

# SHEEPFARMER

DECEMBER / JANUARY 2020

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION



**ROUND UP OF 2019 ACTIVITY**

**LAUNCH OF HERITAGE BREEDS REPORT**

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# Working hard to make your subscription count

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Without market demand there would be no British sheep industry and the country would be in a far poorer place.

That is why NSA has spent so much time working to avoid a no-deal Brexit, and why we fought hard to secure a commitment from Defra and our devolved administrations to provide contingency support if markets were to go wrong.

A no-deal has certainly been delayed but the risks of market disruption remain. Similarly, the importance of market demand is why we have pressed our levy bodies to optimise spend on trade development and market and product innovation at a time when the only certainty is change, and an uncertain change at that. Mid to long term these prospects look good, providing we deliver the quality, service, traceability and assurances that emerging markets require.

The importance of exports to our industry means it is easy to take our domestic market for granted. Yet home demand accounts for the lion share of our production and with a huge and stable marketplace right on our doorstep that is the envy of other major sheep producing nations, that's the way it should be.

## Taste experience

That is why NSA worked to fill what we saw as a gap in the market, that of innovation to stimulate interest in younger age ranges who are looking for food and taste experiences, and food with a story – and what a story we have to tell.

At a time when the tide is turning away from decades of being told that our future is about reducing costs to produce price competitive commodities to compete on a global market, to a new era where the order of the day is higher environmental and welfare standards, adding value and producing premium products, the launch of our Heritage Sheep market initiative report feels timely (more on page 24-25).

When we started on this project two years

ago we thought it would be a way to stimulate more short supply chain and direct sales.

I've no doubt that's still the case but additional opportunities now seem to exist in high value export markets in Asia in particular, where Britain's uniqueness and heritage are highly valued.

Protecting our market is also why the NSA has stepped up to defend our industry against the constant attacks from climate change, animal welfare and anti-meat campaigners. Throughout this year we have led the field in not just defending our industry when its been needed, but by working to create a new commentary to lead the debate on the positive sustainability of British sheep farming – its positive role in combatting global warming, improving soils, supporting wildlife and biodiversity, and of course in contributing to the health and enjoyment of people through healthy and delicious food and the most sustainable fibre on earth.

## Subscriptions

And all this on top of the huge array of activities that the NSA offers for members and the wider sheep industry.

So, I don't feel at all guilty or embarrassed to talk about the fact that we have decided to increase our membership subscriptions from the beginning of 2020 to enable us to continue to protect and position British sheep farming. Not by a lot, just £5 more a year for a full membership. I hope and trust you will agree this is one of the best long-term investments you can make in order to secure the future of your business and interests.

In raising subscription rates we have also had a review of our membership options and from the start of 2020 will be offering a number of options to accommodate requests made by members over recent years, more on page 8-9.

This year has been a a tough year, but we've come through it far better than we might have done, and as we approach Christmas and the New Year I wish you a peaceful and enjoyable time as well as all the very best for 2020.



**INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER**  
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## NSA officeholders



**Lord Inglewood**  
Honorary President



**Bryan Griffiths**  
Chair of the Board



**David Gregory**  
Honorary Treasurer  
Finance & General Purposes Chairman



**Eddie Eastham**  
UK Policy & Technical Chairman



**Kevin Harrison**  
English Committee Chairman

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Manager: **Jonathan Barber**  
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### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



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### Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



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### Northern Ireland



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### Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**



Regional Coordinator:  
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meantime, contact **Euan Emslie**  
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### South East



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### South West



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## Top NSA award officially presented at key industry event

Several months after being announced as the winner of the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep sector, independent sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings has been presented with her award.

The biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table was felt to be the most appropriate place to give Ms Stubbings the award (a figurine of the Cheviot sheep beloved by the late George Hedley), hence the much later presentation of the prize than some years. In fact, the hunt for the 2019 winner was already well underway before Ms Stubbings received her prize. The nominations are being considered ahead of the announcement in January.



NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker (left) and NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths (right) presented Lesley Stubbings with the award.

## Footbath and race prizes

With the 2019 membership recruitment prize draw campaign under our belts, NSA is looking forward to an exciting new initiative with David Ritchie Implements in 2020.

To celebrate its 150th anniversary, Ritchie is generously donating four sheep races (pictured) for NSA to give away. From the beginning of January to the end of December, anyone who joins NSA for the first time, or any existing member that persuades a new person to buy a subscription, will automatically be entered into the prize draw. The 2019 campaign with JFC-Agri worked in exactly the same way and the final winner has recently received his prize of a foam footbath and 20 litres of hoof solution.

Mr Elsworthy joined as a new member at NSA Sheep South West back in June. Based at Tiverton, Devon, Mr Elsworthy describes himself as 'semi-retired', leaving behind bigger farming enterprises to establish a flock of pedigree Charollais sheep.



## Regional meetings coming up

Eight of the nine NSA regions have their annual members' meetings in the new year. All meetings are open to members and non-members, although only members can vote.

- Scotland:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA Scottish Region will be held on Friday 17th January, 3pm in the Lomond Suite, Stirling Agricultural Centre, Stirling, FK9 4RN.
- Marches:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Marches Region will be held on Wednesday 29th January, 7pm at the Clive Arms, Ludlow Food Centre, Shropshire, SY8 2JR.
- Northern:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Region will be held on Thursday 30th January, 7.30pm in the Tyndale Function Suite, Hexham Auction Mart, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 3SG.
- Central:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Central Region will be held on Wednesday 5th February, 7pm at the Agricultural Business Centre (Bakewell Market), Derbyshire, DE45 1AH.
- South East:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA South East Region will be held on Thursday 6th February, 6pm at the Angel Hotel, Privett, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3NN.
- Northern Ireland:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA Northern Ireland Region will be held on Thursday 6th February, 7.15pm at Rosspark Hotel, Ballymena, BT42 3LZ.
- South West:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA South West Region will be held on Tuesday 18th February, 7.30pm at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Livestock Centre, Matford Business Park, Exeter, EX2 8FD.
- Wales:** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be held on Wednesday 19th February, 11am in Hafod y Hendre, Royal Welsh Showground, Builth Wells, LD2 3WY. Members not able to attend can appoint a proxy by downloading a form for the appropriate meeting at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events. The formal business at all meetings will be followed by guest speakers on a range of topics, with NSA Scottish Region also offering a Burns Supper at the nearby Westlands Hotel. See page 10 for speakers confirmed so far, and look out for information provided specifically for your region in the new year.

## New secretary for Central



Rose Smyth



Anne Payne

NSA is delighted to welcome Rose Smyth as the new NSA Central Region Secretary. Rose will juggle the role with working at Holmfirth Market and Farm Office Services, as well as being an active member of Hope Valley YFC in Derbyshire. See page 2 for Rose's contact details.

Rose's arrival means Anne Payne is retiring from the post of Central Region Secretary/Manager after 14 years in office. Anne says: "I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the region. Thank you to all my colleagues and friends along the way. I wish Rose every success and I hope you will all give her your support in the future."

NSA Scottish Region is also very close to appointing a new Regional Coordinator, who will start in January. Details to follow in the next edition of this magazine.

## Still time to use NSA Lambing List

Many of you have already taken advantage of the NSA Lambing List for the 2019/20 season – and there is still opportunity to do so if you are looking for help this lambing time.

The NSA Lambing List is made available to veterinary and agricultural students looking for work experience, detailing NSA members with flocks in need of assistance at this busy time of year.

Add yourself to the list at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list) or, if you don't have internet access, call NSA Head Office.

# NSA regional reports

## Northern

NSA Northern Region was joined by NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker at a hill farming seminar at Ripon Cathedral (pictured), North Yorkshire, in October.



The event discussed perspectives of hill farming in the Yorkshire Dales as part of Ripon Cathedral's Rural Forum. The Rural Forum recognises critical issues facing the countryside and has been looking at the looming crisis (with or without a Brexit deal) in hill farming. Phil was invited to give a presentation on behalf of NSA, NFU, farmers and advisors, helping the forum recognise the importance of hill farming in terms of economics, environment, community, families and tradition.

## South West

NSA South West Region extends its thanks to staff at Rothamsted Research North Wyke facility for an extremely interesting visit in November.

Members and others discovered the breadth and depth of the work being undertaken at the site to better understand the interactions between livestock and the environment. It was heartening to hear the efforts to assess the true extent of livestock farming's impact on climate change. A tour of the site included the new small ruminant research facility, which shows the commitment to research into sheep in the future. The region is looking forward to working with Rothamsted to further disseminate the fantastic work being done there.

## Northern Ireland

Having been nominated as 'best agricultural event of the year' in the Farming Life Awards, NSA Northern Ireland Region officeholders responsible for the success of NSA Sheep Northern Ireland enjoyed an evening at the recent awards ceremony. The region was honoured to be a finalist and sends congratulations to Clogher Valley Show, which ultimately took the award.

## Sheep breeders gather for biennial conference

The biennial Sheep Breeders Round Table, organised by a cross-industry group including NSA, took place near East Midlands Airport, Derbyshire, in November attracting delegates and speakers from across the UK and as far as Europe and even New Zealand.

The conference, which also heard an update from the EU-funded iSAGE project that is now nearing completion, offered attendees the chance to hear

from industry experts on a wide range of topics from performance recording to the genomics revolution.

Also joining delegates for this year's conference were two enthusiastic young people sponsored by NSA to attend. Francesca Grieve (pictured on the right), an agricultural student at Harper Adams University, was sponsored by NSA NSA Next Generation, and Katy Davies (left), a shepherdess from Carmarthenshire, by NSA Cymru/Wales



Francesca and Katy with HCC sponsored attendee Beth Howells.

Region. Further Welsh support was offered by HCC, sponsoring Beth Howells (centre) and Rhys Edwards.

All presentations from are now available to download from the NSA website at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/sbrt).

## YOUR NSA REGION



NSA regions have been busy putting on meetings for members, and most have now run a 'Setting the sheep farming record straight' evening too (more on page 5). To contact your regional representative, see page 2. Don't forget, devolved regions also dedicate time to policy work – see page 14.

## Cymru/Wales

Although NSA did not have a stand at the Welsh Winter Fair this year, the region took an active part in the event and successfully sponsored the hill/native sheep section and one of the young handlers' classes.



Congratulations to Margaret Dalton (pictured), a longstanding NSA member, NSA Vice President and Cymru/Wales committee member for winning the John Gittins Memorial Award for her lifetime contribution to the Welsh sheep industry - one of the most prestigious prizes in Welsh agriculture. Margaret's numerous roles within organisations and societies are too numerous to list, leading the judging panel to say she was the rightful winner in a year of outstanding nominations. Regional Development Officer Helen Roberts also attended the recent HCC conference, describing it as an education day with an air of positivity. The most inspirational speaker was Dr Zoe Harcombe, who busted all the myths about red meat, fat and nutrition reassuring all the industry has a bright future.

## Eastern Region

The business part of the NSA Eastern Region Annual Members' Meeting, held in early October, confirmed existing officeholders and reported on another successful year.

The regional committee was also reviewed, and welcomed new committee members, Richard Savory and Joe Emmett. Alongside Ellie Phipps from NSA Head Office, Richard was also guest speaker for the meeting. Richard and his team run the Sheep Show, which takes four large trailers around the UK each year, appearing at more than 100 shows in front of an estimated audience of 2.5 million people. The shows have an excellent rapport with the public and get many important messages on the sheep industry over to the non-farming population.

# NSA sets the record straight throughout country

Throughout October and November and into December, NSA has held a series of meetings to 'set the sheep farming record straight'.

The events were organised by NSA Activities & Campaigns Officer Chris Adamson, alongside NSA regional secretaries and managers around the country.

Chris comments: "These events were organised in response to increasing criticism of the sheep industry and requests from NSA committees and members for more facts to be shared and to inform farmers of the work being done by the industry to combat these unfounded criticisms.

"At NSA Head Office, we spend a lot of time defending our industry but we believe providing facts and figures to help sheep farmers to defend themselves at a grass routes level was another essential part of the defence."

With the next meeting, and last one of the series, due on Thursday 9th January in NSA South East Region, NSA alongside British Wool and various levy body representatives, has travelled across the country speaking to farmers.

"These meetings have gone very well, and we're grateful for all those who attended to support the meetings and learn more. We're also grateful to the regions for helping facilitate and providing chairs for the sessions," says Chris.

## Engagement

NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps, who spoke at some of the events, alternating with NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, comments: "The meetings were really engaging and each one led to an in-depth discussion where attendees were able to really press on the issues they felt were most relevant in their regions."

NSA would be interested in feedback from members on these events and is keen to run



more events in early 2020. Chris adds: "The topic for our next series of events has yet to be decided and we're happy to take any suggestions from regions on what the next events should be."

As a result of these meetings, NSA has produced a 'top 10 facts' about the sheep industry booklet, available online or from NSA Head Office.

