

SHEEPFARMER

DECEMBER 2021 / JANUARY 2022

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

COP26 UPDATE

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Plenty of resilience, but be aware of expectations

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER
DECEMBER 2021 / JANUARY 2022
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WELCOME & CONTENTS

Strong sheep prices make all the difference to the mood of a sheep farmer, and the positivity spills over to others within our industry.

I should qualify this by sparing a thought for sheep processors who have had to absorb increased export costs, and associated risks; reduced efficiency, due to a shortage of labour; and, of course, paid higher prices for lambs.

While inflated costs and inefficiencies are unwelcome and need to be addressed, I'd argue food inflation means high prices can work for everyone. But it's not just sheep prices that are high – farm-input prices are rocketing. And, as the winter progresses, they will undoubtedly eat away at margins. Farmers need to be at the top of their game to ensure investments made will yield a return.

Compared to other agricultural sectors, sheep farming is showing resilience. Reliance on inputs is relatively low and reliance on grass high, and our supply chains are still not overly concentrated and offer us a relatively wide basket of market opportunities. For years we have been criticised for being stubborn and too traditional, but we are now seeing evidence that our independence and diversity is an asset.

Challenging

But thank goodness for strong prices as elsewhere its been a challenging few months. Trade deals with Australia and New Zealand edge closer to completion. Both deals are based on a gradual liberalisation of trade with the world's largest sheep meat exporters.

The Prime Minister demonstrated a total disregard for welfare, culling in the pig sector and suggesting this didn't matter because farm animals are killed anyway. And then the Secretary of State for International Trade stated she didn't fear for 'her' sheep farmers in Northumbria – the deal with New Zealand would mean she could enjoy a leg of lamb in September, when 'there was no local lamb available'. I can't imagine many Northumbrian sheep farmers considered themselves 'hers' with a gaffe like that.

The commitments given to protect our high environmental and welfare standards appeared to be swept away with a vague recognition of UK/NZ 'equivalence'. The new Trade and Agriculture Commission will have its work cut out if it's to rescue us from the risks of both these deals.

But, despite this, confidence wins out over concern, and the potential for success is in our hands. We are seeing new export opportunities emerge, and we have finally recognised that our future is more about quality and adding value. While the next 10 to 15 years will see Australia and New Zealand able to export more lamb to the UK, this will only happen if people order it. Our domestic market is right here on our doorstep and there is a lot we can do – not just to maintain it but to also grow it.

Sustainability

I'll end with COP26, where our next step on an interesting journey towards net-zero farming begins. A total of 30,000 delegates spent two weeks in conference, yet little real detail has emerged. Two key things are clear. Firstly, the climate change and sustainability train is not going to slow down or stop and, secondly, the agreement to reduce methane emissions, by 30% by 2030, will place some expectations on livestock farming.

Methane is a short-lived gas that doesn't accumulate in the atmosphere, and its short life also means reducing its output can have a rapid effect on climate cooling in the short term. Livestock will remain under the spotlight, although it's plausible methane targets could be met without having to reduce sheep numbers. The sector is certainly innovative enough to find a number of ways to do this.

By the time you read this, the ministerial announcement will have been made detailing future farming schemes in England, many of which aim to tackle the challenges discussed at COP26. It's right to be urgently pushing forward with new schemes, but we are putting a lot of trust in Defra to be fair to our industry. It's been said the first thing to get to net zero will be the Basic Payment. It's a good job some people still have a sense of humour.

NSA NEWS

- 03 News in brief
- 04 Regional reports
- 06 Event reports
- 08 NSA activity on COP26
- 14 Sheep worrying update
- 22 Christmas message
- 34 Register of Sheep Advisers

REGULAR FEATURES

- 10 NSA policy
- 24 NSA Next Generation
- 30 Farm feature: David Raine
- 36 Business update
- 38 Technical information
- 60 Following the flock

SPECIAL FEATURES

- 20 Lamb market supply chain update
- 33 RABI survey results
- 56 Zoonose precautions



20 Transport issues are impacting the lamb market.



30 David Raine tells us about his sheep business



56 Take steps to protect your health.



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All welcome to annual regional meetings

NSA regions have annual members' meetings coming up early in 2022.

All meetings are open to members and non-members, although only members can vote. If you cannot attend in person, the option to join virtually will be provided wherever possible. Failing that, you can appoint a proxy vote via www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events or by calling NSA Head Office. Many of the meetings will include additional guest speakers (details on page 5).

- **Scotland** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Scottish Region will be held on Friday 28th January, at 3pm in the Lomond Suite, Stirling Agricultural Centre, Stirling, FK9 4RN. An evening dinner will follow, at the Macdonald Inchyra Hotel & Spa, Falkirk.
- **Marches** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Marches Region will be held on Tuesday 11th January, at 7pm, at the Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH.
- **Northern** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Region will be held on Wednesday 17th January, at 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 Tuesday 8th February, at 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 27th January, at 6.30pm, at Duncton High St, Duncton, Petworth GU28 0LB.
- **Northern Ireland** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA Northern Ireland Region will be held on Thursday 3rd February, 7.30pm, at Corr's Corner Hotel, 315 Ballyclare Road, Newtownabbey, County Antrim, BT36 4TQ.
- **South West** Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' Meeting for NSA South West Region will be held on Tuesday 24th February, at 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 Thursday 22nd February, at 2pm, in the International Pavilion, Royal Welsh Showground, Buith Wells, LD2 3WY.



NSA Lambing List now open

The NSA Lambing List is now open and ready for members to add details of any lambing placements that may need to be filled for the coming lambing season. *Add your details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list or contact NSA Head Office for further information.*



Support NSA while Christmas shopping

If you are Christmas shopping on Amazon this year, please consider adding NSA as your Amazon Smile charity. This means the Amazon Smile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the amount you spend on Amazon to NSA. And there's no catch. It's Amazon's way of paying back to society through 'socially responsible shopping'. To make sure NSA can benefit from what you spend on Amazon, head to smile.amazon.co.uk and either create an Amazon account or log into your existing Amazon account. Search for 'National Sheep Association' in the charity search function (not 'NSA') and select us as your chosen charity. Then enjoy some guilt-free shopping, knowing every penny you spend on Amazon is helping NSA carry out its work for the sheep sector.

