing-farmers-survey if you're a farmer, or surveymonkey.co.uk/r/shearers-survey if you're a shearer.



Share farming options offer opportunities for young farmers to build businesses

With farming harder than ever for younger people to break into, share farming opportunities provide bright opportunities for some.

Jonny Farmer, County Antrim, recognises this and spent some time considering taking on a share farming opportunity. He explains: "About five years ago I was introduced to Alec who was looking to go into a share farming partnership. It seemed like a good offer and we entered discussions. However, when I investigated it all further, I wasn't sure it would be viable for me at that time."

Jonny was concerned that the business venture may not stack up financially for him at that time and instead took a different route. He comments: "Back then, we didn't know each other and there wasn't a firm level of trust. It was also a new set up, so we didn't know how the sheep would respond and work or how the ground was. There were too many variables and I didn't feel comfortable taking on that much risk at that stage."

Instead, Jonny works as an employed shepherd for Alec, and manages aspects of the business. He says: "Over the past five years, we've really got to know each other, the strengths and weaknesses we have, how we work and how we work together. It's vital with a share farming arrangement that you really know your partner. I think they need to be almost like family."

Profitability

As the business has grown, Jonny says they have had to make changes and adapt in order to keep profitable. Jonny says: "I think an important consideration for me is how profitable the share farming agreement is as I can't risk losing money. It would have to be a wage plus in order to be worthwhile."

Looking to the future Jonny says he would consider entering a share farming agreement again. He says: "I still think it's a very valid option and, if the opportunity were presented, I'd be interested in working on a percentage per head agreement, or something similar."

Jonny opted for employment rather than share farming.



"If we did adopt a share farming system, we'd have to set down our principles and agree. That is something we could do now but would have been far more difficult in the beginning."

Jonny Farmer

With experience of share farming under his belt, Tony Shepherd agrees with Jonny that trust is vital.

He says: "A good working relationship between the landowner and the farmer is essential. A share farming arrangement needs the right landowner and the right farmer. It can be quite a close working relationship and you need to know you can work together and get on."

Tony share farmed with John Henderson from 1992 until 2018 near Skipton, North Yorkshire. He explains: "In 1991, one of John's tenanted farms became vacant and I rented part of it for 12 months, after which we agree to farm it all on a share farming agreement. Prior to that I'd been renting parcels of land and saw the agreement as an opportunity to build."

John bought a share of Tony's existing flock of 200 ewes as part of the agreed share farming format. He says: "We split the sheep 67% to me and 33% to John. He paid me for that percentage, which gave me some capital to reinvest and expand further. By the time the share farming

ended, we had around 450 sheep and 150-200 store cattle."

Tony and John put up new farm buildings, splitting the cost 50/50 and worked very closely on the farm finances. Tony says: "It's a very close and transparent agreement. John would see my finances and he would show me his figures to see how well the farm was doing."

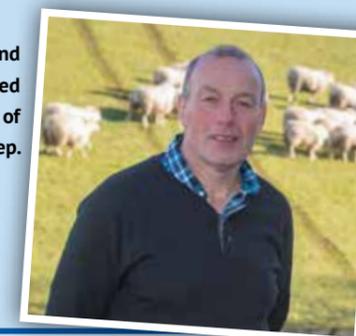
Security

A benefit for Tony was the financial security it offered. He expands: "I didn't have to borrow lump sums of money from a bank to get going. I was able to build up my stock as and when things allowed, and I always had the option of doing external work to build up funds. Each party

does their own accounts, you're not liable to one another, but a working relationship exists."

While not all share farming opportunities are the same Tony says it can be a challenge finding the opportunities. He says: "For a younger person looking for a share farming opportunity, it can be difficult to find something. I had no farming background and John very kindly took that chance."

Tony and John shared ownership of the sheep.



"I would say don't be afraid of the landowner being involved in, but not dominating, your business. It was good to have a conversation outside of your immediate family, and someone who could bounce ideas off. Find a landowner who is interested in the farm being well-run and willing to give someone a start."

Tony Shepherd

Traditional practices alongside modern diversification form essence of business

By Eleanor Phipps, NSA

With 1,100 Scottish Blackface ewes run across eight hefts of less favoured hill land at Biggar, Lanarkshire, alongside representing the interests of sheep farmers in Scotland, NSA Scottish Region Chairman Jenifer Craig has plenty to keep her busy.

"I run the farm in partnership with my father, which is great because it gives us both the opportunity to get off-farm once in a while. It also gives me opportunities to grow the business as interests me, with my father's support," Jen says.

Time off the farm accelerated for Jen when she became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador in 2014, intensifying when she later became a regional officeholder.

At home, the 700ha (1,750-acre) farm runs a very traditional system meaning the sheep rarely see people and are only gathered a handful of times throughout the year.

"For the most part the sheep are self-sufficient," Jen says. "We keep an eye on them but only properly see them about seven or eight times a year. We put a little extra feed out to help them

through the winter, but really that's all."

The farm is split into eight hefts and, Jen says, the ewes are well at home. "The sheep know their homes and, when we gather them in, they're always looking to get back up onto the hills. They're very good as we can bring them down and fold the separate groups together, knowing they'll always split themselves back off to the right flock again when we turn them out. It makes for efficient management – the ewes know the hills and they know where they like to be."

Jen's sheep roam freely across their hefts all year round and tugging time is no exception with the ewes and tups turned out together onto the hill. However, Jen says, the ewes are brought in for scanning with twins then moving onto better pasture for the duration of lambing. Jen comments: "It's much easier to manage and keep an eye on the twins when they're nearby. We usually scan at around 110-115%, and it's a good management tool to bring the twins in."

Treatments

When sheep are gathered, opportunity is taken to provide appropriate treatments - but Jen says the farm is lucky in being able to minimise these.

She comments: "We're fortunate really. With the wet weather we get it would be reasonably assumed fluke could be an issue up here, and I know other people with similar hill systems do have problems, but we don't really. We only dose once a year, and that seems to do the sheep well. We're also fortunate as we don't have ticks, an issue

I know effects some farmers nearby. They may move this way in time but, at current, we're clear. The sheep are also given two doses for worms a year but, other than that, they aren't given much else."

The system produces lambs for the store market, with only a small number being finished each year. Jen says: "This year we have finished about 50 or 60 lambs but the vast majority are sold as stores. We hope to have most, if not all, away by the end of October. We've recently taken to sending a trailer full or so a week, which we have found balances out market fluctuation. Some weeks we might get better prices than others, but if we took a big number to clear at once and the price was low, we'd end up losing out more."

Jen also has some interest in genetics and crosses some of her sheep to produce a different carcass.