More information about the content of these meetings is available on page 26-27.

# Sheep health, wealth and production conference welcomes detailed discussions

A gathering of the sheep farming community in South East England came together at Surrey University's vet school at Guildford for NSA South East Region's Sheep Health Wealth and Production Conference in late November.

The event worked its way along the supply chain, offering guidance to farmers, helping to support and direct their actions from animal health to marketing and sales. The health section had a strong focus on early diagnoses to help ensure problems would be quickly identified and tackled.

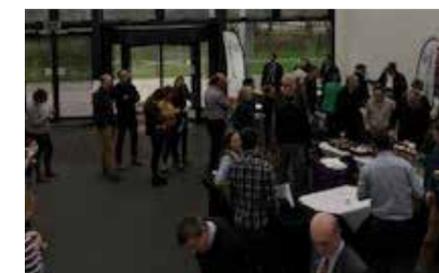
Delegates also heard about the potential for healthier animals by maximising the mineral access through the right seeds for the land, and the natural relationship this has to increase carbon capture in the earth.

Latterly, delegates heard from marketing specialists, both from consumer-facing sales through AHDB, with an in-depth analysis of consumers wants and interests, to how best to sell your livestock, recognising the needs of different

farmers and exploring the different options available in the modern world.

All speakers spoke with a great depth of knowledge and information leaving attendees with plenty of food for thought. The event was closed by NSA English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison, who thanked speakers and the region for putting on such an educational and in-depth discussion forum.

Attendees were able to debrief after the forum over a shepherd's pie and cup of tea and left the event with plenty to think about. *Full report at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports).*



## Speakers and subjects

**Stewart Burgess, Moredun, and Peter Bates, independent ectoparasite consultant** – Where are we on combatting sheep scab?

**Kat Baxter-Smith, MSD** – Helping UK sheep producers understand practical vaccine usage.

**Louise Silk, vet** – Using basic records, the key to improving flock health.

**Dr Benedetta Amato, Surrey University** – How disease surveillance & laboratory investigations can aid flock health decisions.

**Ian Wilkinson, Cotswold Grass Seeds** – Advantages of multi species herbal swards.

**Steven Evans, AHDB** – Meeting the needs of consumers.

**Alastair Sneddon, auctioneer, Norman Bagley, AIMS and Andrew Loftus, Sell My Livestock** – How best to market my lambs and ewes.

# End of another busy year for NSA and its members

As 2019 draws to a close, NSA is looking back at the various events, meetings and ram sales that have taken place throughout the year. This page will have a look back at a few of our favourite moments.



Sheep South West host, and NSA Chairman, Bryan Griffiths welcomed the crowds.



Cymru/Wales Region visited the Yeoman's farm in September.



The Breed Society Forum took place in May near Rugby, Warwickshire.



South East Region met for a farm walk at Plumpton college in August.



North Sheep attracted more than 5,000 visitors in June.



In August, NSA President Lord Inglewood encouraged positivity at NSA's AGM.



Central Region committee member, Alistair Sneddon speaks at NSA Central Region Early Gathering in January.



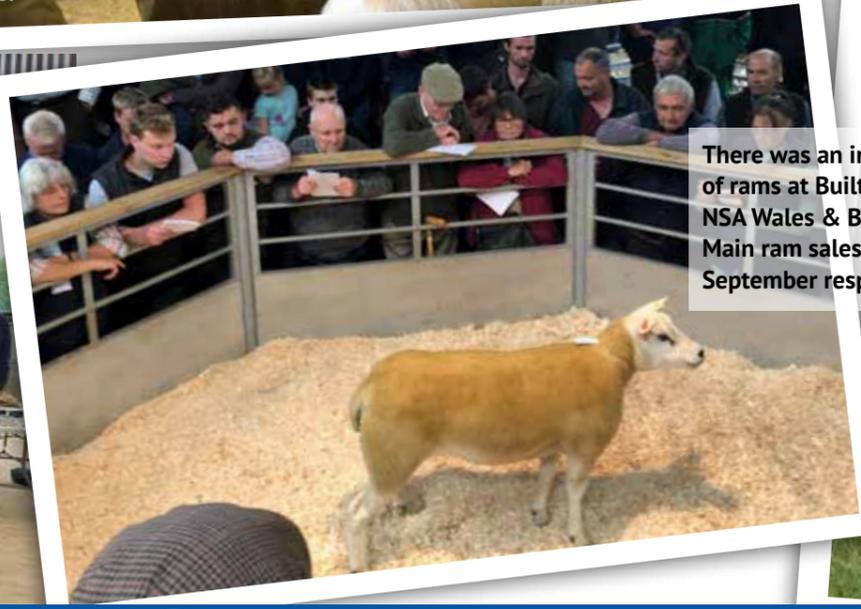
South West Region had a busy day in all rings at their August ram sale.



Eastern Region had two ram sales at Rugby and Melton Mowbray in August and September.



Attendees at NSA Welsh Sheep in May.



There was an impressive display of rams at Builth Wells across NSA Wales & Borders' Early and Main ram sales in August and September respectively.



A sale followed NSA Highland Sheep in Caithness, Thurso, in June.



NSA Eastern Region's Next Generation day in Newmarket, Suffolk, in June.



# Make the most of your NSA membership

From 1st January 2020, NSA has new membership categories on offer. Existing members may wish to take advantage – and changing over couldn't be more simple.

## JOINT MEMBERSHIP

**Are there two people in your household with an interest in the sheep farming enterprise?** Joint membership is a new category allowing two people living at the same address to both receive the NSA Weekly Email Update, share a copy of Sheep Farmer magazine and both gain free (or discounted)\* entry to NSA sheep events – all for just £10 more per year.

## GROUP MEMBERSHIP

**Are you a large sheep farming business involving several family members and/or shepherds?** Access a 15% discount on every membership held every year if you administer three or more\* subscriptions from the same bank account.

## VARIABLE MEMBERSHIP

**Do you value the work NSA does on behalf of the UK sheep industry?** NSA is reliant on membership subscriptions and encourages existing members to voluntarily over-pay on their annual fee to further support the vital work of the organisation. Choose to give an extra £20, £40 or £60 per year to NSA – and make this go even further by adding Gift Aid to your subscription.

## Stay as you are?

The new categories listed here are over and above our existing ones. Our existing categories continue as they were and every subscription is hugely valued by NSA.

We could not do the work we do without your subscription – thank you. Prices from 1st January 2020 are:-

**Individual member\*** £60 per year **Under 27s member** £30 per year **Overseas member** £65 per year



## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Membership subscriptions support NSA's work to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector. It also gives members access to a range of benefits

Receipt of Sheep Farmer magazine

Receipt of NSA Weekly Email Update

Access to the free Legal Helpline

Free or discounted entry to NSA sheep events

Access to sell at NSA ram sales

Associate membership of the Moredun Foundation

Invitations to regional meetings and activities

Access to the NSA Lambing List

Invitations to NSA Next Generation initiatives

# Make your membership go further

## GIFT AID



For every pound of your subscription, NSA could earn an extra 25p from the Inland Revenue. If you've not already agreed for NSA to claim Gift Aid on your subscription, go to [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/giftaid](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/giftaid).

## EMAIL ADDRESS



If we don't have your email address, you're missing out! Get the NSA Weekly Email Update every Friday and notification of NSA activities in your area straight to your inbox. Email [membership@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:membership@nationalsheep.org.uk) to update your details. We never share personal data with third parties.

## MOBILE PHONE NUMBER



We send occasional text messages about NSA activities in your area to members that provide us with a mobile phone number. Email or call NSA Head Office to update your details.

## SECURE A DIRECT DEBIT DISCOUNT



NSA offers a 20% one-off discount on membership subscriptions when you agree to pay by direct debit. Whether you're a brand new or a member for several decades, the discount is available on the first year you do direct debit. Email or call NSA Head Office for details.

## READING THIS AND NOT ALREADY A MEMBER?



Sign up online at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/apply-online](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/apply-online)

\* A Register of Members, detailing all membership categories (existing and new) will be available at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership) from 1st January 2020. Before then, call NSA Head Office to request a copy.  
 Entry to NSA sheep events is free for members in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and half price in Scotland. One free or discounted entry per membership card held, unless you hold the new joint membership and your membership card is marked as "Joint".  
 Historically, although it did not mean more than one person could access free/discounted event entry, individual membership could be held in an individual name, joint names, business or farm name. From 1st January 2020, new individual memberships are to be held in an individual person's name only, with the option to add the business or farm name as the 'payer' if required. Individual membership subscriptions pre-dating 1st January do not have to be changed retrospectively, unless a member wishes.  
 The 15% discount on group packages is available for a minimum of three subscriptions and a maximum of 25, if all paid from the same bank account by direct debit. More details in the Register of Members.

Change your membership category or find out more by contacting NSA Head Office

E: [membership@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:membership@nationalsheep.org.uk) T: 01684 892661

Or go to [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership) from 1st January 2020.

# NSA regional previews

## Eastern Region Winter Fair looks at making sheep pay

NSA Eastern Region invites members to join it at Melton Mowbray Market, the venue for its Winter Fair, on Friday 28th January for an array of exciting information, activities, demonstrations and competitions that will be of great interest to all sheep farmers.

With lambing nearly upon many flocks, the Winter Fair is a perfect time to brush up on ewe nutrition, vaccination and worming information, and maybe decide on some new products for identification and handling. As well as to look forward to the grazing season with fencing and grassland management solutions.

With the increasing interest from arable farmers on how to integrate sheep into their rotations to tackle blackgrass and improve soil fertility, this subject will feature in our seminar programme and in many of the exhibits at the event. We will also take a look at how to improve carbon absorption in your business.

Main sponsors, MSD Animal Health, will be talking about its five-point plan to cut out lameness in sheep and therefore improve total flock performance. Recent survey results suggest that a major reason for early culling of sheep is as a result of lameness, so it's a subject many flocks need to get to grips with.



There will also be a competition to test your skills at stockjudging, which will be open to all, with the chance to win one of our cash prizes. This will be a short format competition and give visitors the time to take part in the competition as well as visit stands and attend seminar sessions.

NSA regional and national representatives will be on hand to let you know what they are doing to help you as members and give details of their Next Generation initiative for young people in the sheep industry.

*Event open 10am-4pm with free entry for members.*

*More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/erwf](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/erwf)*

## Plenty on offer at your regional ARMM

Eight out of nine NSA regions have their Annual Regional Members' Meetings (ARMM) in early 2020. Dates are all confirmed (see page 3) and several regions have got top speakers lined up already.

**Scotland:** Following the ARMM at Stirling Market on Friday 17th January, NSA Scottish Region welcomes members, friends and guests to a Burns Support at Westlands Hotel, Dunblane. Tickets for the four-course meal and entertainment are £36 and available from Euan Emslie on 07718 908523 or [euane@nsascotland.org](mailto:euane@nsascotland.org).

**Central:** An evening meeting in Derbyshire on Wednesday 5th February will see NSA Central Region welcome Andrew Henderson from LLM Vets to give advice on managing emerging wormer resistance, and Ellie Phipps from NSA Head Office to provide an update on NSA activities and work. A pie and pea supper will follow and members in Central Region will find a flyer included in the polybag with this magazine.

**Northern Ireland:** Welsh sheep farmer Rhys Edwards will be making the journey to Ballymena on Thursday 6th February to join NSA Northern Ireland Region for the evening and talk about genetics work he's employing with his flock. Katie James from NSA Head Office will provide the NSA update.

**Wales:** On Wednesday 19th February, NSA Cymru/Wales Region is planning a daytime event with guest speakers and a two-course lunch. Booking will be essential, with details in the next edition of Sheep Farmer and online.

*More on all ARMMs from NSA Head Office or at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).*

## NI members encouraged to get training

With new standards on responsible use of antimicrobials being added to Farm Quality Assurance Standards (FQAS) from 1st February 2020, NSA members are being encouraged to attend their nearest free workshop. With a seat on the FQAS industry board, NSA Northern Ireland Region sees the addition to the standards as a necessary measure to keep scheme members abreast of requirements and protect the industry from unfounded accusations.



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# NSA policy work

## White-tailed sea eagles venture further afield

Since the release of six juvenile white-tailed sea eagles on the Isle of Wight in August, NSA has represented its members on both the release steering group and the monitoring group.

The groups are meeting semi-regularly to monitor the progress of the birds, as well as to determine how strategy is handled for the future.

As of the end of November, of the six birds released, one is confirmed deceased while another is missing presumed dead. The bird's tracker stopped transmitting so it is assumed this is due to the bird having died. A third bird

is currently residing in Oxfordshire having journeyed north shortly after release.

The bird has remained there ever since, following a group of buzzards to food sources such as roadkill and shot game birds. Two birds are currently feeding off similar foods on the island close to the release site, while only one is returning to the release site for the fish provided there.