Correction to Sheep Farmer Oct/Nov issue

An error was printed in the October/November copy of Sheep Farmer magazine reporting from the NSA South West Ram Sale. The article said a Texel shearling from the Uglov flock had sold for 1,450gns. This should have read that the shearling was sold by Phil and Lesley Martyn-Uglov of Launceston, Cornwall.

NSA Chief Executive marks 10-year anniversary

This November celebrates 10 years since Phil Stocker joined NSA.

Taking charge at a time before the term Brexit existed and climate change was an infrequent reference, nobody could have predicted the incredible change for British agriculture that Phil has – and continues to – lead the association through, in a manner that is respected throughout the industry and beyond. The 10-year anniversary has prompted a flurry of congratulatory messages for Phil, from far and wide, emphasising how lucky NSA is to have such an esteemed and capable champion.



Phil Stocker.

Scottish sheep farmer takes Solway prize

Winning a Solway lamb adopter will certainly make lambing time easier for Lucy Beattie of Ullapool in the Scottish Highlands. She is the latest winner of NSA's membership prize draw this year.

Lucy and her family run 200 North Country Cheviot and Mule breeding ewes, as well as tourism diversification businesses. She won a Solway Recycling lamb adopter after deciding to join NSA.

"I am delighted to have won this prize," says Lucy. "I joined NSA after conversations with several NSA Scottish Region officeholders, who explained how NSA can support youngsters and also upland livestock production – two things close to my heart. Coupled with ongoing change for our sector, I thought I should join because the more sheep farmers who can get together and talk about sheep, and lobby those in positions of power, the better."

One final Solway prize is still to be won. New members are entered on joining NSA, while existing members can also enter through recommending friends or family sign up.

More details at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership.



Lucy Beattie.

NSA officeholders



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Honorary President



Dan Phipps
Chair of the Board



David Gregory
Honorary Treasurer
Finance & General Purposes Chairman



Eddie Eastham
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NSA regional reports

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

I would like to start by thanking the region for the warm welcome I have had since starting my new role as NSA Northern Region Manager.

I have big boots to fill following on from Heather, but am looking forward to the challenge, and to working with Heather as she continues as event organiser for NSA North Sheep.

We recently held a committee meeting and have set the date for our Annual Regional Members' Meeting as Thursday 27th January, at Hexham Auction Mart. The evening will continue with a talk from Defra and NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, who will discuss what the future holds with the roll out of the Environmental Land Management Scheme and other future farm support initiatives.

The region is wanting to do more activities and be active with its members, so please email me with any ideas.



Chris Adamson.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting will take place on Tuesday 22nd February, at 2pm, at the Royal Welsh Showground's International Pavilion.

This will be a hybrid meeting. Along with the ARMM we will be hosting speakers to talk about sheep farming in a changing world and what NSA is doing to make sure sheep farming continues to thrive.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region was pleased to have a presence at the Welsh Winter Fair at the end of November. As always, the event was used to present the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society's John Gittins Award for outstanding contribution. We congratulate Terry Bayliss for winning this prestigious accolade.

Along with five farmers from mid-Wales, Mr Bayliss established Farmers Ferry in 1998 to stimulate export demand for British lamb. As chairman for 23 years, he has seen the company grow, establishing Farmers Fresh and its abattoirs in Warwickshire and Wrexham. They now process approximately one million sheep per year, equivalent to 10% of UK sheep production.



Terry Bayliss.



NSA Marches Region held a farm walk in October.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

The regional committee was joined by several new, as well as familiar, faces for its farm walk, which was hosted by Rich Thomas at Risbury Court, Leominster, in October.

All in attendance agreed it was a great insight into Rich's approach to regenerative farming for the future.

Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting will be held on Tuesday 11th January and all are encouraged and welcome to attend. Following the formal business, we look forward to being joined by speakers discussing how sheep and arable farmers can work together for the mutual benefit of their businesses. We look forward to seeing many faces there, but with Covid-19 cases still a concern for many, it will also be possible to join the meeting online. Contact me for details or go to the NSA website.



NSA Central Region's winter roadshow in full swing.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Secretary

Firstly we would like to congratulate Bryan Griffiths on his appointment to the Beef & Lamb Board of Red Tractor.

Bryan is an active member of our regional committee, and will be a valuable addition to the Red Tractor Board to represent NSA and sheep farmers.

I would like to thank everyone who made it to the NSA winter roadshow event in early December. With the ever increasing number of government and industry initiatives, and associated acronyms, it's often hard to understand how this links back to our day-to-day businesses. I hope you'll agree it is incredibly useful to hear how NSA and others are working on our behalf to navigate a way through this and how one farmer is applying this at the farm level.

We are pleased to announce that, providing there aren't any increased restrictions in the new year, we are holding our Annual Regional Members' Meeting and buffet, in person, on Thursday 24th February at the Stockman's Restaurant, Exeter Livestock Centre. While speakers are still to be confirmed, it is our intent to have a panel discussion followed by questions on where the sheep trade could be heading in the next 12 months and beyond. This should hopefully be an enlightening event and we hope many of you will be able to make it.

NSA Central Region

By Alice Heliwell, Secretary

The region is pleased to have held both an in-person committee meeting and a well-attended and enjoyable NSA winter roadshow, at Leek Hockey Club, Staffordshire, in November.

We have our Annual Regional Members' Meeting on Tuesday 8th February. Looking further ahead, NSA Central Region has two farm walks already in the pipeline for next year, but would welcome any regional members' ideas of farms or places they would like to visit to assist with planning.

NSA Eastern Region

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

NSA Eastern Region held its Annual Regional Members Meeting in mid-November, which was preceded by a committee meeting and followed by the first of the NSA winter roadshows.

It was a great afternoon and evening, which finished with a carvery at the Heath Court Hotel, Newmarket. Our 20-strong committee stands with all officeholders remaining the same.

During the meeting the region's healthy finances were explained, supported by the NSA Ram Sales at Rugby and Melton. The region thanks the team at Malvern for managing ram sale entries and associated finances. A model for this exists, which other regions can follow if it is appropriate.