"I want to produce something with a strong carcass," she says. "Recently one of our Cheviot tups got in with some of our Charollais cross Blackie crossbred field ewes and the resulting lambs produced surprisingly impressive carcasses. I'm interested in looking at the genetics there and seeing what potential there could be for something a bit different."

Culling policy

"We run quite a tight ship when it comes to culling. If a ewe goes lame, we'll give her a chance, but if she gets lame again, she will be culled. Equally, if she doesn't take to the tup well. We're not too harsh, but we don't want any poor traits."

“

For the most part the sheep are self-sufficient. We keep an eye on them but only properly see them about seven or eight times a year.

Jen Craig

”



Jen Craig.

Jen clears her ewes to keep them fit and young, meaning none of the maternal ewes should be older than five years.

"We want to keep healthy strong mothers out on the hills," she says. "It can be a tough place for them to live and rear lambs, so we don't want to have ewes out there that struggle and can't sustain themselves or their lambs. Occasionally an older ewe may get through by hiding from us during gathering, but we're usually pretty good at getting them all and clearing the older ones out."

The replacements are largely homebred with the best ewe lambs being drafted and kept, and the surplus sold on as ewe lambs at market.

With the system working well, Jen and her father also rent some land off to a wind farm. She explains: "We have three turbines on the farm and, actually, this is quite beneficial for us. The wind turbine company laid down tracks when they put the turbines in, which makes going up the hill a lot more comfortable for us, particularly when the weather isn't great!"

As well as bringing in income, the turbine scheme also has other benefits, including a tree-planting programme.

"We have a scheme going on whereby a number of spruces have to be planted by the turbine people to compensate for any plants they had to remove to build the road and turbines," she says. "It's good as we can discuss planting locations on the farm and can use them to benefit benefit the sheep with shelter and fit in with the system we run."

Additionally, following the erection of the

turbines, Jen and her father were given support to put new fences around the farm as some were moved or damaged. She adds: "It was an excellent boost for us, as we were able to put loads of new fences up around the field that helped to secure perimeters and hefts."

Diplomacy

However, Jen says, it isn't always the most natural relationship. She explains: "It's a diplomatic relationship and there are some frustrating times. When the road first went down the drainage system was not done effectively. Despite our warnings, this came as a bit of a shock to them when the road was washed out. However, with patience and diplomacy, it has come to be a mutually beneficial relationship."

Jen is now looking into the possibility of expanding to get some cattle, to help keep on top of some growth.

"The sheep are great and important, but in some areas it would be beneficial to have some cattle to help us keep on top of some hefts and keep growth at a more manageable level," she says. "I'm hopeful we can begin introducing some cattle soon, but we'll see."

Jen does a fine balancing act between farm work and running NSA Scottish Region, having taken the reins in early 2019. She explains: "I became active within NSA a few years ago when I became an NSA Next Generation Ambassador. It was a great experience and also introduced me to young farmers in other parts of the UK who I probably never would have met otherwise. I still talk regularly with some of the others in my cohort, and we often discuss different sheep management practices and share tips."

Following the scheme, Jen joined NSA Scottish Region Committee, which eventually brought her to the Chairmanship. Jen now regularly attends Government and industry meetings on behalf of NSA Scottish Region. She concludes: "It keeps me

The sheep are run across 708ha split into eight hefts.

Farm facts

- Family farm since 1947.
- 1,100 pure Blackface ewes.
- Tups are Blackface, North Country Cheviot and Charollais.
- Eight hefts on the hill.
- Farm sits at 290-600m (950-2,000ft).
- Majority lambs sold as stores.



Three wind turbines complement farm income.

“

Despite our hill location and the frequent damp and harsh weather, we don't have too many issues with fluke.

Jen Craig

”

Jen says the flock has avoided major fluke, tick and worm problems to date.



Normangill Farm rises to 600m.

very busy but, because of how my dad and I share responsibility for the farm, it's great to be in the position where I can take time away from the farm to represent Scottish sheep farmers."

Mental health and hardship support are well established and available to farming industry

Mental health issues affect one in three people, and farmers are no exception. With sometimes seemingly endless days and often little or no company, working sheep can be a thankless and isolating task. According to the Farming Community Network, more than one member of the farming community loses their life to suicide every week.

With what looks set to be trying times ahead for sheep farming, NSA wants to help its members and provide support during

hardship. We want to do all we can to ensure members have access to the full range and depth of support they may need as agriculture faces potentially the biggest upheaval in generations.

However, as an organisation primarily focused on representing farmers voices and interests, NSA is not always best placed to help with mental health and similar challenges. Luckily, agriculture has a range of organisations active in this area, and a telephone helpline to answer immediate concerns and signpost people to the best-placed group to offer further assistance.

Support

NSA has a huge amount of respect for organisations like the ones featured on these

Rural Support

Members in Northern Ireland should contact Rural Support. The organisation provides support through a helpline which offers a listening and signposting service for farmers and farm families. They can offer advice on financial and debt problems, inheritance issues, physical and mental health concerns, farming paperwork and Members in Northern Ireland can contact Rural support on 08001381678.



pages, and others out there offering support. If you find yourself in need please contact the Farming Helpline on 03000 111 999, which is operational 7am-11pm, 365 days a year. Somebody will be there to receive your call and direct you to the right place.

Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution



RABI provides welfare advice, practical care and financial support to people of all ages. Help is given to farmers, farmworkers, spouses and dependants in England and Wales.

Extreme weather, physical and mental illness, accidents, animal disease, family issues, personal debt, housing issues and cash flow concerns are just some of the reasons why working people seek the charity's help. RABI says: "Often, problems can quickly spiral out of control but sometimes, all it takes is a small amount of support at the right time to get things back on track."

Support for the sick, elderly and disabled is provided in various ways and includes regular living allowances, funding for disability equipment, paying home help costs or contributing to care home top-up fees. The charity owns and runs two residential care homes – Beaufort House in Burnham-on-Sea and Manson House in Bury St Edmunds.

Finance

RABI has more than 50 county committees, comprising of hundreds of dedicated volunteers, who work at a grassroots level to raise both funds and awareness. Funding also comes from legacies and investments.

RABI continues: "Worrying about debts and money problems is a known trigger for mental health issues. RABI helps people financially in diverse and targeted ways, such as contributing towards domestic bills, paying for relief staff to work on the farm, organising free business appraisals or providing debt advice."

"Farming can be a 24/7 business and many in the industry work long hours in isolation in remote, rural areas. That's why strong support networks are vital for good mental health, especially during stressful times. RABI caseworkers are always available and willing to talk through problems and concerns in complete confidence, without judgment. They are trained in suicide awareness and mental health first-aid and provide a human, sympathetic and caring link to the charity."



Refer a friend or a neighbour to join NSA using the membership form at the back of this edition for your chance to win a JFC-Agri foam footbath.