As part of the project an exit plan has been prepared, although NSA is seeking further clarification due to an absence of detail.



White-tailed Eagle



NSA will continue to oppose the release of the lynx.

## Lynx release plans rumoured to be relaunched

**NSA has been hearing whispers that Lynx UK Trust intends to resubmit its application to Natural England to release a number of Eurasian Lynx into the Kielder Forest in Northumberland.**

NSA has been aware, since the rejection of the application by Natural England in December 2018, that the trust intended to appeal and adjust its application to rectify concerns Natural England raised in the application.

NSA will continue to object to this release and to work with sheep farmers in the area to ensure a robust position is maintained.

## Livestock information programme makes progress

**The new multi species Livestock Information Programme, which for sheep farmers will replace ARAMS in England, has made significant progress in the last quarter of 2019.**

A new company, Livestock Information Ltd, owned 51% by AHDB and 49% by Defra has been established, appointing Simon Hall as its Managing Director.

Livestock Information has now purchased a core database, the National Livestock Movements Database from Shearwell Data, upon which to build the new service, and a phased programme of implementation is planned with sheep not expected to move from ARAMS to the new service fully until 2022.

All mandatory aspects of the service will be fully funded by Defra.

## General election requests

**With the general election due as this magazine reaches members, NSA hopes a conclusion is reached and progress is quickly made to ensure the uncertainty of the past few years is solved and allows the country to move on, in whatever direction the new/returning Government takes us.**

Early in the campaign process, NSA wrote to the Conservative Party and Labour Party appealing for considerations to be made to support and protect UK agriculture through maintaining high standards and ensuring they are applied to imports and supporting rural communities.

*The full letter is available on the NSA website at [nationalsheep.org.uk/news/28272/nsa-sets-out-case-to-political-parties/](https://nationalsheep.org.uk/news/28272/nsa-sets-out-case-to-political-parties/).*

## Business readiness toolkit launch

All NSA members should have received a Business Readiness toolkit in the post in early-November. The toolkit was produced to offer a signposting and guidance service to members and other sheep farmers to help protect businesses for the future and prepare for likely changes ahead. Further copies are available from NSA Head Office.

**The toolkit has been designed to help farmers strengthen their businesses.**



NSA will resume its meetings in Westminster as soon as a new Government has been formed.

## Westminster grinds to a halt

While work is ongoing for NSA in all policy areas, a great deal of activity has by default come to a standstill due to the dissolving of Parliament.

NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps explains: "When Parliament enters 'purdah' – its period of shut down in the five weeks prior to a General Election – the civil service is also stopped in its tracks.

"While by technicality the Government remains in place in order to ensure the country is kept running, it is unable to implement any new work or move anything forward until a new mandate is gained in a general election. This means any work NSA does with the Government and civil service has stopped and, in late October, most Defra meetings NSA had scheduled were pulled until the new year."

## In-depth discussions

However, prior to the dissolution of Parliament, NSA met twice with Farming Minister George Eustice to speak in-depth about the sheep industry and the issues that mattered to sheep farmers. We were also in contact with Secretary of State Theresa Villiers regarding statements she had made over live exports and restrictions on the transport of livestock to abattoirs.

NSA has been clear it is not an acceptable policy for farmers to be required to sell to their nearest abattoir, as this would prevent them accessing the most suitable service and hamper competition. However, the response back from the Government has contained mixed messages and NSA will meet with the new Government as soon as possible following the General Election.

NSA has also spent time working on several consultations on behalf of the sheep industry. This has included a detailed response to the Welsh Government's post-Brexit plans, a response about a future trade deal with Japan, as well as a response to consultations on sheep ageing and carcass splitting.

## Consultations

This last consultation proposed a quasi-change, suggesting abattoirs could choose their preferred method of aging. NSA's response was cautious in this area, seeking further clarification on how this could work in terms of consistency across the country.

Prior to the general election, NSA has been in continued regular correspondence on this issue, and is now due to meet Defra and industry bodies again in the week before Christmas.

## Future of farm support

In late October, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Farming, which NSA fed into, launched its report on the future of farming.

NSA read the report with interest and agrees a number of questions need to be answered and more clarity provided. The report highlights the following areas:-

- How will the Agriculture Bill, Trade Bill, Environment Plan and Bill, and Food Plan be fully integrated for food, farming, the environment and consumers.
- How will there be full parliamentary review of secondary legislation in these areas?
- How will food quality and security be supported as public goods?
- Who is responsible for setting trade standards for agricultural products, what role will there be for using the 'public morals' provision, and how will the impact of trade standards on farming be balanced with consumer considerations?
- What is the future funding cycle for farming support, and how will farmers be assured changes will not be introduced at short notice?
- How will farmers who are already delivering public goods be equitably supported in comparison to those who will require support to achieve public good outcomes?
- How can farmers be assured of the delivery of support that is straightforward, coordinated, integrated and outcome based, with low-impact regulatory oversight, and implemented through farm/land business plans that allows them to work both individually and in cooperation with others?
- How will the skill base within farming be developed to improve productivity, and within Government to develop and deliver policy in this area, and be assured for the long term?
- How will rural development be supported after the UK leaves the EU, how will the shared prosperity fund operate, and how will it be integrated with farming?

NSA will continue to work within this group to help ensure the future of farm support works to support sheep farmers and benefits the industry as far as possible.

# Constructive meetings with Scottish Government

By Jen Craig, Regional Chairman



With 2019, and my first year as Chairman of NSA Scottish Region, ending, we are as busy as ever ensuring Scottish farmers voices are heard in Holyrood.

In early October, we met with Cabinet Secretary Fergus Ewing to discuss topics including convergence funding, to ensure it goes to the right places, future plans to replace existing LFASS payments, predation and the mauling of old season lambs.

In November, we met with Scottish Government civil servants to pick up in more detail what will happen with LFASS. Scottish Government is setting up a group, of which we will have a part, to look at the options. It was a very constructive meeting and NSA Scottish Region committee will be forming a sub-group to look at potential options for this funding.

We are currently in discussions with NFU Scotland and the National Beef Association about a proposal to increase the red meat levy to increase the money available for marketing and promotion. Nothing has been finalised as yet. If any members have an opinion on this, we would love to hear from you – our contact details are on page 2.

# Serious concerns still to be addressed

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Much as I would like to avoid mentioning the B word, I feel that for Northern Ireland it cannot be ignored. In October there were several meetings with Daera to discuss a no-deal scenario.

Although now delayed, we are concerned about the increased workload on the veterinary service as all animal derived products being exported would need to have an Export Health Certificate. These are currently issued in their thousands but this could rise to millions.

We are also worried about comments by Defra Secretary Theresa Villers and DExEU Secretary Steve Barclay, undervaluing the importance of live exports to the farming sector in Northern Ireland and highlighting a lack of agricultural knowledge.

These senior ministers expressed their intentions to stop the live export of sheep and restrict transport journeys by requiring farmers to sell stock to local abattoirs post-Brexit. NSA and UFU wrote a joint letter to Theresa Villers outlining our concerns.

The letter explained live exports are vital to Northern Ireland's livestock sector and any additional controls or changes to regulations are unnecessary. It made clear that more than 500,000 sheep per annum cross the Irish border for processing and it is a necessity that this trade continues without friction.

Transporting livestock is not a welfare issue and by making this assumption they are generating negative press that calls into question animal welfare in the UK.

## 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.

# Consultation progress in Cymru / Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



As I write this report, I thought a deal would have been done on Brexit and we may have known the direction we were going to be heading.

However, now we have a general election to put into the mix, 2020 could look very different. Onwards and upwards as they say.

Since the last edition of Sheep Farmer, NSA Cymru/Wales Region has spent a great deal of time focusing on the 'Sustainable farming and our land' consultation. This consultation followed on from the initial one, 'Brexit and our land', and proposed adjustments as per industries response to the initial consultation.

As part of this, in mid-October, a small group met with Welsh Government officials to discuss the proposals in more depth and quiz them on their future plans once responses were in. Following this, NSA submitted its response. We anticipate a white paper on the topic in due course, and at least one further round of consultation.

Our response centered around the consultation proposals being generally good and the language being used is far better than the first consultation round. However, as with most things the devil is in the detail and the success of the consultation will be reliant on this and the ability of the policy outcome to maintain the viability of good farming and good land management in Wales.

NSA Cymru/Wales region was also pleased to hear HCC Chairman Kevin Roberts use the HCC conference to announce a £250,000 campaign to promote Welsh Beef and Lamb's sustainable production. This was further backed up by Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths highlighting the importance of the red meat industry to the economy of Wales and beyond.

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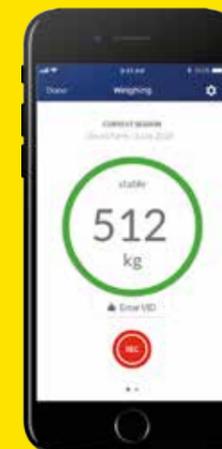


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# NSA Next Generation continues to deliver for young sheep farmers

NSA Next Generation welcomed young sheep farmers from across the UK to its annual Next Generation winter workshops at the start of November.

For the first time since the launch of the NSA Next Generation programme, the initiative that aims to support the future of the UK sheep industry by encouraging and supporting young sheep farmers, the workshops were held at two venues allowing an increased number of young sheep enthusiasts to take part in the free informative, networking events.

## Workshops

The first of the events was held at Sedgemoor Livestock Market, Somerset, with the second at Junction 36 Rural Auction Centre, Cumbria, with approximately 100 young farmers and students joining together across the two venues.

The days began with attendees hearing from current NSA Next Generation Ambassadors speaking about their own enterprises and how they are adding value to their farms, their flocks and their own selves as shepherds, a suitably motivating way to start the day.

The two events were also joined by industry experts including local sheep vets, land agents, Moredun scientists and representatives from

the Farming Community Network (FCN) to deliver what proved to be a popular session, highlighting to attendees the importance of looking after themselves, as well as their sheep.

Helping to bring the conferences together, NSA Communications Officer Katie James comments: "The NSA Next Generation winter conference is always a popular event and this year was no exception with young farmers and students joining us from far afield. As always, we were very lucky to be joined by some excellent speakers offering targeted advice for those younger people involved in the industry, as well as NSA Next Generation Ambassadors delivering information to attendees on how they add value to their farming enterprises in different ways.

"Thanks must go to all of our speakers at both conferences, without whom events such as these could not happen. Thanks should also go to all the young people who joined us and for the enthusiasm shown at both events. Most of those joining us at the events are just starting out in their careers at a time of uncertainty for the industry but despite this they were motivated and confident of a successful future in their chosen careers as shepherds or as those working in the allied industries. This positivity is exactly what is needed at this time."

NSA has also recently launched its Ambassador programme for 2020,

with applications having shut on Monday 16th December. Having taken a one-year break to explore other support ventures for young sheep farmers of the UK, the NSA Next Generation programme is excited to open applications for its 2020 group of Ambassadors.

## Ambassadors

The programme, which is now in its sixth year, offers young sheep farmers aged 20-34 the opportunity to take part in a series of technical and personal development sessions aimed to further their experience and understanding of the UK sheep industry.

Previous Ambassadors are quick to promote the benefits involvement with the scheme has brought them. NSA Next Generation Ambassador, part of the 2018 cohort, Kirree Kermode from the Isle of Man says: "I would highly recommend the Next Generation Ambassador programme for any young person passionate about the industry. I thought I knew quite a lot about sheep farming but was hugely surprised how much I learned, not only from the host of brilliant delivery sessions from business professionals, vets, advisors and farmers but also from the other 11 members of my group who I now consider great friends."



Next Generation Ambassador, and now NSA Trustee, Jonny Farmer spoke to attendees at the event in Cumbria.



Roughly 100 young people attended the events across both venues.

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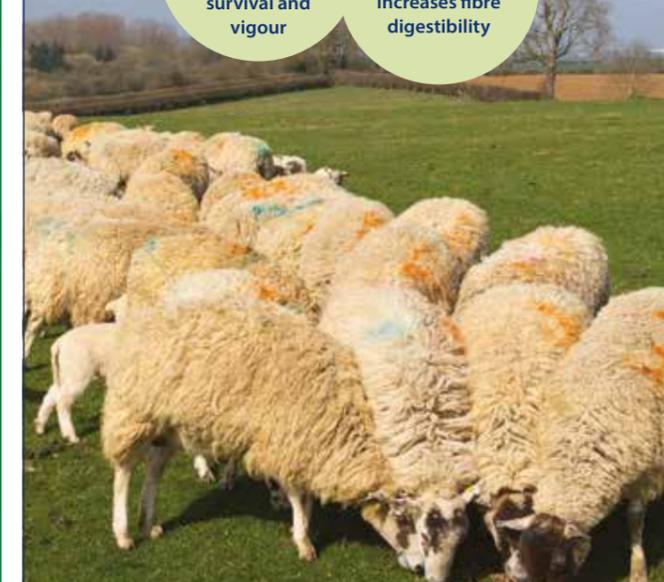
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# Research well underway for beneficiaries of Samuel Wharry award



Recipients of NSA Samuel Wharry Award, delivered in conjunction with the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, Charlie Beaty and Marie Prebble are making advancements with their trips, with Marie sending her report from Iceland and Charlie's trip fast approaching. We hear from them both here.