The first of NSA's winter roadshows 'Sheep farming in a changing world' began with NSA Policy & Technical Officer Sean Riches giving insight into how NSA is working hard on our behalf. AHDB's Emma Steele explained what the levy board has been up to, beginning with the 'We eat balanced' campaign. This excellent promotion has resulted in an 11% increase in what consumers would put in their baskets. Sheep farmer and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Robert Spink also spoke during the session, explaining how he has developed his sheep business and is working to ensure it remains sustainable in the future.

See page 2 of this magazine for contact details of regional officeholders, and pages 10 and 11 for policy work by regions representing devolved nations.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

NSA Scottish Region was pleased to welcome young sheep farmers to Stirling in November for the NSA Next Generation winter conference.

I led a workshop about getting young people's voices heard and was pleased to see the level of enthusiasm, passion, genuine interest and thought participants were taking to contribute to the session.

Each subgroup contributed their own opinions and engaged in lengthy discussion on how baselining, capital funding, sequestration and knowledge transfer will impact our sector. Outcomes have been included in NSA Scottish Region's response to the future agricultural policy consultation.

NSA Scottish Region would like to thank all members who took part in this year's #LambforStAndrewsDay campaign. Their support and donations have helped to tell the positive story of sheep farming and promote eating lamb, particularly at a school aged level.

Keep an eye out for a new edition of the NSA Scottish Region Newsletter, which will be published in early January. The November edition can be viewed on the NSA Scottish Region website.

We are looking forward to our ARMM and annual dinner on Friday 28th January. To book tickets for the dinner, please contact Euan Emslie on 07729 346135 or euanemslie053@gmail.com.

Missing an excellent day out at an NSA sheep event? Us too!

Mark the 2022 and 2023 dates in your diary now.

2022

NSA Scot Sheep
Wednesday 1st June,
Dundee

NSA Sheep Event
Wednesday 27th July,
Worcestershire

2023

NSA Welsh Sheep
Tuesday 16th May, Powys

NSA North Sheep
Wednesday 7th June, Northumberland

NSA Sheep South West
Tuesday 20th June, Dorset

NSA Sheep Northern Ireland
July TBC, Co. Armagh



More at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events

Roadshows offer platform to discuss future of sheep farming

A team from NSA Head Office joined levy board representatives and farmers from across the NSA regions to deliver a series of interesting and thought-provoking roadshows during the past few weeks.

UK farming is experiencing the most significant changes for many generations, so the events were well timed for NSA to meet with members and other interested parties to discuss the UK sheep sector's role in an evolving environment. The evening discussions also provided opportunity for NSA to share its ongoing work to ensure the UK sheep sector continues to be well represented.

"Farming, food, and land management are all significantly impacted by challenges posed by climate change and the loss of the natural world," says NSA Policy & Technical Officer Sean Riches, who led several roadshow discussions. "And this

is compounded by significant economic, social and political uncertainty.

"UK sheep farming is on the cusp of huge changes in trade patterns, with trade deals advanced with Australia and New Zealand, alongside a complete revamp of farming, food and environmental policy that will restructure farm support.

Challenges

"While there are many risks and challenges, there are also equal opportunities and the future is bright for those willing to adapt and move with the changing tide. The roadshows were an ideal platform to discuss this and it was highly encouraging to hear farmers thoughts on how they are prepared to do what they can to build a more sustainable and successful sheep industry for the future."

NSA thanks farmer delegates who joined the roadshows and shared stories of how they're working to future-proof their systems and



Roadshow attendance has been strong.

meeting any challenges, head on, along the way.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker adds: "NSA is working tirelessly to defend sheep farming, to position it as one of the solutions to many of the world's challenges, and to take actions to turn opportunities into reality. It is great to be able to speak directly with our members about how this work is valued, face to face, after only being able to make contact via video links for so long. We look forward to further events in 2022."

SHWAP goes virtual – and breaks NSA online event records

The fourth NSA South East Region Sheep Health, Wealth and Production (SHWAP) conference took place in October, attracting a record-breaking number of attendees from the UK and further afield to an online NSA event.

Taking place during three themed evenings, the conference covered topics including both sheep and shepherd health, the role of multi-species swards in arable rotations, and how to attract and support the next generation of sheep farmers.

NSA was pleased to be joined by some well-known names from the UK sheep sector, which helped attract the high number of online delegates. Flock Health's Fiona Lovatt and Moredun's Fiona Kenyon launched the event on the first evening of the conference, sharing their wealth of experience in sheep health and flock

health planning. And they were joined by Yellow Wellies' Eleanor Sanger for stimulating discussion on the importance of maintaining farmer mental wellbeing, as well as the physical health of sheep.

On the second evening 'production' took the spotlight, with presentations from University College Dublin's Tommy Boland, Essex-based sheep farmer Ian Metson, and Farm Carbon Tool Kit's Becky Willson.

Speakers

The third and final evening speakers – Dyson Farming's Peter Lord, British Grassland Society's Tom Goatman, BGS mentor Yann De Lu and mentees Caroline and Tom Slay, and NSA Communications Officer Katie James – spoke about their experiences in supporting young sheep farmers entering the industry.

Event organiser NSA South East Chairman Yann Le Du says: "Despite my initial reservations

SHWAP

SHEEP, HEALTH, WEALTH AND PRODUCTION CONFERENCE
NSA South East Region

about running our fourth SHWAP as a virtual event, foregoing social interactions during and after the conference, I was delighted by the added potential offered in terms of increasing our audience to a nationwide one and having attendees from mainland Europe.

"The event was a huge success and all involved in its organisation hope the attendees found it valuable. We also hope it will have inspired members to join us again in two years' time for SHWAP 2023."

The event was sponsored by MSD Animal Health, Elanco, Rappa, Datamars and (for the Wednesday session) Germinal.

Watch all three SHWAP webinars at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars.

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- Moroni et al. Effect of intramammary infection in Bergamasca meat sheep on milk parameters and lamb growth. *J Dairy Res.* 2007 Aug;74(3):340-4. doi: 10.1017/S0022029907002506. Epub 2007 Apr 24.
- Henry J. Assessment of *S. aureus* vaccine against mastitis in UK flocks. ISVC 2017 Oral communication
- Sánchez, R et al. Case of study: Evaluation of the impact of mastitis vaccination on mastitis treatment in a dairy goat farm in the southwest of Spain. WBC 2016. Poster

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What does COP26 mean for UK sheep farmers?