Mental health and other difficulties can impact anyone – but support is available.



Farming Community Network FCN



The Farming Community Network (FCN) is a voluntary organisation and charity that supports farmers and families within the farming community through difficult times.

Complementing the network of county-specific groups working in set geographical areas, FCN has a network of over 400 volunteers, split into 33 county groups across England and Wales, who are there to listen, provide practical and pastoral support, and 'walks with' those who seek help for as long as it takes.

FCN says: "Simply talking to someone is a big step in improving your mental health. You can talk to your friends and family, other farmers, your neighbour or your GP. Or if you are worried about talking to those closest to you, for fear of becoming a burden, you can talk to FCN."

Mental health

"Farmers have to overcome multiple issues on a daily basis, some of which are beyond control: fluctuating market prices, animal disease, the weather, lack of fodder, the potential impact of Brexit and rural crime to name but a few. Combine these stressors with the isolation and the pressure to make the farm business a success, it is hardly surprising that so many within the farming community struggle with poor mental health – and why some see no alternative than to end their own life."

"When it comes to farming, it is very easy to underestimate just how important the mind is. Along with the body, it is, without doubt, the most important bit of kit a farmer can have. If the mind is not well maintained, the consequences can be disastrous – not just to the farmer, but to the farm business and the farm household too."

Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institute

RSABI supports people emotionally, practically and financially in times of need. The service is available to those from farming, crofting and growing in Scotland.

RSABI says: "Ours is a comprehensive service to clients who are experiencing difficult times to enable them to move forward."

"Emotional support is available through our helpline, case officers and volunteers, all of whom are mental health first aid trained. We listen, keep people safe and access professional support when required. As well as the helpline, we offer a call out service for the lonely and vulnerable. We can access practical support such as, but not limited to, welfare benefits, business reviews, debt signposting, counselling and mediation services. Our financial support can be monthly payments and/or single grants. All requests are considered, including business costs to help overcome a short-term crisis."



Support comes in many forms.

Addington Fund



The Addington Fund helps farmers in severe financial difficulty by investing in property and renting them out at a cheaper rate, providing homes for retiring farmers or those who have to leave a tenancy. It also provides feed and forage to those who have insufficient supplies due to natural disaster, bad weather or bad luck.

The fund says: "Our strategic rural housing scheme buys houses to order for farmers, who have no choice but to leave their current property. This may be due to an unfortunate combination of events that they cannot recover from, or eviction, giving the farmer no other choice but to find somewhere else to live. Houses are purchased to order to accommodate the needs of the tenant. When the property is ready the new tenant is able to move in discreetly to a house that is affordable."

Housing

"Many of these houses are shared ownership and can ultimately be purchased outright as circumstances improve or change."

"We also have a similar affordable housing scheme, with properties that will never be sold. These affordable houses are for anyone who has worked in any sector of the agricultural industry and are also rented out at a reduced rate to deserving candidates who wish to remain in their chosen rural environment. These include young families or people who wish to engage in rural activities."

"Disaster relief is given in the form of purchased goods such as compound feeds, silage, hay, straw and straights. This is designed to protect the welfare of animals and alleviates suffering of hard-working farmers in times of natural difficulty."

Working together to keep the sheep industry healthy

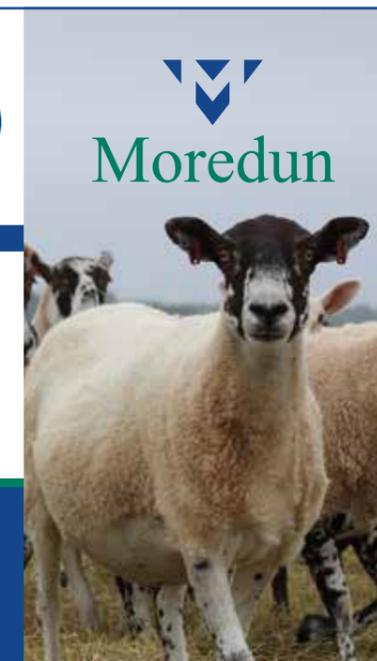


Did you know, as an NSA member you're also an associate member of Moredun and can access the Moredun online portal?

Find Moredun magazines and disease factsheets, as well as new features such as Moredun's new film: OPA Control - Research and Diagnosis.

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.



Top tips for obtaining planning permission for farm building developments

By Charlotte Lockwood, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

With the continued uncertainty surrounding Brexit and the future of farm support payments, many farmers are looking at farm-based development opportunities to assist in protecting the future of their business.



Consider the noise and smell impact of a new building on neighbours.

However, obtaining planning permission for schemes can be a complicated process. This is particularly true if your proposed plan is situated in the green belt, a national park, conservation area or contains listed buildings.

While the Government has sought to extend the types of agricultural development that can be carried out without the need to submit a formal planning application, these rights are subject to conditions and limitations. Additionally, they often do not extend to developments proposed in sensitive areas, such as national parks.

Greater protection is afforded to protecting the natural environment within areas such as national parks and green belt, which is contained in both national and local planning policy.

Scenic beauty

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in the areas above and that the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited.

However, these policies need to be balanced against other national and local planning policies which promote rural developments.

While the development of homes in isolated rural locations is often limited, support is provided

for developments where it can be justified. Equally, while a development may have support on paper, it can often be challenging to demonstrate to local planning authorities why it should be permitted. For a positive outcome, preparation and early liaison with the local planning authority are crucial.

It is worth considering your land and assessing the most suitable location for the proposed development. Consider whether or not there are sites closer to existing buildings that may be suitable and whether you have existing buildings that could be converted to other uses.

Surroundings

Also, consider the surroundings of the proposed site. If it is close to other residential properties, screening may be required to protect the amenity space around those properties.

If the proposals are significant and are likely to cause noise or odours, consider what steps may need to be taken to reduce these potential impacts.

It is worth discussing your proposals with the local planning authority. This can be through a formal pre-application service or informal discussions with a planning officer. Most local

authorities have a duty planner available to assist with general queries relating to development. Some pre-application services require payment of a fee. However, this may be helpful to obtain the local planning authorities views on developments. Consider discussing the proposals with your parish council and neighbouring landowners to gather views and help prevent objections that may later block planning permission.

It is easy to assume the local planning authority will understand your business. However, this isn't always the case. Modern farming practices are ever-changing, and those not actively involved in the sector are often unaware of the resources required to run a farm. It is essential to spend time detailing how the proposed development will assist the future growth and sustainability of your business.

Future growth

This may require providing as much detail as setting out the day to day activities of the farming enterprise. Explaining how your business works and how the proposed development will support the future growth of that business will assist in justifying the need for the proposed development.