## Marie

I have had an amazing couple of months in Norway and Iceland learning so much about how shearing is done here and the wool supply chain.

In Norway all the wool is sorted and graded at the time of shearing by skilled wool handlers and may be sent to a professional wool classer. Different classes of wool are allocated codes according to wool type and characteristics such as fineness, crimp, kemp and colour, and good wool is worth upwards of £3/kg.

Most sheep are housed for six months, generally from October until after lambing, and shorn once in the autumn and again in the spring. The sheds are designed for feeding, divided up by feed barriers with slatted flooring and water drinkers in each pen.

Farm shearing tends to be labour intensive, as sheep are usually turned over and dragged to the shearer from a race, which could be several metres from the shearing machine. The Norwegian White breed is a big sheep and, especially in the spring, I can see how hard the job could be. A government subsidy paid to sheep farmers generally covers the cost of shearing, which is justifiably priced higher than in the UK.

## Iceland

In Iceland the sheep, like the people, are tough. They must be to thrive in the extreme landscapes of mountains and volcanoes, which presents challenges for the wool producer and shearer when fleeces are full of sand.

Grading is done to different degrees by the farmers, although not as much care is taken with the wool here as I was expecting. In fact, most farmers shear their own sheep having possibly been on one course or having taught themselves.

What is most impressive is that most of the good wool stays in Iceland to be processed and used to make clothing, in particular the iconic Icelandic jumpers that are experiencing a fashion revival. I visited a mill and some wool outlets to see this for myself (pictured).

Most farmers I spoke to do not understand what sounds like a complicated payment structure with 12 government payments for wool spread throughout the year and several made directly from the wool buyers. Payment is just over £2/kg for good wool.

When shearing we disinfected all our equipment and changed our clothes between farms for biosecurity. The set-ups left room for improvement but the hospitality of being cooked for and having accommodation provided at every farm was amazing.

As soon as I am home my attention turns to reading and collating survey data. Thank you to more than 200 sheep farmers and 100 shearing contractors who have so far completed my surveys. It will be interesting to explore the main issues surrounding wool production and shearing in the UK.



As part of her visit, Marie has followed the wool through to the premium finished product.

## Charlie

I'm fairly sure I don't need to point out how wet it is at the moment – but gosh it is wet!



As is the same for a lot of farmers, this autumn has been fairly steady, with little being done on the arable side of the business. Of the lambs that are left, a few will be heading off at the end of the week, and the rest will be staying on farm to fatten over the winter.

Bar the obvious necessities (flights, a car, accommodation and contacts), my preparation for my New Zealand trip has been fairly limited – although I have managed to narrow down key areas of permanent pasture management that I am going to focus on.

I did this by picking factors that I feel are easiest to adapt and change here in the UK, with possibly the most important of these being soil management and grazing practices. Permanent pasture offers many benefits to biodiversity and ecosystems, such as carbon sequestering, something that we really need to shout about more to the general public.

Any intrusive improvement of permanent pasture will require a lot of prior consideration and, in some cases, permission from Natural England, which can take months. It can also come at a high cost, both environmentally and to farmers. Because of this, I feel that less intrusive ways of improving permanent pasture could be the best bet.

With such a lean year on the cards, lower-cost improvement techniques and improved management much surely be prioritised to maximise grassland potential. It's not long to go before I set off now, and by the next edition of Sheep Farmer I'll be out in New Zealand!

# Hard work and determination desirable for good placement opportunities



As winter begins, agricultural students the length and breadth of the country will be searching for their placement 'sandwich' years. Flash back a few years, and Thomas 'Ernie' Richards was in the same position.

Ernie studied agriculture with animal science at Aberystwyth University, a four-year course including a one-year placement. With grandparents running a small sheep flock and various part-time jobs on farms, he was determined to use his sandwich year to best advantage.

He says: "Having a strong interest in the sheep industry I wanted to work on a large-scale farm so I could stretch my skills and fully understand the role of a shepherd. But there were some important considerations to make. I had to decide whether I wanted to live at home or away and, if away, did I want to be self-catered or live with my employers?"

Ernie contact NSA for help with finding his placement, and former NSA Chairman John Geldard reached out to him. Ernie adds: "I was very lucky to hear from John. The Geldard family run a very successful farming business, with

large sheep, beef and poultry enterprises.

"I was a general farm worker mainly working within the beef and sheep enterprises. My responsibilities were feeding and husbandry and other general farm tasks such as farm maintenance, tractor and machinery operations."

## Qualifications

Ernie believes being open minded and seeking as many opportunities and skills as you can is essential while looking for and undertaking a placement. "Get as many certificates of competence as possible to increase your skills, knowledge and safety. Sell yourself, make sure your CV is up to date and correct and remember, the more qualifications and skills you have, the more employable you are," he says.

"If you are fending for yourself, make sure you have a slow cooker! Always eat well and always give things a go. Join a local YFC club. Spend your year asking questions – if you not sure about something there is no better time to ask.

And be sure to take lots of photos and enjoy yourself."

Reflecting on his placement now, Ernie says: "Working for a successful farming family who produce excellent breeding stock meant I was more employable after uni. This has resulted in me getting my current shepherding job, managing a 1,000 pedigree Lleyn ewes along with my boss, and producing commercial breeding stock from a well-established closed flock."



Ernie Richards

Get as many certificates of competence as possible to increase your skills, knowledge and safety.

On other side of the experience, NSA Vice President and Ernie's placement provider John Geldard says offering opportunities is good for farm businesses and for students.

"We run a busy farming business with many different aspects, including three farms, so we look for total commitment and enthusiasm. However, we want to give opportunities to those who are willing to strive, so if they give us that we'll do all we can to help them."

John's business has grown from strength to strength through his career, and now his two sons are running much of the day to day work with John advising and overseeing. He adds: "There are barrels full of knowledge and tips that you learn as you get older; but the difference between age and youth, is age has the knowledge

and youth has the energy – unfortunately, you can't have both! This is why I like to provide opportunities for the next generation, and students like Ernie, to learn and develop their knowledge."

## Opportunities

With so many different opportunities out there, John says it is vital for people to put thought into what they want to do. "Make sure you apply for placements in line with what you want to achieve. That isn't to say you shouldn't try new things and be open to opportunities but don't just take the first thing that comes along unless you're sure it's right for you," he says.

Make sure you apply for placements in line with what you want to achieve ... don't just take the first thing that comes along.



John Geldard

# Genetic improvement drives vice president's business strategy

By Ellie Phipps, NSA

With the emphasis on enhancing the genetic merit of his flock, NSA Vice President Peter Baber says the collation of accurate data, to record and assess performance, is key to the success of the sheep breeding business he runs with his wife Louise and shepherd Darren on the edge of the Dartmoor National Park.

Peter became an NSA Vice President after serving as national chairman from 2002-2006 and has always found time to support the work of several industry organisations. However, that has never distracted from his focus on the core business.

"I have always had an interest in genetics and applying its principals to our flock has helped develop and drive our breeding business forward," he says.

Peter runs several breeds on the farm, Suffolks, SufTexs, Texels and Exlanas, with the majority of lambs sold for breeding. Peter adds: "We tup 300 terminal sire ewes each year, plus 100 ewe lambs, as well as 450 Exlanas and 200 ewe lambs. We breed all our ewe lambs and most of our ram lamb replacements ourselves."

Peter also runs Suffolks, SufTexs and Texels.



Peter believes in breeding fit-for-purpose sheep, capable of lambing outdoors, able to withstand all weathers, cope with worm burdens and survive on grass alone, by grazing, digesting and using the grass efficiently to produce the fastest growing lambs with top quality carcasses. He explains: "I'm a firm believer in keeping sheep that deliver without intervention."

## Tupping

During tupping, Peter splits his flock into as many as 30 tupping groups. He adds: "I am an avid performance recorder and I use a lot of homebred ram lambs. I use EBVs rigorously and I'm always looking to expand the traits I can assess to ensure my animals are top quality, today and into the future."

Peter retains the best for breeding or sale, while the 40% lower performers are finished and sold deadweight to Randall Parker. However, this isn't his only control. "We have a strict policy on functionality with zero-tolerance for mastitis and prolapses, and anything particularly dirty or daggy or with footrot is culled," he expands.

Once all the data and analysis has been processed, Peter sorts the flocks according to EBVs and then lambs are kept or sold direct off the farm to his growing customer base.

He comments: "In my opinion, the traditional show and sale ring has no place in a progressive breeding programme. I admire the skill of the show stockman and the hard work required to prepare sheep for the ring, and it plays a valuable part in public relations with those outside our industry."

"However, sheep are judged largely on how well they are presented and on how well they have performed on hard feed. This has little to

do with how they will perform on a commercial farm. I believe that modern progressive breeding programmes compare the performance of animals solely grazing grass and look for traits which the human eye alone can't possibly measure accurately or identify."

Peter's attention to detail continues through his biosecurity policy. A handful of rams are brought onto the farm each year but go into quarantine for up to eight months. During this period, they are tested at least twice for CLA, MV, border disease and Johnes.

Similarly, scanning contactors disinfect equipment and trailers before coming on to the farm, and Peter has always been aware of the risk of bringing in disease on shearing trailers and equipment, so he and his shepherd Darren shear the 500 wool sheep themselves.

Peter is also a firm believer in faecal egg counts (FEC), which he first began using more than 20 years ago. He says: "In the 90s I collaborated with my vet to develop a FEC kit to check worm counts and have been doing so ever since. It's a valuable tool, firstly to maintain sheep health and secondly slow down the development of worm resistance. Our policy for using anthelmintics is 'as little as possible but as much as necessary'. As a result, we have very little worm resistance on our farm."

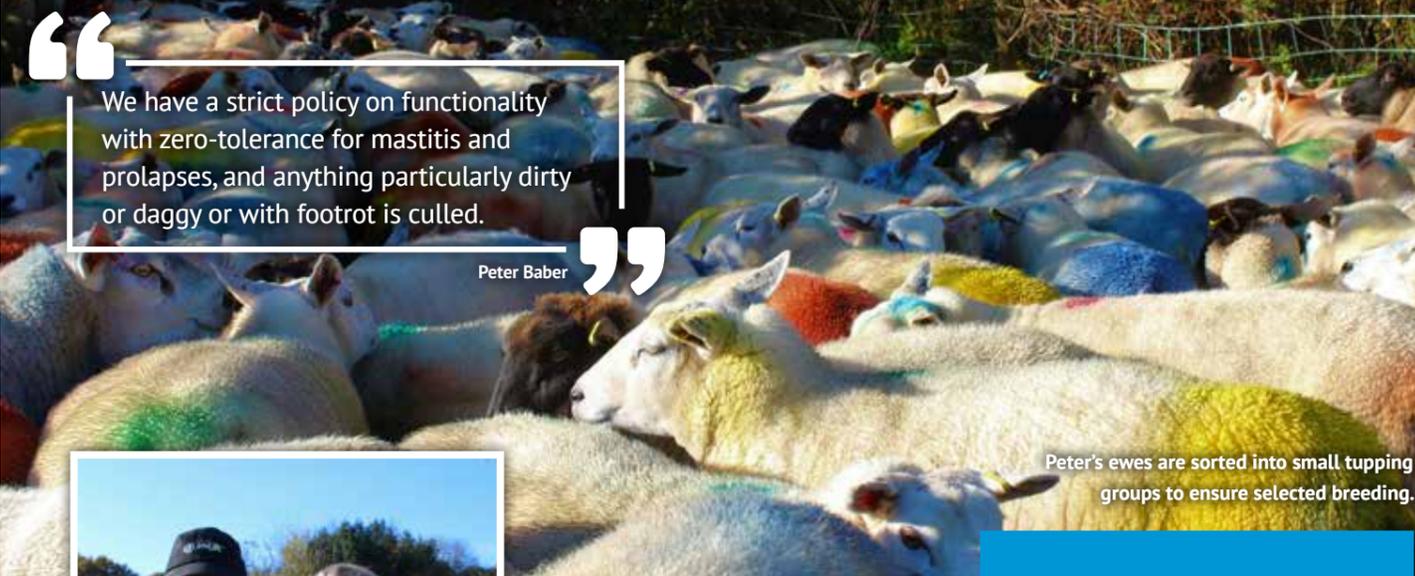
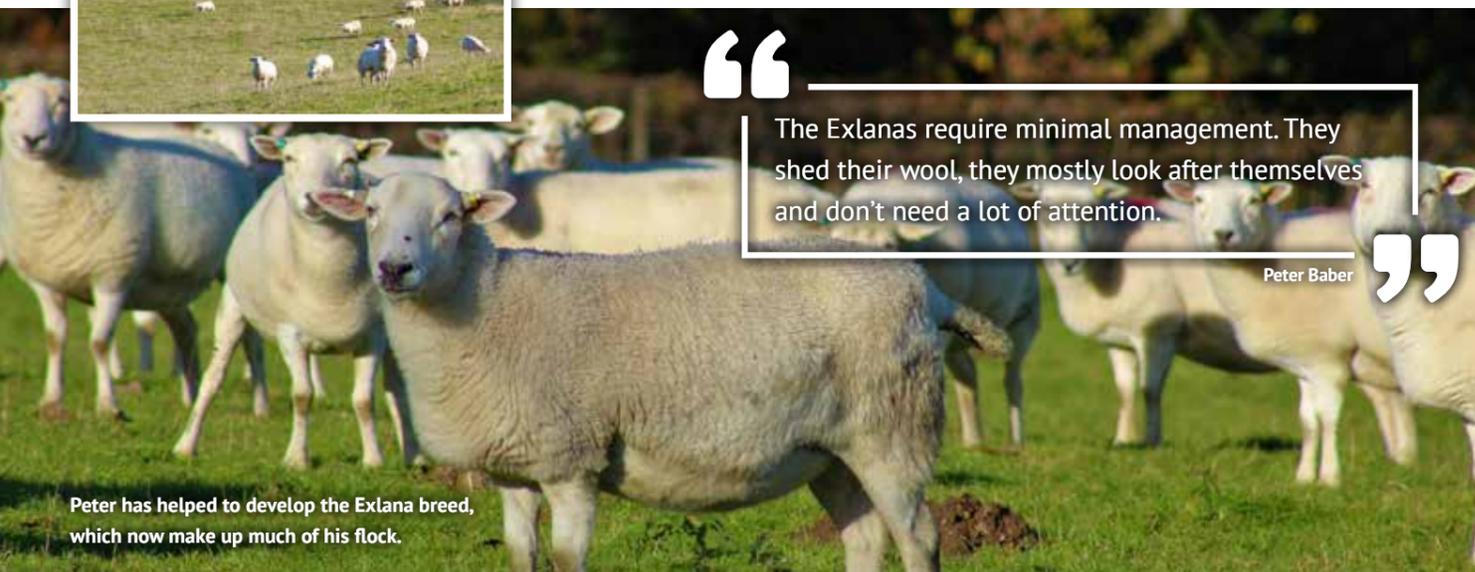
## Worming