By Katie James, NSA



What can be done to help slow climate change and what role can British agriculture play in this? That was a question asked by many at the recent COP26 summit.

Frequently the answer from those not in full appreciation of the positive role UK farming, particularly sheep production, can play is to simply reduce meat consumption. But this is not necessarily the answer and, during recent weeks and months, NSA has emphatically re-emphasised this, urging the British public not to point the finger of blame at the nation's farmers in the climate change debate and not to use farming and land management to offset ongoing polluting practices elsewhere.

Valuable

In a series of messages shared with the media in the lead up to COP26, NSA highlighted the many positive ways in which sheep farming delivers for the environment, economy and society – from explaining how grasslands are effective carbon sinks to the sector's valuable role in promoting nature recovery and its position as a backbone to so many rural communities. The messages have been clear – UK sheep production can be part of the solution to the climate issues we face.

This work within the media was further strengthened with a booklet produced by NSA sharing positive messages on the varied aspects



Grazing livestock are part of the climate change solution, without cutting herd and flock numbers.

of sustainability that sheep farming is able to deliver in.

Aiming to reach those with influence on the future climate change agenda in the UK, the booklet was sent to all MPs in the UK and other notable people ahead of COP26. It is also continuing to be used to promote sheep farming, as a useful resource for general public and those involved in key organisations, such as Defra.

The 'Already part of the solution' booklet provides clear information about the positive role sheep farming play, under the headings of grassland, emissions, nature and community – the same headings as were used for press releases and social media content while COP26 was running. In the booklet and online, the topics are supported by case studies from farmers around the UK.

So, with such a positive story to share, how can UK sheep producers reach out and be heard; and has the UN Climate Change Agreement, finalised at the COP26 summit, resulted in this challenge being made harder to do?

Principles

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "COP26 took place during a full two-week period with thousands of participants and hundreds of discussion sessions. But it's still not possible to identify any practical outcomes and most of the effort went into agreeing broad principles.

"But the direction of travel is clear and there is little doubt the heightened narrative will have increased many farmers' awareness and willingness to take actions on their own farm even further. We are seeing the cost of many farm inputs increasing, so farmers have little choice but to buy and use resources as sparingly as possible, and to take measures that, at the same time, reduce carbon footprint and production costs.

"The farming industry has signed up to being net zero by 2030, based on reducing farm emissions, creating habitats such as hedgerows and trees, optimising sward lengths to sequester more carbon, and producing renewable energy on farm. This will need a reliable tool that measures footprinting on a whole-life-cycle basis, and it will need more agreement on how methane is measured – taking account of global warming potential (GWP*) and the short life cycles of methane."

Offsetting

NSA also believes more thought needs to be given to the use of farmland for carbon offsetting, to ensure this does not allow heavy fossil fuel-reliant industries to continue being the real cause of the climate problem. Carbon sequestration cannot be counted or paid for twice.

Mr Stocker continues: "One commitment that was made was an agreement across 105 countries, but not all nations, on the reduction of methane output of 30% by 2030. It's easy to think this unfairly impacts livestock production. But enteric methane from ruminants is not the only source of national methane outputs and the reason for this target is due to the potency of methane compared to carbon dioxide and nitrous oxide. The short life cycle of methane means reductions in output will have a greater cooling effect.

"Oxford University work discovered that methane has a significantly shorter life than the other gases, which was great news for sheep farming. But the cooling argument now piles pressure on from another angle. It does, however, suggest there is a real value in reducing methane emissions, and maybe that value should be recognised financially given that livestock, and particularly grassland farming, could help solve

longer-term problems caused by the fossil fuel-based industries.

"I don't think anyone should be surprised fossil fuels are so heavily implicated in climate disturbance. The past 100 years have seen millions of years' worth of carbon previously secured deep inside our planet mined and released into the atmosphere."

Targets

Other agreements secured at COP26 included a 'phasing down' of coal use, the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, and investment in vulnerable communities in parts of the world most affected by climate change.

Mr Stocker concludes: "Reducing methane outputs in livestock could hold a value, although the case will need to be made. We can contribute to methane reductions through efficiencies and improved management, and without the need to reduce the size of the sheep industry. Reducing days to slaughter obviously reduces methane outputs, but we need honest and full-lifecycle analysis and assessments of broader sustainability metrics to fully understand the implications of taking such actions at scale."

Find more information and the NSA 'Already part of the solution' booklet at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/uk-sheep-industry/sheep-and-the-environment.

NSA Breakfast Club delivered straight from COP26



Getting in on the action as it happened direct from COP26's Blue zone in Glasgow, NSA's November Breakfast Club looked at how the climate summit was considering UK agriculture.

It was surprising to hear agriculture had not been specifically high on the conference agenda – but it was increasingly evident it could not be separated from the debate on achieving decarbonisation targets.

Commitments

Speakers – Scottish Farmer journalist Claire Taylor and Leeds University's Piers Forster – described how some of the decisions and commitments made at the summit would have a significant impact on the way we farm in the UK. Points were made of how inaccuracies in the metrics used to measure agriculture's impact on climate change were leading to continued portrayal, particularly by the media, of livestock production as a major contributor to global warming. This continually fails to separate UK practices from those in other parts of the world.

This 'One piece of the global puzzle' webinar, along with several other COP26-themed sessions, can be watched back at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars. Head to the same place for the December NSA Breakfast Club – 'Lamb for all seasons: an update on how your product sustains the body, mind and environment'.

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The NSA booklet is available online.

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Northern Ireland's environmental bills enter next phase

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



It seems we've been talking about a climate change bill in Northern Ireland forever, but I make no excuses for doing so once again.

Two rival climate bills are now progressing at Stormont, with Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots' draft executive bill joining Claire Bailey's (Green Party) existing private members' bill. The agriculture minister claimed Ms Bailey's bill would damage the agri-food industry. She proposes a target of net zero by 2045, but the minister aims to achieve at least an 82% reduction in emissions by 2050.