Ensure you have complied with all requirements contained relevant national legislation and obligations of your local planning authority. The application may be rejected if all relevant material has not been submitted.

Most local planning authorities have a checklist of requirements available from their website. Ensure all plans and drawings are to scale, the appropriate fee has been paid and the correct land ownership certificate has been signed within the application form.



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Love Lamb Week just a part of ongoing work promoting range of sheep products

Scotch Lamb, Naturally campaign returns

QMS has launched its award-winning 'Scotch Lamb, Naturally' campaign to inspire and encourage consumers in Scotland to seek out lamb as a tasty, quick, simple meal.

The six-week-long campaign, which started in mid-September, includes television, billboard, press, digital, social and radio advertising as well as supporting PR activity.

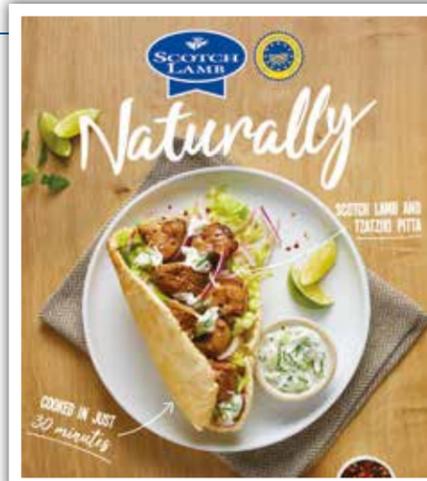
The new campaign highlights what sets Scotch Lamb PGI apart, as well as its versatility

and simplicity as a cooking ingredients, is set to reach more than four million Scottish consumers during September and October.

The average consumption of lamb in Scotland, the focus of the 2019 campaign, is only half of what it is for the UK as a whole.

Kirsty Fox, QMS Marketing Manager, says: "We have a great message to take to consumers. We have a delicious, nutritious, quality-assured food, produced naturally right on our doorstep and there are endless tasty, mid-week lamb meals which take 30 minutes or less to cook."

For more information on Scotch Lamb PGI visit www.scotchkitchen.com or follow Scotch Kitchen on Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.



Promotional material has been shared in Scotland.



AHDB promotion to get lamb back on plates

Ahead of new season lamb availability, the latest phase of AHDB's £1.4 million marketing campaign began in September with targeted advertising activity in two bursts.

The first started in summer and has resulted in millions of people seeing the campaign message 'Lamb: Hits you in the chops'. September saw the next phase get underway to coincide with the peak supply of British lamb, to help further support the sheepmeat sector.

AHDB is also running an additional campaign specifically for levy-payers. This includes physical and digital materials such as social media images and promotional merchandise to help provide farmers with further support and guidance in marketing their produce at critical times in the production year. Farmers can get involved by sharing images on social media using the hashtag #lambcampaign.

By focusing on lamb's unique flavour and its versatility, the work aims to stem the steady decline in lamb sales and boost consumer attitudes towards the meat across several audiences.

AHDB is also working with retailers, foodservice outlets and industry stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach to support the promotion of lamb and sheep meat in the coming months.

The work forms part of a more extensive, rolling programme of promotion of red meat, covering consumer, trade, work with retailers, health, nutrition and the environment. In 2018/19, AHDB Beef & Lamb invested in £9.762m of its income on promotion and PR support for beef and lamb at home and abroad, roughly 61% of its income.

Clarification

Moredun would like to acknowledge that the article in the August/September edition of Sheep Farmer, about monitoring antimicrobial use in the UK, referred to research conducted by a consortium of sheep experts and led by Peers Davies at Liverpool University. Dr Davies is happy to take questions about the research from NSA members. Email peers.davies@liverpool.ac.uk.

British Wool focus on stakeholder and consumer outreach

British Wool has been busy visiting auction marts, speaking to sheep farmers to raise awareness of its work among the farming community.

In a positive joint relationship, NSA joined in much of the roadshow to promote its own work. The joint presence was well received during the primary sheep breeding sale season.

Laura Johnson, British Wool Producer Marketing Executive, comments: "Attending and supporting livestock markets is something we find very important here at British Wool. There are many similarities between the way in which we sell producers' wool and the livestock markets – both working on behalf of the sheep farmer in achieving the best possible price and realising the true market value for their products. The roadshows have been a great way for us to explain to producers exactly what we are doing to market their wool internationally and to help maximise their returns."

British Wool is also working closely with brands in China that use British wool. Products that meet the criteria for the British Wool licensee scheme can be offered marketing support through social media, the website and consumer exhibitions in China.

Back in the UK, the team has recently been involved in a number of trade and consumer exhibitions, such as the Bed Show in Telford and Flooring Show in Harrogate, to promote the use of British wool-rich products.



LMC delivers campaign to keep lamb on the menu

Changing the mindset of the Northern Ireland consumer remains a significant challenge, says LMC, and, following a burst of advertising at the start of the year, it is clear much work needs to be done to convince 21st-century shoppers that lamb should be a regular choice for their shopping basket.

During Love Lamb Week, activities allow thousands of consumers to engage with lamb. Social media content was combined with successful sampling sessions in Tesco and Asda stores across Northern Ireland and in Victoria Square, Belfast. An LMC spokesperson says: "These sessions provided a fantastic opportunity for farmers to communicate the passion with which they produce lamb, the standards of production that they must meet and the care that they take with their animals. Consumers were genuinely interested to hear exactly where their lamb comes from."

On social media, messaging boasted about the versatility, quality and simplicity of lamb as a meal choice for all the family, as well as the importance of lamb as part of a healthy balanced diet. Feedback from supply chain partners has been extremely positive, says LMC, and coverage across TV, radio and online will have helped to raise the profile of lamb.

LMC continues: "We have also launched our broad-reaching media campaign. The campaign's 'Flavour Your Life' message will reappear on TV, radio, online, print, outdoor and through our social media channels. The campaign is designed to demonstrate that lamb (and beef) can be used to provide a quick, simple, healthy and nutritious meal solution for all the family that is not limited to the traditional roast. September also marks the 20th year of LMC's school cookery demonstration programme, and lamb will feature in many of the 350 demonstrations to be carried out in secondary schools across Northern Ireland."

HCC brings Lamb Love to Welsh Workplaces

HCC celebrated Love Lamb Week in early-September by working with food-service and catering providers to bring Welsh Lamb promotions and tastings to some of the country's largest public-sector workplace cafeterias.

This year HCC organised joint promotions with large and small retailers throughout the UK, investing in targeted online advertising, and for the first time partnering with foodservice companies on workplace promotions in selected offices in Cardiff and Newport.

The marketing included tastings of PGI Welsh Lamb, a barbecue-themed promotion, recipes and other literature, as well as a competition that ran throughout the month of September.