Late in the summer or early autumn Peter will sample up to 600 lambs individually for FEC, and this data is then used to create FEC EBVs for all his breeds. Peter says: "I am aiming to breed sheep which are resistant to worms and not worms that are

"The Exlanas require minimal management. They shed their wool, they mostly look after themselves and don't need a lot of attention."

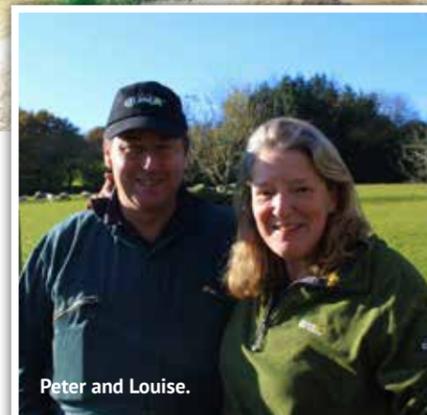
Peter Baber

Peter has helped to develop the Exlana breed, which now make up much of his flock.



"We have a strict policy on functionality with zero-tolerance for mastitis and prolapses, and anything particularly dirty or daggy or with footrot is culled."

Peter Baber



Peter and Louise.

Peter's ewes are sorted into small tupping groups to ensure selected breeding.

parentage test a cross section of lambs to check we haven't made any mistakes. We sell breeding sheep according to their genetic potential based on performance recorded records, so we can't afford to make mistakes. We believe in investing time to check and double check our records," he adds. "It is attention to detail which means we are making genetic gains with the Texel average for this year being 150 points."

On the latest Signet Suffolk evaluation in November there are 13 lambs with indexes over 400 points and seven were bred in Peter's flock. Almost all of Peter's 2019 Suffolk lamb crop are in the top 25% of the breed, with more than 40% in the top 1% of the breed for both overall terminal sire index and for growth rate to 20 weeks. With the Texels, again, well over 90% are in the top 25% of the breed and three quarters are in the top 1%.

## Opportunities

Peter joined NSA in the mid-90s when he returned to farming following a master's in agriculture and shortly after returning from three years travelling around the world. He says: "I went to my first NSA meeting at a time where the incumbent vice chairman had had to stand down suddenly for personal reasons. I was nominated and, before I knew it, I was an NSA officeholder and delighted to be put forward!"

Following a year as vice, Peter became the South West Region Chairman and before long was asked to stand as national chairman. He says: "NSA is a great organisation to be a part of. It represents a whole variety of sheep farmers and gives people the opportunity to really have their voices heard. I have enjoyed being involved with NSA and now being a Vice President I get to play an integral part and be involved in the organisation while being able to step back a bit and spend more time at home on farm."

"The role an organisation like NSA plays is essential to the industry, and supporting it ensures

## Farm facts

- Farms on owned and rented land across 160-240ha (400-600 acres) depending on time of year.
- Sells around 60% of lambs as breeding stock and 40% direct to abattoir.
- Receives minimal support from farm payment schemes.
- Focuses on breeding high index, performance recorded sheep.

Peter's bought-in tups are quarantined for up to eight months.



there is a voice at the table for sheep farmers specifically. It allows ordinary farmers direct access to decision makers. During my time as Chairman, I met and built professional working relationships with a number of government ministers and was able to bring a real farming voice to Westminster – it's a much needed role and I find it good to know, while I'm out and about on the farm, there are people still working to do that at NSA."

Planning for the future is vital - but can be complicated.

## Understanding inheritance tax rules could help with future planning

By Stuart Coombe, Old Mill **OLD MILL**

Inheritance and succession are an essential part of every farmer's future plans – and yet getting your head around many of the issues involved is far from straightforward.

I spend a lot of time talking to clients about the available gift allowances, with cashflow planning helping to highlight what someone can or cannot afford to give away. But the various allowances are confusing, and I'm hopeful suggested future changes will do away with all the different types and create a single annual allowance.

### Timings

It is relatively well known that large gifts can be made, as what is known as a potentially exempt transfer (PET), and the donor must survive for at least seven years. Of course, the rules are much more complicated than that, but the general understanding is that such gifts will have an impact on inheritance tax if you die within seven years of giving them.

The report proposes that this seven-year term is reduced to five years. A common issue with estate planning is people leaving it late in life to start inheritance tax planning, by which point seven years is a potentially long time to survive,

and therefore carrying the risk that larger gifts will 'fail'. As such, reducing the time by two years would be a welcome move.

Gifts made three to seven years before your death are taxed on a sliding scale known as 'taper relief' and there is a proposal to remove this. We often speak to people who get confused by the taper, not understanding that it is a taper on the tax due rather than of the amount gifted. Taper is only available when the gift (or cumulative gifts in the previous seven years) is over £325,000; below this is tax free.

There is also what is known as the '14-year rule' which is even more confusing, as in some cases, gifts made up to 14 years prior to death can still attract tax. The idea is to scrap this, which would certainly make tracking gifts and establishing any tax due a much simpler task.

There are several interactions between capital gains and inheritance tax, which make planning essential, but which can cause surprises to those unaware. The worst-case scenario for many would be gifting assets in their lifetime then passing away within seven years of that gift and paying (additional) inheritance tax as a result of the failed potentially exempt transfer.

It is relatively well known that there is a capital gains 'uplift' on death, whereby no capital gains tax is due, even in the common scenario whereby

assets are simply passed to a surviving spouse. This can lead to situations where individuals hold onto assets in later life knowing that will be more tax favourable than gifting during their lifetime, which could then lead to a significant capital gains liability.

Once the asset is passed through the estate, the value at death becomes the new 'base cost' and gifting or selling the asset may then be more tax favourable. This is particularly relevant where assets are passed to a surviving spouse (which is exempt from inheritance tax), or where assets qualify for business/agricultural property relief. This can often lead to no tax being due and is something that is proposed to change.

### Complexity

The idea is complex and would involve something similar to holdover relief (a relief against capital gains tax in certain scenarios), but this would need some careful drafting if it were to come into legislation.

At present, if a life assurance plan is not held in trust it becomes part of a taxable estate. In a very sensible proposal, the idea would be that term assurance plans would automatically be exempt from inheritance tax without the need for trusts, which individuals (and some insurance companies) struggle to understand.

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# New tastes from old traditions in new Heritage Sheep report

By Bob Kennard, NSA

In late November the National Sheep Association launched the report from a feasibility study exploring the potential for a new British Heritage Sheep marketing initiative. The report was launched at a special event at NSA Head Office involving people from across the sheep and meat sectors.

Described by the influential Grocer magazine as a 'potential game-changer for farmers and consumers', this new marketing initiative for British native sheep breeds plans to promote and celebrate the wonderful diversity to be found in British sheep meat.

There are now more than 700 UK cheeses and 2,000 UK breweries, and about 3,000 independent bakers in the UK. In contrast, most sheep meat is sold as 'standard lamb', with only limited regional variations (Welsh, Scottish). And yet we have the largest number of native sheep breeds in the world (more than 60), a rich diversity of pasture and soil types, and we know sheep meat flavours develop with age, becoming more complex and characteristic.

This is not an 'emperor's new clothes' type of marketing scheme – there are genuine

differences for consumers to discuss and explore. New research by NSA, backed up by other organisations, has shown there really is a marked difference in meat flavours between British sheep breeds, particularly in older animals such as hogget (one to two years old) or mutton (over two years old).

## Food story

This would have been obvious to the Victorians, who had great debates over their favourite breeds and ate more hogget and mutton than lamb. Princess Diana's ancestor, the Earl Spencer, was a great fan of the Welsh Mountain breed and kept a flock on the estate for his table. King George III was particularly fond of the Portland breed and cookery book pioneer Mrs Beeton's favourite was the Southdown.

Feed is also a known factor for flavour in sheep meat. Animals grazing on the wild herbs and grasses of our uplands will have a different flavour to sheep grazing on lush lowland meadows. Salt marshes impart their own distinct flavours to sheep meat through the unusual plants grazed on them.

The report recommends and identifies a fully traceable British Heritage Sheep scheme, which will be open to any producers of quality British native breed sheep, and highlight to consumers the ABC (age, breed and countryside) of each

piece of meat. For example, as a consumer you may be tempted to a piece of Herdwick lamb from Lake Coniston, Suffolk hogget from the Suffolk Fens or the Cotswolds, or Cheviot mutton from the Cambrian Mountains or the Scottish Highlands, and so on. It's all about creating greater differentiation and interest, telling the story of the product and satisfying interest in flavours and tastes.

There has been particular interest in this idea from the two main parts of the market that the sheep industry needs to excite about sheep meat – the young, and people who eat meat but currently not sheep meat. In a YouGov survey earlier this year, these two groups were particularly interested in this new and exciting way of looking at sheep meat.

## Report aims

However, there is more to this than simply expanding consumer choice. The aims of the scheme are to:

- **Conserve the genepool of UK native sheep breed characteristics** by creating specific market opportunities.
- **Add value to sheep supply chains** by creating differentiation and adding to product development.
- **Expand the scope of sheep meat markets** by appealing to a new, younger audience and

a marketplace increasingly interested in food experiences.

- **Enhance landscapes** through 'the right sheep being in the right places'.
- **Help rural communities** through adding value and creating opportunities for improved business viability and new enterprises, particularly for younger farmers.
- **Protect the environment** through establishing closer market connections between the product and its production environment.
- **Make a positive asset from our agricultural heritage and culture.**

A survey carried out by NSA among the sheep sector showed that most respondents wanted the scheme to be owned and controlled by those involved. Following legal advice the intention is now that the scheme will be owned by a company limited by guarantee, incorporated for non-profit making functions.

In addition to a board of directors, it is proposed to establish an oversight committee consisting of a wider group of stakeholders, reflecting those along the supply chain.

Policy will be enacted through managerial and coordinating activity from the project's small management team. Technical and administrative support being supplied 'in kind' by bodies such as our levy bodies, the farming unions, breed societies, and large land interest bodies such as National Parks.

Finally, the Friends of Heritage Sheep grouping will consist of interested parties who



The report was formally launched in late November in Malvern, Worcester.



Above: The full report is available online for members to read.

have the ability to communicate directly with consumers through their public memberships. The next step will be the establishment of the company.

The report is available online at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk).

## The ABC approach

The ABC approach represents three different specifications in the product you are marketing:

A is for the age of the animal – be it lamb, hogget or mutton.

B is for the native British breed, developed before 1960.