Targets

Both bills seek to set targets and carbon budgets with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. One of the major differences between the two bills, however, is the journey to net zero. The private members' bill has a more ambitious target of 'establishing a mandate for climate change mitigation and adaptation in Northern Ireland', wanting our nation to be net zero by 2045. The Executive Bill looks to 2050 and an 'equitable contribution' by Northern Ireland to UK net zero.

This approach is based on a DAERA consultation and the advice of the UK Climate Change Committee (an independent body providing expert advice to the UK Governments on climate change). The agricultural industry will have to make changes and adaptations to how it operates in the future

to achieve the targets in either bill, but does prefer Mr Poots' way forward.

Unfortunately, at present it appears most Assembly Members would favour Ms Bailey's bill. So this is where it is crucial that our industry does its utmost to explain the implications this will have on the whole industry before the next phase of these two bills, which takes place in January. I'm holding a farm visit in December, organised by Ulster Farmers Union, when local ministers will be able to see how a working farm operates and what the difficulties farmers face to reach net zero.

Roadshow

As I write this, we are looking forward to the NI leg of the NSA winter roadshow, where we will share a platform with UFU at Newtownabbey, County Antrim, to talk about the work of both organisations and the implications of the impending Climate Change Bill for the sheep sector.

We have had some developments on the movements of sheep between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, with the option of registering as a Qualified Risk Scrapie Flock. So before the end of the year can should be able to move stock from GB to NI. To date not many flocks have applied for this status, but it is a simple process that will only be available for a short time.

There is still no real movement in allowing NI sheep travelling to shows or sales in Great Britain to return home, as there is no guidance yet on the criteria required to allow venues to become an export assembly centre.

Scottish climate change targets and sheep scab control initiative

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



In the previous issue of Sheep Farmer, I wrote about the steps Scottish Government had been taking towards agricultural transition in Scotland via the Agricultural Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB).

The consultation had just been launched and NSA Scottish Region has now responded to this and would like to thank all members for their contributions. While much of the latest focus of new agricultural policy will incorporate climate change mitigation and biodiversity improvements, it is clear we must not lose sight of sustainable and viable food production.

Consequences

Efficient farming and crofting will have residual benefits for the industry and the Government. To change the direction of capital funding completely will result in many unintended consequences and further reduce the national flock and our workforce directly. This is clearly not a desirable outcome. We advocate practical solutions that can be implemented on all farms to allow a standard level of conformity while, at the same time, ensuring all farm businesses can benefit not only for food production but also the many other objectives surrounding agriculture, such as meeting climate change and biodiversity

targets. Our farmers and crofters play diverse roles, whether they be from a stockmanship element or an environmental one. Flexibility and diversity are vital for survival.

One year on

In late 2020 we were fast approaching Brexit with little sense of direction, as well as new climate change targets being written into law. There was also a high lamb trade (little did we know it would continue) and the hope that new laws, coupled with stronger penalties, for sheep worrying by dogs would be introduced. We are still none the wiser about the overall direction of travel, but we are starting to see some snippets of information appear.

NSA Scottish Region has recently had encouraging dialogue with both Scottish Government's Disease Control Branch and Moredun, with particular attention being paid to endemic diseases. An industry-led sheep scab working group will reconvene in early December with Regional Chairman Jen Craig leading the working group. It is anticipated a review of activities that have taken place in England and Wales will be undertaken to assess their efficacy and if they should be replicated in Scotland. Talks have also taken place to pursue the accurate diagnosis and testing of OPA, with the long-term ambition for control and eradication. It is still early days, but we need to start somewhere.

Welsh focus on net zero and red meat and wool opportunities

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region played a part in COP Cymru, speaking alongside representatives from HCC, FUW and NFU Cymru as part of a panel discussion entitled 'Fields of ambition'.

This focused on nature, adaptation and resilience safeguarding for natural habitats and ecosystems, to preserve biodiversity and to help our communities adapt to the impact of climate change.

The Welsh Government has published 'Net Zero Wales – the next phase towards a greener, stronger, fairer Wales'. The plan contains more than 120 proposals covering everything from peatland restoration to active travel, and includes farming, land use and forestry. The report states how a sustainable farming scheme will require all farms across Wales to reduce on-farm emissions through improved livestock, land and manure management.

To support tree-planting, 10% of agricultural land will be shared by 2050 while maintaining a strong food production sector across Wales. The plan also says people will be encouraged to consider their diet and to eat healthier, more sustainably and locally sourced food and to actively consider the positive impacts of minimising food waste. By 2030, 43,000ha of woodland will be created and a further 180,000ha by 2050.

Many of the trees planted will contribute to the new National Forest for Wales, stretching from the north to the south. A total of 3,000ha of peatland will be on a recovery pathway by 2025, with the sale of peat in compost banned.

Red meat

I attended HCC's annual conference, a gathering of the red meat industry in Wales, encompassing farmers, processors, policymakers and academics. I wasn't disappointed. Having heard at COP26 how our industry is a significant part of the greenhouse gas problem, it was good to hear we are able to highlight the sustainability of the Welsh red meat sector.

'The Welsh way: towards a sustainable and prosperous red meat sector' was an apt title. There was a wide range of speakers, including Minister for Rural Affairs Lesley Griffiths, NSA member Carys Jones and NSA Next Generation Ambassador Ernie Richards.

The conference also suggested the future also looks brighter for Welsh wool. With farmers seeing lower prices for their wool, a new project is keen to reach out to them to discuss opportunities for a fairer deal. Led by Menter

Môn, 'Made with Wool' aims to add value to Welsh wool as a natural and sustainable product. As part of the scheme, farmers and others with an interest in the supply chain can attend training and mentoring sessions, and have their wool tested at a specialist facility in Caernarfon.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be responding to the consultation launched by Welsh Government on changes to livestock identification, registration and movement. The regional committee will be providing input and we encourage individual members to contact us with views as well.

At the time of writing, we understand there will be an offer of free sheep scab testing in Wales this winter. This will raise awareness of the disease and to help farmers and vets accurately diagnose and take steps to eliminate it. Further details will follow.