The Love Lamb Week promotions are part of a drive by HCC and several Welsh suppliers to raise the profile of Welsh red meat in the UK.

Emily Rees, HCC's UK Market Development Executive, says: "It's important we make the most of every opportunity to promote Welsh Lamb, working with supermarkets and independent retailers and through the media."

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Clarifying the role of on-farm actions in consumers' eating experiences

TECHNICAL

While PGI Welsh Lamb has earned a reputation across the globe as being a high quality and premium product, research has shown that lamb consumption in the UK is declining.

HCC believes this means, now more than ever, there is a need to understand meat quality, ensure consistency and reignite consumers' confidence in choosing lamb for mealtimes.

A new project undertaken by HCC will assess Welsh Lamb meat quality to help enhance quality and consistency throughout the supply chain, to ensure chefs and discerning diners continue to choose PGI Welsh Lamb for years to come. The levy body says this will provide a prosperous future for the product and industry as we move into a post-Brexit trading world.

Development

The recently-launched meat quality project is part of HCC's Red Meat Development Programme and is one element of a three-strand approach to enhancing and improving the Welsh red meat sector across the supply chain. The Red Meat Development Programme is funded through European RDP money and by the Welsh Government.

This project is dynamic and exciting and looks to engage with the whole supply chain to ensure Welsh Lamb is the best it can be for customers in the UK and beyond. The project will assess current meat quality variation between different Welsh production systems and breeding groups and will develop best practice guidelines for the farmers and others in the industry to adopt.

Leading the project is Eleri Thomas, whose PhD thesis was centred around meat eating quality. Dr Thomas explains: "This project will take a whole supply chain approach and we will be looking to work with farmers, processors and consumers to get a fully rounded understanding of current Welsh Lamb meat eating quality."

Guidelines

"Based on our findings, we will look to produce guidelines for the industry to adapt to ensure consistency and safeguard PGI Welsh Lamb's enviable reputation and educate consumers on how to cook various cuts of lamb to enjoy them at their best."

Assessing and understanding eating quality is a complex undertaking, with many factors contributing towards meat quality across the supply chain as farmers, processors and consumers themselves can all impact quality.

Dr Thomas says some of these impacting factors or 'control points' occur at farm level – with fatness, age, genetics and sex all bearing different effects. Genetics, for example, can impact profoundly on intramuscular fat (marbling). Well-finished and non-stressed animals will have a high level of muscle glycogen which converts to lactic acid and ultimately affects pH, gives the meat a good colour, reduces the chance of off flavours and gives consistent eating experience.

Research has shown stress can reduce the amount of muscle glycogen an animal has, so how sheep are handled and how they travel to an abattoir are very important in terms of meat quality.

On the processing side, factors to consider include the ageing of the meat, how it's

displayed and how it is chilled, while only the consumers themselves have control over how the product is cooked and tastes – another important consideration within meat quality science.

Dr Thomas adds: "A major element of the project will be conducting consumer taste panel research. This involves getting groups of consumers to taste and score various cuts of PGI Welsh Lamb on tenderness, juiciness, flavour and overall liking."

"Consumer taste panel research in other parts of the world has previously shown that consumers are often willing to pay more for meat that scores well in this type of research."

This aspect of the project was launched at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells in July, where scientists, processor colleagues and industry insiders were invited to an exclusive event and consumer taste panel demonstration. To launch the work, Dr Thomas was joined by Dr Linda Farmer, a leading meat quality scientist from the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute in Belfast, and Gareth Ward, a Michelin-starred chef and Welsh Lamb enthusiast from Machynlleth, Powys.

Quality

Dr Thomas continues: "We are looking forward to getting this project underway and to start analysing and understanding how we can enhance PGI Welsh Lamb."

"The knowledge we will gain from this work will be valuable to the whole industry, as we hope that everyone in the supply chain can play their part in ensuring PGI Welsh Lamb can be the best that it can be and a quality choice for consumers for years to come."



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Ensuring good conditions for lambs will help reassure consumer confidence.

Treating lameness using the five-point plan will prevent spread

By Dr Jenny Hull, Black Sheep Farm Health, Northumberland



It was once said that two things in life are certain: death and lame sheep. However, with the arsenal of control options available, lame sheep are not a certainty for any flock.

The most common causes of lameness in sheep are footrot and scald. According to an AHDB lameness study, footrot alone is estimated to cost £10 per ewe per year.

As this figure is only for footrot, it is clear the combination of all causes of lameness is costing the sheep industry millions of pounds annually. The lameness target on any farm should be below 2% and, I believe, this is achievable using the industry-recognised five-point plan.

The industry-recognised 'five-point plan' is straightforward, but does require a long-term commitment to reduce lameness. With this commitment, it has consistently been shown to reduce levels below 2% in flocks after three years.

Culling policy

Some sheep infect others, so it is best to cull severely or repeatedly affected sheep. Each episode of lameness damages the structure of the hoof, which then predisposes them to a future episode.

Two strikes and out is a good rule of thumb – if a ewe has had footrot more than once in any season she, along with those not responding to treatment, should be culled. Some flocks can manage their lameness with strict culling alone, but this requires a high input of replacements.

Different strains of footrot and CODD exist,

and your sheep may not be prepared for the strains carried by incoming sheep. Quarantine any bought-in sheep for three weeks. While in quarantine, inspect their feet for any visible disease, as sheep can have lesions without showing obvious lameness, particularly with CODD. Monitor closely for signs of lameness and ensure sheep are sound before mixing with the rest of the flock.

Incoming sheep should receive a footrot vaccination on arrival. This quarantine period is an excellent opportunity to practice biosecurity for other diseases and administer treatments such as those for prevention of resistant worms, resistant liver fluke and sheep scab. Writing a quarantine protocol with your vet is worthwhile.

Treatment

Treat cases of lameness within three days of the sheep going lame – this has been shown to improve the success of treatment significantly and is also in the interest of the sheep. Isolate them from the main flock into a separate field (not with other non-lame sheep) to reduce them causing further cases.

Resist the urge to trim feet – long toes will be shed naturally once the inciting cause of the lameness is cured, as the sheep will begin to use the foot properly again. Diagnosis and treatment of lameness should be discussed with your vet so the right product is used for the right disease at the right time and dose.

Remember, different antibiotics are appropriate for different infection. Footbathing for the treatment of scald can be useful when done correctly – be sure to follow instructions for dilution carefully and consult your vet if in any doubt.

Gathering and handling present opportunities for lameness to spread. Muddy, dirty pens are an especially rich source of infection. Make sure pens are clean, ideally with a concrete floor, or use mobile pens that can be moved onto clean ground. Pine woodchip, gravel and hydrated lime can all help keep pens and tracks clean.