C is the countryside in which the animal was reared.

View from Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



The British sheep industry is one of our richest farming sectors in terms of diversity, heritage, environment, and for decades we have been told the only way forward for economic viability is to get more efficient, reduce costs of production, and compete on a global market.

Arguably the farm support structure we have enjoyed has prevented the radical changes that may have been seen had it not been available. Over the last few years it has become accepted that our future is more about high standards of environmental and animal welfare, and high standards of traceability assurance and quality.

Of course it is still right to drive efficiency to an optimal level, but given we are such a land based sector this has to be done within the natural boundaries of the farming system and in addition to increasing efficiency, reducing waste and losses, it is also right that we look for opportunities to add value to our products in any trustworthy way we can.

If our industry is diverse then we are fortunate that our markets are also diverse. Our export trade and our domestic market both include a strong demand for halal, as well as large and small scale supply chains. All these market opportunities are essential and the Heritage Sheep approach is intended to add to them by creating a new artisan market segment while also preparing for changing trends if consumers continue to move more towards food innovation and experiences in the future, here in the UK and in our export markets too.

Once we get beyond our current political mess it's not difficult to see that there will be huge opportunities for the UK sheep sector – the long-term supply and demand dynamics look favourable and Britain is good at sheep farming and good at product processing and distribution. But these opportunities will only be met if we stay ahead of the game in terms of quality, reputation and social license. The Heritage Sheep initiative has the potential to be a useful part of the market mix that supports our sheep industry in its entirety.



The report identifies characteristics in sheep to the meats taste.

# Sheep farming in the modern world: the net zero challenge

By Phil Stocker, NSA

Climate science is complex and has proved controversial over the last few decades. It's not been helped by previous incidents such as ozone layer damage, that didn't fulfil media predictions of global disaster, or talk of an ice age that suddenly turned into predictions of global warming.

But, like trusting politicians, trusting the media is a dangerous game. While they love to report on catastrophe and disaster they don't balance this with good news stories such as the removal of chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) gases which, in the case of the ozone layer, helped nature to semi-repair itself.

Even five years ago many were questioning whether climate change was happening at all, and if it was, whether human activity had anything to do with it – and there are still doubters now. But scientific evidence is strong and climate science has become more advanced.

On a practical level few would dispute that the weather patterns we are seeing now are more extreme in every sense, be it floods, drought, melting of glaciers or wildfires. We have moved

beyond doubting that our footprint on the earth is a major factor – but, in my opinion, are still confusing natural biological gaseous cycles with those related to the use of fossil fuels.

## Carbon cycle

A carbon cycle has been going on forever. Most simply, all plants take in and release both carbon dioxide and oxygen, and through their lifecycle they sequester carbon into the soil through root matter, dead and decaying plant matter, and the birth and death of soil life.

Sheep even lock up carbon in their wool (which contains some 50% carbon) and of course wool is far more sustainable and planet friendly than fossil fuel based synthetic textiles. Quite how we allowed that commonly worn synthetic outdoor garment to be called a fleece I'm not sure.

Animals are similarly involved in what has been a natural carbon cycle that has been occurring for millions of years and there is truth in the fact that the ruminant farmed livestock we have now would once have been huge herds of wild ruminants that naturally kept a rich vegetation in balance.

So, if our natural biological cycles have been going on since life began, what has changed to make things so different? The big disrupter is the use of fossil fuels. You hardly need science to prove the fact that releasing high volumes of carbon rich fossil fuels, in the form of oil and coal, that have been stored deep within the earth for thousands of years, into our atmosphere over a

period of some 150 years is going to put natural cycles out of balance.

But still ruminant livestock are demonised for their impact, and it has almost become the media's number one recommendation that if an individual wants to do any one thing to save the planet then they should give up eating red meat.

It's this distortion that has led to NSA touring the UK to 'set the sheep farming record straight', sharing facts and alternative thinking to help provide farmers not just defend our industry but to be proactive in positioning it in a positive light.

## Climate change

These events are covering three topics - climate and the environment, animal welfare, and red meat and human nutrition. Each of these topics will be covered over the next few editions of sheep farmer, beginning here with the climate and environment.

A good place to start is that the science and the media have both been misleading with the

## Sheep, carbon and ecosystems

Wool is around 50% carbon – naturally renewable with great insulation and fire-retardant properties.

Sheep grazing helps build soil organic matter, storing carbon and providing food for an array of soil-based and above ground living beings.

Sheep graze on permanent pasture and rotational leys – both are effective in building soil organic matter and carbon.

Sheep grazing in upland areas provides a mosaic of habitats and creates natural fire breaks, reducing the risk of environmentally devastating wildfires.



Is it time to embrace electric farm vehicles?

facts. The science has not used entire lifecycle carbon footprinting, so has not considered the role of pasture in sequestering carbon into the soil, and neither has it included the carbon footprint of feedstuffs or embedded carbon used in the intensive livestock sectors.

The science and the media draw no distinction within the red meat sector between the intensive feedlot type systems in other parts of the world and the predominantly grass-based systems that are common here in the UK. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other UN reports do recognise the value and importance of low impact grass-based livestock farming but the media continually fail to report this.

## Suitability

Science does show that whether it's grassland or trees, the crops most naturally suited to an area tend to be the most efficient and stable way to use that land – and of course we know that Britain is known as a pastoral nation with our temperate climate with high rainfall and high winds lending itself very well to being a grass-based nation.

In relation to wildlife and biodiversity much of Britain's ecology has evolved alongside grassland and grazing animals. It's absolutely no accident that the birds we are encouraged to provide habitats and food sources for, such as skylarks, lapwings, curlew and barn owls, are birds that would not thrive in the absence of grazed grass and dung-related invertebrate life.

Look at any bird identification book and you'll see a significant category under the heading 'farmland birds'. Insects, bees and bugs all have vital roles in pollination and food source provision for birds and mammals alike, and grassland communities, managed well, can be a hive of activity for such life.

Back to the greenhouse gases and there is a serious misunderstanding of how they behave. Until very recently the climate scientists assumed

our three main warming gases, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane all behave identically – but this has now been found to be wrong.

While methane is associated with ruminants and is a potent gas (some 25 times stronger than CO<sub>2</sub>) its life length is far shorter, some 12 to 18 years compared to well over a hundred for N<sub>2</sub>O and CO<sub>2</sub>. Because of this its concentrations don't build and build in the atmosphere.

There is a powerful argument that as long as livestock numbers don't increase then they are not contributing to warming. In fact, anything we can do to reduce methane emissions through efficiency measures or diets can be argued to be contributing to planetary cooling.

Nitrous oxide is another greenhouse gas associated with livestock farming through soil processes and manure and urine deposition.

However, as with methane, researchers are now questioning earlier assumptions – and new work by Bangor University is demonstrating this area has been largely understudied. Researchers there are finding that, particularly in upland situations where high organic matter soils have a tendency towards acidic nitrification, the associated emissions may be significantly lower than previously assumed. This again raises big question marks over the carbon inventories used to measure the global warming potential of grazed ruminants.

## Research

Work done by Rothamsted Research at North Wyke in Devon is, among other things, looking at broadening the metrics used to assess global warming sustainability alongside our need to feed ourselves. This work demonstrates that the use of arable and cropping land across farmed livestock species is far lower for sheep production than other species.

This is important because of the positive role that grassland can play in carbon storage and warming reductions compared to the emissions

## What can you do?

**Optimise efficiency within the business boundaries you set:** For some this could be about reducing days to slaughter while for others with slower maturing breeds it may be about ensuring stock numbers are within the production boundaries of the farm. For all it should be getting rid of the bottom percentage of the flock and avoiding disease and parasites.

**Be less tidy:** Not an excuse for leaving rubbish around but about creating more unmanaged habitat around the farm.

**Integrate native trees in and around the farmed areas:** Some may go more towards agro-forestry approaches, for others new woodland.

**Field boundaries:** Plant more hedgerows and consider a coppiced approach for some. Maintain walls and ditches

**Optimise soil pH and avoid compaction.**

**Allow a greater grass 'reservoir' allowing taller growth and denser multi species swards.**

**Employ a level of predator control:** Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust work shows fox and corvid control significantly increase the success of ground nesting birds.

**Provide feed stations for seed-eating birds.**

**Implement measures to reduce reliance on fossil fuels.**

**Consider renewable energy production – biomass, wind, and solar.**

involved in crop production, particularly if that crop production is based on oil-based inputs.

The criticisms and accusations seem endless but most of us involved in sheep farming feel we can win this sustainability argument – and increasingly the science supports that view. Remember that some of the most appreciated areas of the countryside are only the way they are because of sheep farming – creating landscapes, environments and communities that visitors and residents love to see.

There is a lot of research work ongoing in this area and more is needed in future. But our reputation and image depend on us being able to demonstrate sustainability and responsibility, in the area of climate change and the natural environment, but also in the subjects we will look at in future issues of Sheep Farmer, that of animal welfare and human nutrition.



Above: British wool carpets, due to their wool content, are a natural store of carbon.



Grazing sheep have manufactured the landscapes we know and love today.

# Address ewe nutrition now for future dividends

A close focus on nutrition and greater precision in feeding ewes in late pregnancy can bring big benefits, says Laura Drury of Trouw Nutrition, as it has such a major bearing on lamb numbers, lamb viability and potential returns per ewe.

She highlights two crucial objectives at this stage, starting with the management and maintenance of ewe body condition, feeding to achieve the target lambing BCS of 3.0-3.5 for lowland ewes and 2.5 for hill ewes. Target lambing BCS should be reached before the late pregnancy period, so body condition score change must be achieved during mid-pregnancy.

## Condition

Ms Drury explains: "You need to avoid weight loss in thin ewes (below BCS 2) while encouraging weight loss in overfat ewes (more than BCS 4). Overfat ewes will have a lower dry matter intake during late pregnancy, leading to increased fat mobilisation and a higher susceptibility to twin lamb disease."

As ewes enter late pregnancy, Ms Drury says the focus must also include the development of the lamb both in utero and immediately after birth. Around 75% of lamb growth will occur in the last six weeks of pregnancy when ewes also have to start to produce milk and colostrum.

"Colostrum production is crucial for lamb survival. Indeed, 49% of lamb losses occur in the 48 hours immediately after birth with a significant proportion due to insufficient or poor quality colostrum. Lambs require 200ml of colostrum per

kilo of bodyweight in the first 24 hours of life so it is vital the ewe is fed adequately to produce a sufficient, good quality supply."

She further explains achieving precision in late pregnancy nutrition is a major, but important, challenge as the ewes' energy requirements increase by 60% from seven weeks before lambing to the week immediately prior to lambing. At the same time dry matter intakes will be only 2-2.5% of bodyweight, or 1.6kg for a 70kg ewe.

## Analysis

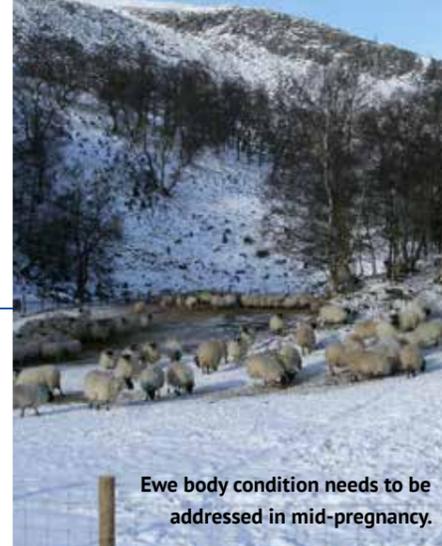
"One week pre-lambing she will need 18.3MJ/day so the ration requires an energy density of 11.5MJ/kgDM and must be well-balanced," says Ms Drury.

She stresses the importance of getting forages analysed, as they form the basis of the diet and other feeds may be required to supplement them. Without a forage analysis, developing accurate rations and ensuring ewe nutritional requirements are optimised is close to guesswork, risking poor performance and increased costs.

The diet will need the correct balance of rumen fermentable energy, which can come from cereals such as barley and oats, and rumen degradable protein (RDP) from forages. An imbalance may reduce starch utilisation which can compromise colostrum production.

"Choose compounds carefully. Look for quality ingredients like soya, which has twice the bypass protein content of other protein sources like rapeseed meal. Oats have a lower energy content than barley but are more rumen friendly, while molasses and sugar beet provide a good source of sugars and are palatable.

"Minerals are also vital. Supplementing with vitamin E, selenium and cobalt has been shown to improve lamb survival. Increased selenium levels



in colostrum and milk support newborn immunity, reducing the risk of hypothermia, and supporting ewe immunity. Inclusion of a good quality selenium yeast, which is significantly more bioavailable than inorganic selenium, will be of particular benefit during pre-lambing."

Ms Drury says feed management in late pregnancy is vital for a successful lambing season. She advises feeding a maximum of 0.5kg concentrates per feed to reduce the risk of acidosis and to feed concentrates at the same time every day. Also ensure forage is always available.