Links and further information

- Read about Net Zero Wales at www.gov.wales/net-zero-wales.
- Download HCC's practical guide to reducing on-farm emissions and increasing carbon sequestration at www.meatpromotion.wales/en/industry-resources/environment.
- For more from Menter Môn's work on wool, email Helen Howard Jones at helen@mentermon.com.
- The deadline for the Welsh Government livestock identification consultation is Sunday 2nd January. Email helen@nationalsheep.org.uk with your views.

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Levy bodies – play your part in deciding direction of future focus

By Sean Riches, NSA

The role of the levy board is to take a levy from produce to cover the cost of promoting, developing, sharing knowledge and supporting the respective sector in the trading market in which they operate.

The expectation is for the respective bodies to use the levy money as a collective for initiatives to take maximum advantage of market conditions.

In the UK, specific to beef and lamb, there are four levy bodies working in the respective devolved administrations: in England, the Agriculture & Horticulture Board (AHDB); in Scotland, Quality Meat Scotland (QMS); in Wales Hybu Cig Cymru – Meat Promotion Wales (HCC); and in Northern Ireland, the Livestock and Meat Commission (LMC).

In spring 2022 levy payers in England will be able to have their say on what the major challenges are for the sheep sector and influence

the work AHDB does to help counter this. No doubt the levy bodies in the devolved nations will be watching the outcome with interest.

Levy payers will be able to vote on the structure and priorities of the various AHDB sector levy bodies, under two new proposals unveiled by AHDB and the Government. This comes as a result of discussions after the response to the earlier (2018) request for views, where calls were made for a regular vote for levy payers, at least once every five years, and a desire for much greater involvement, as well as a say in the future direction of AHDB's activities, including how levy payers' money will be spent.

Register

To be able to participate in the AHDB vote in spring 2022, eligible levy payers will first have to register at ahdb.org.uk/shape-the-future.

Once registered, an information pack will be sent out with further details of what is expected in the vote and any further actions required.

This is your opportunity to shape the future by having a say on what is important to you and your business. Whether that's the work that goes into protecting the reputation of the industry or marketing the benefits of lamb to consumers at home and abroad. Maybe it's the market prices and the forecasting, or the practical advice and guidance shared through manuals and at events.

NSA is encouraging levy payers to register and to vote on the basis that it is levy payers' opportunity to influence where levy money is best spent and, in due course, who the nominations are to represent farmers on a planned AHDB Beef & Lamb Council (part of the new governance restructure). There is a lot of AHDB work that is visible to levy payers, and much that is less visible but strategically important, so AHDB's communication on this will be critical.

NSA is happy to play its part to help sheep farmers understand how levy money is used. As an example, the current AHDB-led Industry Reputation Working Group has been well received and gone a long way to bring farmers, processors and industry organisations together to develop, share and fund activities to strengthen consumer confidence that purchasing beef and lamb is a positive choice.

AHDB is an evidence-based organisation, seeking out data and information to ensure a balanced perspective is maintained to support the sustainable production and consistent food security expected by UK consumers. The 'We eat balanced' campaign has shown how effective, segmented and targeted marketing can make a difference, when simple, substantiated facts are communicated in an engaging way.

Consumption

As many will know there have been some distinctive trends in meat consumption during the past 10-20 years, as well as more defined pandemic-driven ones just recently. Red meat consumption has fallen consistently, replaced mostly by white meat. However the past 18-24 months did see an uptick in red meat consumption as eating out was replaced with eating at home due to lockdown restrictions. The 'buy local' message, due to Covid-19 restrictions, saw an increase in fresh meat sales at local butchers and farm shops. Both Brexit and Covid-19 has led more of the British public valuing what they are eating, where it has come from and how it has been produced.

NSA believes the industry should take the opportunity to further build on the support of the British public and amplify the work done by campaigns, such as 'We eat balanced', to exploit opportunities in our domestic markets and

increase our self-sufficiency. UK consumers only really like legs of lamb, for a Sunday roast and mostly at Easter. By aligning initiatives such as British Heritage Sheep with the marketing skills demonstrated by the AHDB, and other levy bodies, we see the prospect of promoting different cuts of meat, for different weekday meals, with seasonal slants based on the wide and diverse geographical locations on which sheep meat is produced. Work could also perhaps bring mutton back into fashion.

Advantage

As the world opens up again, and the UK looks to establish itself as an independent trading nation, it is important to have the right people in the right places at the right time to take advantage of opportunities for meat and/or genetic exports. NSA welcomes how AHDB has ensured there are representatives flying the flag for British produce both at home and, so importantly now, overseas.

This has led to the opening up of some new markets recently, including Japan, as well as the identification of the growing opportunity for sheep meat in the Middle East. NSA believes that, for continued development of both local and international markets, the visibility of all levy body representatives is paramount, both here and abroad, for the UK food and farming supply chain to achieve its full potential, and to collect useful global market intelligence to enable the sharing of best practice.

With knowledge exchange playing such an important role as the industry adapts to meet new challenges, communication with farmers, as well as accessibility and visibility, is of vital for all of the levy bodies. In Northern Ireland LMC has been recognised for becoming more effective and having staff who are good at understanding problems from an industry point view - although they are sometimes difficult to contact due to their workload. HCC in Wales also communicates well with its grassroots farmers and this will only



'Buy local' message increased fresh-meat sales.

go from strength to strength as the repatriation of the levy has more affect going forward.

Sustainability

To support farmers both today and tomorrow, NSA maintains all the levy bodies will need to rise even further to meet the challenges the industry will face from increasing sustainability requirements, on farm emissions and food security. Providing feedback with up-to-date market intelligence, and working with and for more diverse markets at home and abroad, requires focus on the greatest impacts both positive and negative, such as those areas that are vital to support the wider reputation of beef and lamb. These are genetics, enhanced animal health to reduce antibiotic usage, and the environment (including soil and grassland management).

Increased communication in the form of QMS' Scottish Red Meat Resilience Group, formed to give the Scottish red meat industry a collective

voice when responding to key industry issues, has been hugely welcomed. But there have also been calls for a specific marketing group for lamb in the future to ensure the longevity of, for example, the Scotch Lamb PGI brand, particularly in the light of new policy that will no doubt have different orientations to previous years.

NSA is pleased that all levy bodies have seen the benefits of working collaboratively – something it has consistently requested for several years. It makes no sense to duplicate work and, while NSA recognises that it works in a competitive market in relation to various PGI marks, NSA also feels strongly how much new trade development activity is done on a UK level involving all four nations.