Footrot bacteria can live on pasture for 14 days so low stocking densities, rotational grazing and paddock style strip grazing systems can all help reduce lameness challenge.

Gathering areas including feeders, water troughs, gateways and handling areas are often where sheep pick up an infection. Sprinkling hydrated lime on these areas is a cheap and effective way to dry out the bacteria and reduce their survival time. Frequent movement of feeders and troughs also reduces poaching, and therefore survival of lameness bacteria on pasture.

Vaccination

There is a licensed and effective vaccine available for footrot, used for both prevention and treatment. As a treatment, it can be combined with an antibiotic injection. This vaccine should be used on the whole flock to increase the resilience of the flock and to support the other four points of the plan.

Vaccination protocols can vary, and this is best discussed with your vet, but in flocks with a high incidence of footrot, two doses four to six weeks apart followed by a six-monthly booster. In flocks with a lower incidence an annual booster may be appropriate. before the high-risk period such as wet weather or housing, is enough.

Continued on page 30

Areas of congregation present opportunity for food disease to spread.



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Avoid trimming feet, as this can make the problem worse rather than better.

- Care should be taken when administering the vaccine as it is hazardous to humans – swift medical attention should be sought if you self-inject. Also, sheep that have been given the vaccine should never be injected with moxidectin 1%. The vaccine can cause a lump or injection site reaction; therefore, it is best not administered just before shearing, and care should be taken in vaccinating show stock.

It is safe to vaccinate pregnant ewes and

breeding rams but avoid vaccinating ewes in the month either side of lambing and avoid treating rams less than six weeks before the mating season. Vaccination in many flocks has reduced footrot down to almost negligible levels, especially when combined with the other four points of the plan.

The drive to reduce the use of antibiotics and maximise animal welfare will no doubt continue to keep lameness as a significant concern in years to come. There is some interest in streamlining the

footrot vaccine by tailoring the strain to those on the individual farm. In theory, this may generate stronger immunity as the challenge is more specific.

There is no vaccine for CODD but work on a vaccine for digital dermatitis in cattle may lay the foundations. Biotechnology companies are keen to propound the use of sensor technology for the early detection of lameness.

New EBVs improve ram selection in Scotland



The value of investing in a ram with the right genetic merit for your system has been highlighted in results from the third year of the Ram Compare project.

The project has highlighted how commercial producers can identify the most profitable rams for their production system by using Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs).

For the first time, an EBV for days to slaughter has been produced – indicating the degree to which sire choice can influence the speed that lambs reach slaughter weight. Over a quarter of the variation seen in this trait can be attributed to a lamb's genetics and there are important genetic differences between rams.

Reducing the number of days to slaughter can both improve farm profitability and reduce the farms carbon footprint, further highlighting the role

genetics play in meeting our climate change obligations.

This year, Signet Breeding Services launched the biggest change to its terminal sire recording programme in decades, moving the assessment of carcass traits, like muscle and fat depth, onto a weight, rather than an age, adjusted basis. While this has changed the ranking of Signet recorded rams, it has greatly enhanced the commercial focus of these widely-used EBVs for producers selecting lambs at a fixed slaughter weight.

Improved efficiency

Sarah Millar, Head of QMS Industry Development, says: "It is great to see Scottish producers benefiting from the Ram Compare project and see the potential for improved efficiency and meat production in commercial sheep flocks."

In 2017, Beltex was introduced to the project and are a new addition to the results publication. Scottish producers, the Dunlop family, submitted



rams to the trial at Bowhill and subsequently one of their rams came out with the highest carcass conformation EBV out of 138 rams tested.

Farmer Andrew Dunlop comments: "We have been performance recording with Signet for over 20 years and widely use EBVs in our pedigree and commercial flocks. It makes sense with a carcass breed that prides itself on siring lambs with conformation that meets market demand. We are delighted our ram has performed so well in this EBV in the Ram Compare results."

QMS is a joint-funder of Ram Compare. More at www.ramcompare.com

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Pneumonia losses continue to blight UK sheep flocks

Pasteurellosis is a condition affecting sheep of all ages that can cause significant economic impacts in sheep flocks through losses of growing lambs.

The most important infectious agents involved are bacteria including *Mannheimia haemolytica*, *Bibersteinia trehalosi* and *Pasteurella multocida*.

These bacteria are considered normal residents of the tonsils and throat of healthy animals. However, under stress, the immune system can become overwhelmed - even when animals have been vaccinated. The bacteria can multiply and invade the lungs, developing into

Age Group	Count of animals
Adult	29
Neonatal	2
Post-weaning	12
Pre-weaning	50
Unknown	19

Pneumonia can affect lambs of any age but most commonly affects those aged three to eight weeks.

pneumonia, or spread to the blood stream to cause septicaemia.

Mannheimia is one of the organisms that cause pasteurellosis and, so far during 2019, pneumonia due to *Mannheimia haemolytica* is the fourth most commonly diagnosed disease in sheep in Great Britain. This data was gathered from carcasses submitted for post-mortem examination to veterinary investigation centres in England and Wales and our partner post-mortem providers and disease surveillance centres in Scotland.

Prevalence

Pneumonia due to *Mannheimia* was an issue in growing lambs, ages ranging from four days to six months. However, the majority of cases were in lambs aged three to eight weeks of age. In 59% of cases the animal was found dead, demonstrating how the disease can cause sudden death and not present clinical signs.

In May APHA looked more closely at 20 of these cases of *Mannheimia* pneumonia in growing lambs and, of interest, is the antibiotic resistance pattern. Of the 20 cases, 11 showed resistance to tetracyclines, and in one isolate, there was also resistance to ampicillin.

This highlights the importance of further testing following a post-mortem to identify the

By Amanda Carson, APHA



organisms causing pneumonia and the antibiotic sensitivity of the organism so the most appropriate antibiotics can be used in the flock.

Concurrent disease in these 20 cases included coccidiosis, but other underlying stressors would include management issues including overcrowding, transport or mixing of groups and of course poor weather. Identifying and reducing stress is vital in protecting sheep against pasteurellosis.

Proper management and nutrition, including timely and correct vaccination of the ewes (following the recommendations on the data sheet) and ensuring lambs receive adequate colostrum, are all essential to provide the best start in life for lambs.

Antibiotics

Prophylactic (routine or blanket) of antibiotics should only be used as an option of last resort.

The recommendation for vaccination is a primary course of two injections four to six weeks apart followed by an annual booster four



Infected lungs appear swollen and purple-red.

to six weeks before lambing to boost production of colostral antibodies.

If it is suspected a vaccine has failed, as opposed to the consequences of other contributory factors including concurrent disease or recent stressors, this should be reported via your vet to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), as this helps VMD identify if there is a problem with a particular product.