## Feeding time

Ms Drury further recommends adequate trough space to minimise barging, which can cause stress. "Competition at the trough may also lead to problems with twin lamb disease in shy feeders, and acidosis and prolapse in more dominant ewes. Keep troughs clean, removing any unpalatable or contaminated feed. Make sure there is plenty of unobstructed access to clean, fresh water," she adds.

"Prioritise the best forage to ewes closer to lambing and those carrying more lambs. If feeding rolls, consider floor feeding as ewes will graze rolls from bedding which will slow down intakes and further reduce the acidosis risk.

"Planning now to ensure ewes are correctly fed in late pregnancy could have significant benefits for the size of the lamb crop sold and flock margins," Ms Drury concludes.



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# Liver fluke anticipated to make a comeback this season

Levels of liver fluke were relatively low last autumn and winter, but with many areas much wetter this year and cases of acute fluke rising, the indications are of a much higher risk for many flocks this coming season.

Reports to early November showed there was disease in high risk areas but, as predicted by experts, cases are patchy. This means the need to risk-assess and test for liver fluke in individual flocks is greater than ever.

In September and October for example, several cases of acute fluke were confirmed not only in high risk areas, but also in North East England, outside the areas designated high risk by the NADIS regional forecast.

## Act now

With blood testing in lambs and bulk milk tests in dairy herds also showing fluke activity, now is not the time to 'wait and see' but for individual farms to consider their own situation and test.

Deciding whether or not to treat for liver fluke, which products to use and what

management actions are needed can be daunting. To get started there are three main actions to take:

**1. Assess the risk on your farm:** Look at the historical incidence of liver fluke and add the impact of this year's weather. Remember some areas of the farm will be higher risk than others. Check for any feedback from testing in your area (e.g. SCOPS/COWS updates and talk to your vet or advisor). Always consider fluke as a possible factor in poor performance in addition to bad weather, worms, feeding or trace elements. You can track 'wet days' (more than 1mm rain) in your area using Met Office data, bearing in mind the more wet day the higher the risk.

**2. Investigate any sudden deaths in sheep:** A post-mortem is still the most definitive evidence of liver fluke. If you are selling stock to an abattoir, ask for information on the condition of livers and specifically any evidence of fluke damage.

**3. Take appropriate steps before treating:** There are a number of tests available (see below) and management options to consider before treating sheep. These might include avoiding the highest risk fields, fencing, housing early and quarantine treatments. When treating sheep, be aware of the

flukicides available for different ages of fluke (see table). Resistance to triclabendazole is not uncommon and we need to avoid overuse of these medicines if we are to protect their long-term efficacy.

## Treatments

Always choose treatments carefully and remember no flukicides have any persistent activity. Moving animals away from the high-risk area (for example housing post-treatment) is the only way to avoid re-infection.

For more information visit [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk).



Abattoir feedback on fluke damage is useful information.



By Lesley Stubbings



Experts are predicting a higher and less predictable fluke risk this season.

Table 2: Treatment options

Flukicide	Age of fluke and % kill rate												Optimum time of year to use
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12+	
Albendazole											50-70%	80-99%	Spring/Summer
Oxyclozanide											50-70%	80-99%	Spring/Summer
Nitroxylin								50-90%				91-99%	Late Autumn/Winter
Closantel				23-73%	91%			91-95%				97-100%	Autumn
Triclabendazole* <small>*Assuming a fully susceptible population</small>	90-99%							99.0-99.9%					Autumn

Table 1: Summary of tests

Test	Fluke antibody test	Coproantigen ELISA	Faecal egg detection
Warning	Earliest warning	Second earliest warning	Latest warning
Description	Blood sample looking for anti-fluke antibodies. Shows first signs of exposure to fluke but takes two to four weeks for detectable antibodies to show.	A newer test on faeces that can detect fluke infection around two to three weeks earlier than a faecal egg count.	Detects fluke eggs in faeces.
Appropriate use	Most suitable for lambs in their first grazing season. Following a wet summer, can be very useful as an early indicator and also on farms with a less predictable risk.	Specific test for fluke carried out on dung; detects antigens and secretions produced by active fluke infestation.	Identifies presence of mature, egg-laying liver fluke. However, egg laying does not start until 10-12 weeks post-infection; acute fluke infection not detected.
What a positive result means	Lambs have met a fluke challenge this year – but level of parasite challenge unknown.	Active fluke infestation.	Egg-laying adults are present.
What a negative result means	No exposure so far. Repeat after three to four weeks where farm has fluke history.	No fluke, very low numbers or young fluke that are too young for secretions to exceed test threshold. May need to repeat, especially if tested pooled samples.	No egg-laying adults present, but large numbers of immature fluke could be present. Egg shedding can be sporadic so repeat after eight to 10 weeks.

# Utilising post-mortems can improve flock health management

Nobody wants to find a dead ewe, lamb or ram in their field. However, if you do, they can provide a valuable diagnostic tool to investigate disease in the flock when submitted for a post-mortem examination.

Examining a dead sheep can give a relatively quick and accurate cause of death. It can also help you make beneficial management changes to prevent further problems by identifying the cause of death and spotting other potential problems through incidental findings. Post-mortems can be performed by your local veterinary surgeon, local APHA Veterinary Investigation Centre or a private provider.

The list of findings from a post-mortem is almost endless. Starting with dissection alone, the organ affected can often be isolated and specific diseases can be narrowed down, such as liver fluke, dosing gun injury, pulpy kidney or CLA.

## Diagnosis

A post-mortem does not have to stop with just looking at the carcass. If the causative agent is not clear, further samples can be taken. For example, in thin ewes, Johne's disease may be suspected from discolouration and thickening of the intestinal wall. However, sections of gut can also be looked at under the microscope to

confirm disease, and staining carried out to look for *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*.

In ewes with sudden death, there may be little to see on dissection, but sampling fluid from the eyes allows testing for calcium, magnesium and ketones, which can reveal more.

With lambing time around the corner, those experiencing abortions can submit the foetus and placenta for analysis. Damage to the placenta, caused by enzootic abortion or toxoplasma, can often be seen on visual inspection, but samples can also be taken to look for other agents, such as campylobacter and listeriosis.

In 2014-16, AHDB ran a fallen stock project that examined deceased lambs. Of the 859 lamb carcasses that were submitted, a diagnosis was made in 56% of cases, and more could have been made were producers willing to investigate further.

More than 100 diagnoses were made with the top five most common being worms, pasteurilla septicaemia, pulpy kidney, pasteurilla pneumonia and coccidiosis. In the same study, a diagnosis was made in 85% of adult sheep submitted.

Giving your vet a complete history of the disease issue and of the specific individual you may wish to post-mortem is vital. Your vet can advise whether a post-mortem is the most suitable way to investigate a disease outbreak. For example, if ewes are dying of twin-lamb disease around lambing time, then it may be more cost-effective and quicker to blood sample live ewes.

By Vicki Fisher, Farm First Veterinary Services



If it is agreed that it is suitable to use a post-mortem you need to determine whether the carcass you are hoping to submit is worth examining. Submitting a fresh carcass will give the best chance of identifying any problems. A rotten, gassy carcass is of no use and a waste of money. Always check with your vet, but general rules to check whether the carcass is viable are as follows:

- The animal has been dead less than 24 hours.
- No blue discolouration of the skin.
- No bloating.
- If possible kept cool especially in warmer months (heat speeds up decomposition).
- No predation by vermin (check intestines have not been pulled out of the anus).

You also need to consider if treatments have been given. If you wish to investigate an outbreak of pneumonia in weaned lambs, you should submit a new case that has died without receiving treatment.

## Secondary infection

If a lamb dies after several weeks of pneumonia and several courses of antibiotics, it is likely the initial cause of disease is gone and now all that is visible is damage due to secondary infections. Although examination of both these cases will confirm there is a pneumonia issue, it would not be worth trying to culture the second case as the original cause is unlikely to still be present.

In some cases, it may be appropriate to submit



Post-mortem examinations are an undervalued diagnostic tool for flock management.

## Lab testing locations

- SAC St Boswells, Roxburghshire
- VI Centre, Penrith, Cumbria
- VI Centre, Thirsk, North Yorkshire
- VI Centre, Shrewsbury, Shropshire
- VI Centre Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk
- VI Centre, Carmarthen, Carmarthenshire
- VI Centre, Starcross, Exeter, Devon

## Partner providers

- WWS (Aberystwyth University)
- University of Bristol
- University of Surrey, Guildford Royal Veterinary College

a live animal for a post-mortem (sacrifice) but this should be thoroughly discussed with your vet first, and consideration also given as to whether the animal will meet welfare standards for transport.

Overall, post-mortem examinations are often an undervalued diagnostic tool that could be used to improve the management and production of your animals. With access to better services through your own veterinary surgeon, and the APHA Veterinary Investigation (VI) Centres' free carcass collection, there is little reason to not have more post-mortems done.

Throughout large areas of England and Wales, APHA and its delivery partners are providing a free carcass collection service to farmers who wish to have a post-mortem performed at their local centre. The post-mortem is also partly subsidised by Defra, so this is worth taking advantage of.

If you wish to use this service, you must get in contact with your own veterinary surgeon first who will contact the VI Centre to arrange it further. Please do not attempt to send a carcass without prior agreement.

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Lungs with chronic pneumonia

# Reducing antibiotic use during lambing will benefit your flock

By Dr Phillipa Page, Flock Health 

A shift in how farmers approach lambing, particularly indoors, has led to a national reduction in the use of oral antibiotics to lambs at birth with no negative effects on lamb survivability. This is great news for our industry.

The latest Targets Task Force report has reported that sales of oral antibiotics for UK lambs has been gradually reducing since 2016, with the 2019 lambing period seeing a reduction of more than 20% compared to the previous year.

This is a very positive step and gives testament to the confidence and proactiveness of UK farmers to engage more with their veterinary surgeons and advisors to focus upon key areas. All farming systems have areas in which they can improve and, although the changes required may be marginal and not involve extra cost, the impact can be significant.

## Improvement

In order to prepare and improve your flock for the coming lambing season, review and address these key areas:

**1. Availability of quality colostrum:** We know overwhelmingly that the quantity, quality and timely provision of colostrum to the newborn lamb is critical to its survival, as it is protected

against common diseases such as watery mouth, joint ill, scours, pasteurella and clostridia.

**2. Ewe nutrition:** Optimum levels of protein and energy in the diet, ideally primarily supplied by quality forage, will drive quality colostrum production. Think about what your late pregnancy ewe diets look like.

**3. Ewe body condition score:** Ewes in lean body condition in late pregnancy need extra feed and should be grouped separately to enable improved opportunities to feed.

**4. Lambing shed hygiene:** The bacteria responsible for causing newborn lamb diseases exist in the environment and are normal inhabitants of sheep sheds. Problems occur when the levels of bacterial challenge overwhelm the protection systems of the newborn lambs, such as those provided by colostrum.

Successful steps to tackle shed hygiene include minimising stocking density, regular bedding down in lambing areas (although some bacteria still survive well on dry straw), crutching of ewes at housing, removing and treating lame ewes and ensuring all water troughs are clean and not leaking.

Individual pen hygiene is also important. They must be dry, and ideally properly cleaned out inbetween ewes, with a dry disinfectant applied underneath the straw. In times of high pressure or if a pen cannot be properly cleaned out, it is essential to simply apply plenty of clean fresh straw. Reducing the time ewes spend in these

individual pens will help reduce the challenge of disease and the costs associated with bedding.

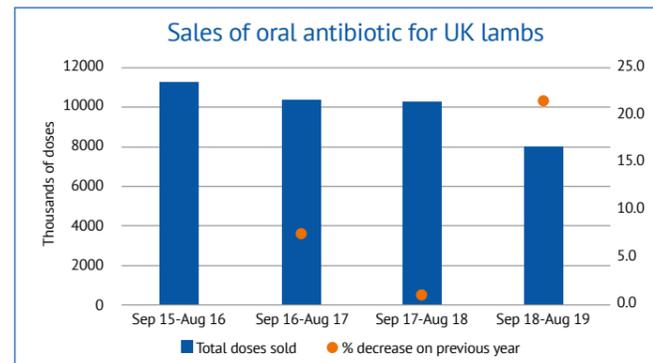
It can take real bravery to stop using a product that has provided apparent security, particularly against frequently fatal newborn lamb diseases such as watery mouth. This is where working together with your trusted veterinary team is crucial.

As described in the above checklist, there are many aspects of the sheep system at lambing time that will contribute to healthy lambs that are a good birth weight and immuno-competent - i.e. fit to fight disease. All these areas need to be properly discussed with your vets before you change your well-trusted systems.

## Pre-lambing prep

A common approach is a discussion at a pre-lambing flock health visit. Here you and your vet can discuss possible areas of weakness in the system and look at small gains for improvements. Some farmers get their vets to blood sample ewes to check their metabolic status and others now routinely test the quality of the colostrum that the ewes produce.