Our levy bodies are fortunate to have significant financial resource with which to further our sheep industry. But with such opportunity comes the responsibility to use the money to support the entire industry in a way farmers can engage with.



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Check out the new website at www.moredun.org.uk



Sheep-worrying posters designed by creative young farmers

As part of its ongoing work to highlight the issue of sheep worrying to the public, NSA recently ran an open competition for children to design their own warning sign suitable to be displayed on farm reminding dog owners to keep their animals on a lead when walking near sheep.

"For many years, as many members will be aware, NSA has highlighted the seriousness of this issue and has taken actions, such as supplying free farm signs to members to alert dog walkers of the risk posed to sheep if their pet is allowed to run off lead," says NSA Communications Officer Katie James. "Unfortunately, NSA is aware that too often these signs are ignored.

Fantastic

"But it is hard to ignore a plea from a child, and that was the thinking behind our competition. We were pleased to receive some fantastic entries to catch the public's eye and shows them, through the eyes of children, the devastation that could occur if they fail to keep their dogs under control and on a lead when near livestock."

Entries were submitted in three age categories: under eight years old, eight to 12 years old, and 13-16 years old. The signs are designed to be suitable for display on fence posts and around farmland, reminding dog walkers to keep their pet on a lead in areas where sheep may be present.

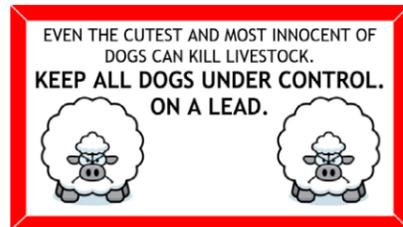


Overall winning poster, designed by Max (age nine).

Winning the eight to 12 category and overall competition was Max, aged nine, from Kent, with NSA judges all in agreement that his simple design delivered all the information needed. Winning the other age categories were Isabelle, aged six, from Lancashire, and Alice, aged 14, from Scotland. Max's winning design is now available to download from the NSA website at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/dog-owners/dog-control-sign for use as a sign on farm.



Under eight-years-old category winner was Isabelle (age six).



Alice (age 14) won the 13-16-year-olds category.

NSA members are reminded that weather-proof signs asking for dogs to be kept on leads are available for free by contacting NSA Head Office.



Sheep worrying is year-round threat

Shorter days and falling temperatures may feel like a welcome relief for farmers who worry about the possibility of attacks on sheep by dogs.

But, despite 2021's spring and summer months seeing a peak of reported cases, NSA is reminding members, and highlighting to the general public, that the threat of dogs worrying sheep is, unfortunately, not a seasonal issue.

The past two years has brought an increasing number of dog walkers into the countryside, as dog ownership has soared and Covid-19 has kept many people from their usual pastimes. This has led to many sheep farmers across the UK reporting an

increase in sheep worrying attacks by dogs. And with Christmas and New Year holidays almost upon us it is likely many people will once again get out and about walking with their dogs, putting sheep flocks at risk.

To remind members of the procedure to follow should there be an attack on their flock, NSA now has a bank of questions available on its website, answered by PC David Allen of North Wales Police and member of the Livestock Worrying Roundtable, which may help at what can be a devastating time.

To read this invaluable advice please visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/dog-owners



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Healthy flocks – healthy returns

By Sean Riches, NSA

NSA has always acknowledged the importance of sheep health and good welfare in efficient production. The two form the basis of sustainable, grass-based sheep meat systems.

With increasing demand for sustainably produced and 'trusted' food, it is important to understand and provide what consumers want while, at the same time, speeding up innovation, looking for efficiencies, improving productivity, and protecting the environment.

Healthy livestock realises its genetic potential, thus optimising production efficiency and reducing both the cost of production and environmental impact. There are significant welfare gains to be made by having a healthy flock. And the healthier animals are the fewer antibiotics are used.

Initiatives

NSA began to speak publicly about the potential for a Government funded livestock health and welfare scheme eight years ago, as part of the Rural Development Programme available to the UK when it was a member of the EU. It was this thinking that led to recent Welsh Government-funded sheep health initiatives and interest in health and welfare schemes as part of the new Future Farming programmes in England.

Since the UK's departure from the EU, and the potential for more freedom in farm support

schemes, the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England (AHWBE) and Defra have brought together a number of stakeholders to develop a programme to incentivise and reward farmers for maintaining high welfare standards. The programme is for England only, and NSA will watch with interest on whether the devolved nations develop something similar.

Stewart Houston, non-executive member of AHWBE, says: "During the past couple of years, a group of farmers, vets, specialists and Defra teams in England, have worked together to design a way that helps farmers to enhance the health and welfare of their stock. This ambitious vision is coming to fruition through the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway."

The Annual Health and Welfare Review will be the first part of the pathway to launch, planned for spring 2022. But this will be just the beginning. Further funding, including grants from £2,000 for investments in equipment or infrastructure that improve health and welfare on farm, will be launched later (see figure below).

The review comprises a fully-funded, yearly vet visit, where a farmer's own vet will carry out a review of the livestock enterprise. They can also carry out diagnostic testing and provide bespoke advice on health, welfare, biosecurity and responsible use of medicines on farm. This will provide valuable data to enable widespread monitoring and help address a range of endemic diseases, which are estimated to cost the sheep sector around £85 million each year.

Farmers may also be signposted to the other financial support that becomes available through the pathway, such as investments in sustainable approaches to mitigate environment impact or improvements to livestock living conditions.