Further resources on vaccination in sheep can be found on the RUMA website at <https://www.ruma.org.uk/sheep/vaccines-sheep-production/>.

Anonymous farm case study

Since lambing began, there had been 30 neonatal lamb deaths with a history of bloating in some. A four-day-old lamb submitted for post mortem examination had two organisms cultured from the lungs, which were *Mannheimia haemolytica* and *Pasteurella multocida*. The ewes had not been vaccinated for pasteurella but every lamb had been given 0.5ml amoxicillin injectable antibiotic at birth, and the navels dipped or sprayed with a variety of different products. The antibiotic sensitivity pattern, in this case, showed resistance to tetracyclines. Blanket use of antibiotics is inappropriate and contrary to RUMA guidelines; it can lead to the development of antibiotic resistance as demonstrated in this case.

Issues with mental health affects us all.

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Small improvements across your business can better overall productivity

By Phillipa Page and Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

Speak to any sheep vet and you will hear them claim that close collaboration between a sheep farmer and a trusted sheep vet consistently leads to positive flock health benefits and ultimately improvements in the bottom line.

However, up until recently there have been limited studies that have categorically supported this claim. There is now peer-reviewed research from Nottingham University that has looked at several different flock health management practices and considered how these might be associated with a measure of flock productivity, namely sales of finished lambs.

Outcomes

Arguably this single measure is fairly crude but, as it is notoriously difficult to gather consistent and comparable data from large numbers of sheep farms, this key performance indicator was used as a reliable single outcome measure for the purposes of this study.

The research involved on-farm interviews and monthly abattoir sales data from 648 sheep farms, supplying a major UK retailer. The single outcome measure of flock productivity

was recorded as the number of lambs sold for meat per 100 ewes per year.

The average number of ewes per flock was 500, kept on an average of 118 hectares. Overall, there were an average of 108 finished lambs per 100 ewes, with half the farms finishing 82-135 lambs per 100 ewes.

This is one of the first studies that clearly shows how commonly certain flock health management practices are undertaken on a large sample of UK sheep farms. Of the farms studied, 62% had a least one visit from their vet per year and 29% had two or more planned visits.

In terms of recording information about which ewes to cull, 69% of respondents used a notebook for this with a smaller proportion (25%) using an EID handheld, computer or smartphone. When asked to rank the primary reason for culling ewes, age was given as the most common (46%), followed by mastitis (25%) and then tooth loss (21%).

There is no doubt of the benefit of accurately recording ewes to be culled allowing no chance that the poor breeder or the often-lame ewe gets back into next year's flock.

Flock health security was another area under investigation and many flocks purchased replacement ewes (42%) and rams (61%) through a livestock market. Of all bought-in sheep, less than a third (32% ewes; 28% rams)

were then treated with an orange or purple wormer as recommended by SCOPS and fewer (14% ewes, 22% rams) were footbathed when in quarantine.

Vaccination was undertaken by most farmers in this study with 39% using both abortion vaccines and clostridial vaccines and 55% using just clostridial vaccines. Worming practices varied, with 50% of farmers worming on a predetermined schedule and others using a combination of FEC, grazing history and a very small percentage (less than 1%) using daily liveweight gains.

Iceberg diseases

Disappointingly, only a very small percentage of farms (less than 5%) routinely screened for 'iceberg diseases' such as maedi visna, Johnes or CLA. This is concerning considering emerging research that suggests the prevalence of these diseases is increasing throughout our national flock.

Iceberg diseases can have significant impacts on flock productivity due to effects on milk production, growth rates and particularly ewe longevity.

Other concerning figures showed 31% of flocks gave an oral dose of antibiotics to every lamb born on the farm and, very worryingly, a further 5% gave an antibiotic tablet to every

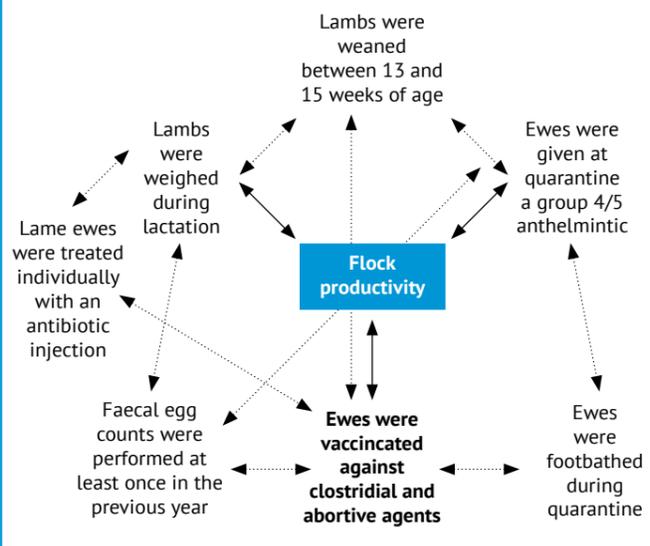
Flock productivity

The association between flock productivity and husbandry procedures are demonstrated in this graph. Those employing good practice preventative measures are the same as flocks with higher productivity. While it can't be directly claimed it is because of good practice that these flocks are more productive, the data does correlate.

Key:

Solid arrow - Direct link with productivity.

Dotted arrow - Other practices linked with productivity.



lamb born – a procedure that absolutely cannot be justified due to the unlicensed nature of such tablets.

It is interesting to note there was no difference in the productivity of flocks that used prophylactic oral antibiotic in the majority of their lambs compared to those that did not, suggesting further that the mass treatment of baby lambs with antibiotic is often habit rather than necessity.

Productivity

A higher overall flock productivity was significantly associated with three distinct management practices – these being lambs were weighed during lactation, ewes were vaccinated with clostridial and abortion agents, and during quarantine ewes were given a group 4 or 5 anthelmintic as advised by SCOPS principles.

Every shepherd needs to work closely with their trusted sheep vet to identify the marginal gains that might be possible at every point in the flock year – from monitoring colostrum quality and hygiene in the lambing shed to the prevention of lameness or the rapid diagnosis of disease.

No tiny detail is too insignificant or irrelevant, as each one builds on the others to return value and significant impacts to the bottom line of flock productivity. In times where flock robustness is crucial, the devil really is in the detail of flock health planning and every flock would benefit from working closely and proactively with their vet.

'Aggregated marginal gains' can help to improve flock performance.