Colostrum quality is tested by means of a refractometer, an inexpensive piece of equipment that can be bought online and is simple to use. Only a drop of colostrum is required and it can be done in minutes by the shepherd at the side of the pen in the lambing shed.



Higher risk

- Lambs in group with recent clinical cases
- Triplet and/or low birth weight lambs
- Born to thin and/or poorly fed ewes
- Challenging environmental conditions
- Later on in lambing period

Lower risk

- Lambs with adequate colostrum
- Fit health single lambs
- Lambs born in the first week of lambing
- Good environmental conditions - clean, dry, well sheltered

Some farmers are using this as a monitoring tool at the start of lambing to assess the success of the late pregnancy diet. Other farmers are using it to test suspect ewes, such as thin, lame or sick ewes to identify the need to supplement their lambs with extra harvested colostrum.

Your vet will guide you through how using simple tools like this can benefit both this lambing and be used to inform actions for future lambing. It can also help give confidence when deciding how to reduce routine antibiotic treatments.

If you are nervous about reducing your routine antibiotic use, you need to consider your lambs in different categories and discuss

risk assessments with your vet. Often the least risk lambs are those born early in the lambing period, and singles that should have plenty of good quality colostrum available and rarely need the routine use of antibiotic.

## Interventions

Careful observations with records of the interventions over a lambing period provides a framework to work towards for next year.

We may identify ewes that are not in target body condition during a pre-lambing visit and we need to take immediate action.

However, more usefully, we can take this information and put measures in place for the

following year to ensure there are fewer ewes below condition for the next lambing - thus improving birthweights and reducing mortality in the next year's crop of lambs.

There becomes an incentive to assess body condition earlier before weaning and using it as a weaning decision tool. Being more proactive with the leaner ewes and ensuring they gain condition earlier has provided farmers with far easier housing strategies. Improving these ewes and maintaining them through mid-pregnancy enables simpler grouping at housing and maybe only a handful of lean ones need to be added to a triple-bearing group.



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# Development of vaccines for worms will help farmers in the battle with resistance

By Dr Beth Wells, Moredun  Moredun

Work at the Moredun Research Institute has been focusing on the development of vaccines to control two major species of parasitic roundworms in sheep.

These are *Teladorsagia circumcincta* (Brown stomach worm) and *Haemonchus contortus* (Barber's Pole worm).

Without vaccines, control of gastrointestinal nematodes (roundworms), which are commonly responsible for reduced production efficiency in lambs, relies on anthelmintic products – to which resistance is increasing.

The five different groups of anthelmintic for sheep should be used strategically and in line with best practice advice to prolong their lifetime. This includes diagnostic worm egg counts to inform on the need to use a worm drench and a worm egg reduction test post-worming to ensure the wormer of choice has remained effective. New methods are also being developed to complement the use of wormers to extend their usefulness.

## Research

Of the two vaccines that research at Moredun is currently focused on, the vaccine which controls haemonchus has been successfully commercialised. It is currently manufactured and sold by Wormvax Australia, a subsidiary of Moredun in Australia, where Barber's Pole worm causes significant disease and resistance to anthelmintics is widespread.

Since 2016 the vaccine has been exported to South Africa and, in the UK, it became available under a special treatment certificate and veterinary prescription during 2018.

*Haemonchus contortus* is a highly pathogenic stomach worm, which lives in the abomasum of sheep, the adults being 1.5-3cm long and therefore visible to the naked eye. It has been widely reported on farms throughout the UK for many years, but it is only in recent years that it has become a more widespread problem.

## Weather

Although a worm that thrives in warmer climates, haemonchus can survive in the more northerly parts of the UK by overwintering in the host. This ability gives it the opportunity to persist even harsher winters and can lead to serious disease in the summer.

Climate change, with milder, wetter winters, has been suggested as a reason for the more widespread occurrence of haemonchus, therefore the development of a vaccine is a positive breakthrough in the battle against resistance and the increasing threat from climate change.

Although haemonchus is a threat to UK sheep health, the most prevalent roundworm on UK farms is *Teladorsagia circumcincta*. At Moredun, a research project funded by various bodies including the Scottish Government and the EU, has developed a prototype vaccine to control this parasite.

This worm is endemic in UK flocks and is one of the species responsible for parasitic gastro enteritis (PGE) that reduces growth rates and production efficiency in lambs. There are increasing reports of resistance to white and clear drenches and, more worryingly, reports of resistance to multiple anthelmintic classes within the population of this worm species.

The prototype vaccine currently being

developed at Moredun has substantially reduced faecal egg counts in both lambs and pregnant/lactating ewes and therefore could potentially reduce pasture contamination with the infective larval stages of the parasite. This original prototype vaccine, involving a cocktail of eight recombinant proteins, is too complex for commercial manufacture so researchers are currently attempting to simplify the vaccine.

Initial results in lambs looks promising, with current trials also assessing its effectiveness in preventing ewes from contaminating the pasture during late pregnancy and early lactation in field trials. This is very important in reducing contamination of grazing pastures while lambs are young, allowing them to develop immunity without being exposed to high levels of parasitic nematodes, with subsequent disease risk.

## Preventatives

It is widely accepted that preventatives are better than treatment so it would be an advantage to the sheep industry to have an expanded number of vaccines at their disposal, but this prototype vaccine requires further refinement and testing, so there will be a time lag before it is available in the UK as a commercial product.

For more information, search for 'parasitic roundworms' at [www.moredun.org.uk/research](http://www.moredun.org.uk/research) or visit [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk).



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David Miskelly, Aberdeenshire vet and sheep farmer

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# Bluetongue risk – and flukicide warning

By Amanda Carson, APHA



With different strains of bluetongue continuing to be reported in Europe, it is important for UK farmers to remain vigilant to the threat.

Risk assessments have determined the risk of disease incursion in the UK remains low, but early detection is vital. Several reports of suspected cases have been reported in 2019, with main presenting signs including swelling of the head, discharge of nasal mucous, drooling and crusting around the mouth and nose, and foetal abortions with abnormal brains.

## Further testing

Fortunately, all suspected cases where samples were sent to the Pirbright Institute for testing proved to be negative. APHA has followed up on some of these cases.

One case involved a single animal in a small flock with a dramatic swelling of the head (pictured), but an allergic reaction was considered most likely to be the cause and the case negated on clinical grounds.

A second case involved four sheep in a group of 40 breeding ewes that presented with swelling of the heads (oedema), cloudy nasal discharge and crusting on the ears (pictured).

BTV testing was negative – but a post-mortem

examination was carried out on a ewe that subsequently died. Initial biochemistry tests suggested liver disease and negative liver fluke ELISA (blood test) ruled out fasciolosis as a cause of oedema in the face; further histopathological investigations are continuing.

## Flukicide risk

What is significant is the fact this group of sheep had very recently been treated with a fluke and worm combination product containing oxyclozanide. We reported in 2016 a similar case of swollen heads in ewes following treatment with an oxyclozanide containing product and offer this advice to farmers:-

- Follow the instructions in the datasheet.
- Take care to estimate accurately the liveweight of animals to be treated, to ensure effective

dosing (not overdosing) and preventing inadequate dosing, a known risk factor in the development of anthelmintic resistance.

- Note that combination oxyclozanide and levamisole products require frequent mixing during dosing to prevent possible settling out of the suspension.
  - Be aware the datasheet cautions that, rarely, sheep may show an anaphylactic reaction with swelling of the head.
- The incident was reported to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) as a suspected adverse reaction. APHA has also advised that any sheep showing clinical signs due to suspected oxyclozanide toxicity should not be slaughtered for 28 days after drenching.



Swollen heads (left) and crusty ears (right) can both be signs of bluetongue.

# Improvements to Signet database

By Ed Brant, Signet

Following the launch of the new National Terminal Sire Evaluation last year, Signet has been developing its online database at [www.signetdata.com](http://www.signetdata.com).

There are now more indexes and a new maternal index displayed alongside the terminal index, as well as the addition of eight new carcass traits.

The new website has also been designed to meet the ever-growing demand from farmers to access, sort, refine and process their data in order to get the most out of the EBVs and convert genetic gains into profit.

To get the most out of the EBVs it is important for the farmer to identify their on-farm strengths and weaknesses and assess if they can use genetics to maintain and improve. Using a similar process to fitting a breed to a system, EBVs

are designed to work within a breed to fit the optimum animals to the on farm situation. The role of the database is to make it easier to do that.

## Refined search

The EBV search allows users to refine EBV traits to fit their interests and needs. Producers wishing to select an animal that will give fast growing lambs would select an animal with a high index for scan and eight-week weights.

Those that retain their own replacements would put more emphasis on maternal traits when searching for a ram.

New features include:-

- Breed reports showing the top animals of a breed in three categories.
- A streamlined and quickened inbreeding calculator.
- Additions to reporting and analysis tools, such as the online access to genetic trends.
- Option to display any trait or index for dams, sires and lambs, or all can be displayed together. This can be used to evaluate breeding decisions as well as being able to illustrate the effect dam and sire selection has on a specific crop of lambs.

**Breed reports** To access breed reports, type these addresses into your browser and replace the xxxxxx with the breed of interest:

- Ram lambs- <https://signetdata.com/breed-summary/xxxxxx/ramlambs>
- Shearling rams- <https://signetdata.com/breed-summary/xxxxxx/shearlings>
- Stock rams- <https://signetdata.com/breed-summary/xxxxxx/stockrams>

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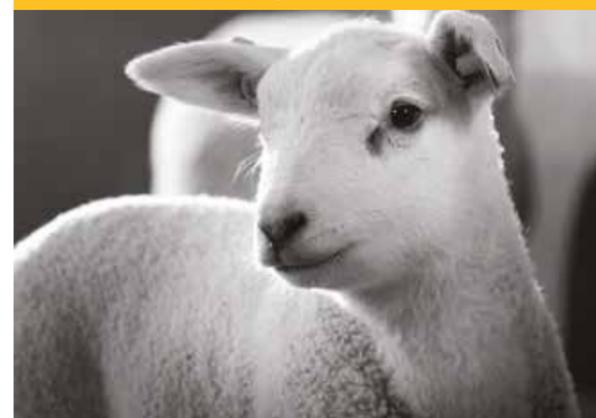
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# Following the flock

As the year draws to a close, we're back with Kevin Harrison in Somerset and Nigel Durnford in Wiltshire, as well as hearing from David Howlett in Derbyshire for the first time.

## David Howlett

NSA Central Region Chairman, Derbyshire



The autumn of 2019 has certainly been the gift that keeps on giving! The weather has made things particularly hard work here at Chatsworth Estate, but full credit to the shepherding team for their perseverance.

We have had to hold lambs on the main farm longer than we had hoped but all lambs are now away on winter forage crops and various grass leys on tenant farms across the estate and other land in the east of the country. It is remarkable what a change of farm does for these lambs. Hopefully the price is heading in the right direction too. Ewes are all dipped and are tugging well. The scanning results for the late January lambing flock of 192% was particularly pleasing, especially with a large number of shearlings in the flock. It is looking like we will need to house these slightly earlier this year. I continue to attend as many industry events as I am able too. I feel attending meetings/workshops help to gain some perspective from all the challenges that are presenting the industry at the moment.



David Howlett scanned in at 192%.



## Nigel Durnford

NSA South East Region Chairman, Wiltshire

Where has the year gone? It feels like lambing has only just finished!

After a very busy summer, the autumn has now gone but finished with an excellent NSA South East Region Sheep Health, Wealth and Production Conference (see page 5).

The ewes this year have come through the summer well and were in perfect condition to go to the tups, the Texel shearing ewes looking a real picture. I purchased a lovely ram lamb from the Texel pedigree sale at Worcester and he has worked really well, grown on and kept his condition despite working hard.

The Shropshires have done a great job in the Christmas tree plantations and have just been removed to allow the selection and cutting of the trees destined for the Christmas tree sales, which are now in full swing.

Now for the election, Christmas, Brexit – and before we know it we will be in the lambing sheds again – I can't wait.



## Kevin Harrison

English Committee Chairman, Somerset

This year our lambs performed well and finished quickly over the summer and, by the end of October, we had sold everything with the exception of 14 stragglers.

The price was disappointing as we got towards the end of the summer, but thankfully we managed to get some away earlier at a better price. We got 50 acres of turnips in at the beginning of September for winter feed for the ewes and ewe lambs but the turnips don't seem to have grown as well as last year so we will be hoping for an early spring. Tugging is complete with a more even spread of tugging over three weeks, which will be a relief compared to last year with over 60% lambing in the first week. The grass is holding up and ewes are in good condition. As we head into winter, our barns are full, manure spread, grain sold, no lambs left, ewes tugged, and replacements bought. What could possibly go wrong?



Kevin Harrison got 50 acres of turnips in for winter feed.

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