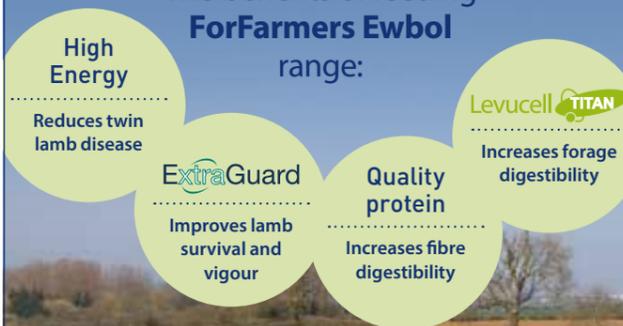


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Survey reveals top questions farmers have about scab

Unnecessary scab treatments can increase resistance.

Over the summer SCOPS carried out a short survey asking sheep farmers to choose their 'top 10' questions about sheep scab. The results showed there is an appetite for clear advice and, this autumn and winter, SCOPS will address issues raised.

This article addresses the top three queries that came out of the survey - what treatments are available for sheep scab, what the pros and cons of the different treatments are, and how to diagnose (detect) the presence of sheep scab.

With resistance in scab mites (and worms) to the endectocides (injectables) a growing concern, and the importance of minimising the unnecessary use of any medicine, making sure it is scab before treating is very important. If you have used an endectocide and think it may not have been fully effective, you should contact your vet or SQP and discuss with them what action to take. They have access to a protocol which can help you work through the issue together.

Diagnosis

Previously, sheep have been treated when the farmer believed an itchy sheep had scab, or as 'insurance' because it seemed the right thing to do. Fortunately, there are now two ways sheep scab can be diagnosed and, using the

new blood test, we can detect it much earlier - before any clinical signs develop.

Skin scrapes are the original method and involves your vet taking samples from the surface of the skin. It is still the quickest way to be sure itchy sheep have sheep scab before they are treated. However, this is only useful when there are clinical signs of disease, which can take months to develop.

Newer test

Blood testing is a newer way to identify antibodies to scab in the bloodstream of an

affected sheep. The advantage of this is that it is easy and can diagnose a sheep with scab as early as two weeks after infection, long before the clinical disease.

This is very useful for sheep in quarantine, or in situations where they may have been at risk, ensuring treatment is only given if they did pick up mites. You may find that many vets are now also taking blood samples at the same time as the skin scrape. This means that if the scrape is inconclusive, which is sometimes the case, they can use the blood test as a backup.



By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS

Scab treatments, pros and cons						
Active ingredient	Method of application	Withdrawal period (days)	Persistency	Other external parasites?	Pros	Cons
Dip						
Diazinon	Plunge dip Must not be used with jettors and showers	49 / 70	Up to four weeks	Lice, ticks, blowfly, keds	Treats all sheep ectoparasites of sheep	Plunge dipping only, which requires certificate/disposal license or use of a contractor.
Injectables						
Ivermectin	Injection	42	No claim	Nasal bots	Relatively easy to use, no special equipment required.	Does not treat lice so diagnosis/detection necessary. Must move to a clean area to avoid reinfection. Two injections needed.
Doramectin	Injection	70	No claim	Nasal bots	Relatively easy to use, no special equipment required.	Does not treat lice so diagnosis/detection important. Must move to a clean area to avoid reinfection.
Moxidectin (1% and 2%)	Injection	70 (1%) 104 (2%)	1% 28 days 2% 60 days	Nasal bots	Relatively easy to use, no special equipment required.	Does not treat lice so diagnosis / detection important.

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Following the flock

In this 'Following the Flock' we've returned to Northern Ireland with Brian Jamieson, as well as a taking a glance at Peter Derryman in Devon and Dan Phipps over in Suffolk.

Dan Phipps

NSA Eastern Region Chairman, Suffolk



After a successful lambing here at Godolphin we rolled into spring much happier this year, meaning lambs thrived and got away in good time, crucially eating less creep than the year before.

Last year's scanning showed 1,997 ewes carrying 3,789 lambs (1.89%). With barren ewes removed we had 1,938 ewes carrying 3,789 lambs (1.95%). From this we have sold 3,108 lambs prime, retained 130 ewe lambs and still have 177 lambs. This gives us a final percentage of 1.71%. Unfortunately, we did not get the trade of a year ago meaning we are £9 a head back.

Rams are busy despite our current drought-like conditions. If ewes hold, we will have lambed 1,200 by February 2020. We have also added tups to our 460 shearling ewes; not a lot of action yet but that's to be expected.

Our pilgrimage to Kelso gave us two Suffolks to breed replacements, two Charollais and nine crossbreds, of which I had the privilege of judging some classes. Unfortunately, I was unable to buy the champion as I value my job!



Dan Phipps has cleared 3,108 lambs, retaining just 130 replacement ewe lambs.

Peter Derryman

South West Region Chairman, Devon

A steady flow of regular customers for all our three breeds have been arriving at the farm over recent months. This is always a relief, as was our success at the NSA South West Ram Sale at Exeter. We are down to our last 100 commercial lambs hopefully these will be gone, more or less, by the time you read this.

Preparation for all ewes pre tupping this year included a campylobacter vaccination - this should give us peace of mind following our problems this spring with several Romneys aborting. The shearling ewes received their usual toxoplasmosis and enzootic abortion vaccinations. New stock rams this year include two Romneys, two Hampshires and, from Kelso, two Suffolks. A visit to Kelso is one of the perks of breeding pedigree sheep. With the rise of private on-farm and online sales it's good to see the atmosphere and success of live auctions such as these still thriving. Judging by some of the prices paid and the large number of young breeders involved in the pedigree sector, there is confidence in the future despite everything else happening.



Peter Derryman has dosed his ewes with a campylobacter vaccine following difficulty during lambing.



Brian Jamieson has turned his tups out to begin the next lambing season.

Brian Jamieson

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chairman, County Antrim



The shortening day can only mean one thing for most sheep farmers - breeding season is almost here.

For the mainstream producer thoughts are turning to preparing stock for the hormonal frenzy of tupping.

Fields are earmarked as suitable in terms of grass cover, size and proximity, stock is vetted to within an inch of its lives and old notes are revisited to make sure the correct males join the appropriate females.

I always try and ensure adequate cover is provided and, in a batch of 120-130 ewes, I will introduce five rams. Two will immediately and inexplicably go lame, a couple will fight while the fifth manages to kill himself with exhaustion. Somehow, the job gets done and the excitement of a new crop of lambs begins.

What type of marketplace awaits these arrivals is anyone's guess. Politically, here in Northern Ireland, we've been without Government since January 2017 and now with Westminster experiencing a similar, albeit shorter hiatus, predictions on the prospects of farming are founded as much in speculation as they are fact.



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Alwyn Phillips, Penygelli Farm, Caernarfon, North Wales

Alwyn Phillips’ forage-based Penygelli pedigree Texel and Poll Dorset flocks have been performance-recorded for over 30 years. In 2018 one of his Texel rams was ranked as the number one ram in the country in the RamCompare project.

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