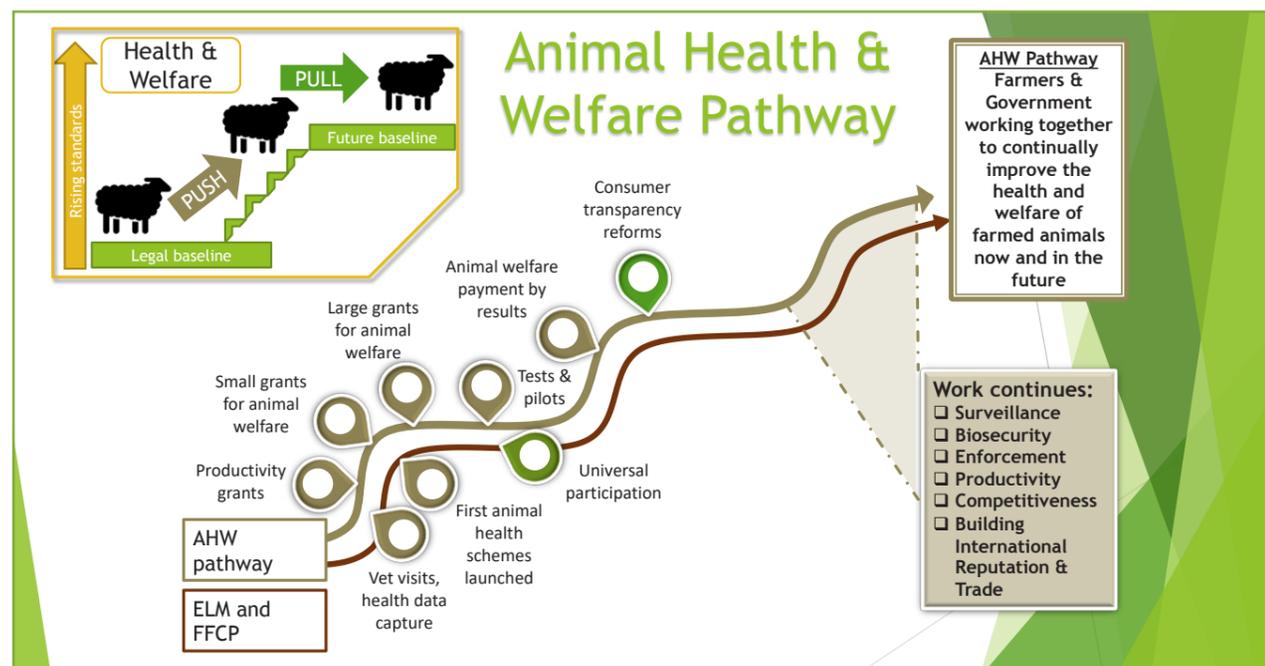
Flexible

The offer will initially be available for all commercial sheep farmers in England, with 20 or more sheep, who are currently eligible for the BPS. The aim is to open the offer to all sheep keepers in England, again with a flock of more than 20 head, at some point in the future. The actual timing is still to be determined.

"The pathway is designed to be flexible enough for all farmers to benefit in some way, no matter when they join," explains Mr Houston. "For example, some sheep farmers already have regular flock health reviews, but may benefit from referral to a grant for a specific welfare investment. And improving the health and welfare of sheep on neighbouring farms will directly benefit your flock."

The health priorities for the sheep sector have already been published in 'The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024' and those for welfare will be announced shortly. Applications for the review will open soon and Defra (and NSA) will keep farmers updated.

For more information, see Defra's Future Farming blog at defrafarming.blog.gov.uk.



This graphic is supplied by Defra. AHW = Animal Health and Welfare. ELM = Environmental Land Management. FFCP = Future Farming and Countryside Programme.

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Medicine Hub set to collect national data on antibiotic use

High on many political and public agendas, and linked to the annual vet review, is the need for responsible use of antibiotics in order to preserve their effectiveness in both human and animal health.

And, as a requirement to enable future export trade, UK producers will need to consider possible EU rule changes, with member countries having to provide information on antibiotic use in cattle from 2023 and sheep from 2026.

The UK's comparatively low levels of antibiotic use at farm level, particularly in the more extensive production systems utilised by sheep farmers relative to much of Europe, is recognised. But there is a lack of a collated, single-source national dataset that effectively measures the use of antibiotics at farm level and can provide the necessary evidence.

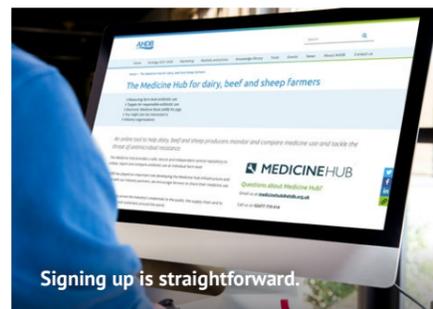
NSA is therefore engaged in how the industry-led Medicine Hub (developed by AHDB) plans

to address this, by offering a protected, secure and independent central repository to collate, report and analyse UK-level antibiotic data from a variety of sources, including farm records of medicine use, vet prescribers and, data on sales from vets to individual farms.

Permission

The hub can also take in data collected by others in the supply chain. Farmers can give their permission for access to information already submitted, or held elsewhere, so they need supply the data only once. The data collected will be anonymised before reporting and will be crucial to the UK being able to prove ongoing responsible use and for the industry to meet new national antibiotic-use-reduction targets, jointly agreed by vets and producers through the RUMA Targets Task Force.

Vets, as the prescribers and gatekeepers of antibiotics, have a significant role to play in



this. NSA is encouraging sheep farmers (just in England, at this stage) to register on the Medicine Hub and to 'Add vet-practice permission' to allow their vet to access their antibiotic data. This may be for the vet to view only, to edit, or to edit and submit data on the clients behalf.

Farmers can then contact their vet to confirm they have completed this step. In some instances, the vet may be ahead of the game and make contact first, as registering farm clients will now be an important first step towards demonstrating the success of a wide range of antibiotic stewardship activities undertaken in these sectors during the past five years.

The Medicine Hub can be accessed at medicinehub.ahdb.org.uk. NSA hopes it will become a UK-wide initiative in time - see below.

UK-wide data collection under consideration

There will be a change to farm assurance in Wales from this spring, with antibiotic use to become a more formal part of the annual health and welfare review required by Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers (WLBP) and Farm Assured Welsh Livestock Scheme (FAWL).

It was felt the annual review of medicine data, in which vets would make recommendations for responsible and reduced use, was being hindered by a lack of quality and standardised data, particularly around antimicrobial benchmarking.

Having invested in the problem, a WLBP antimicrobial use calculator was developed, which allows vets to assign medicine use to farm enterprises. This ensures analysis of medicine information uses standardised, quality data to achieve more meaningful results.

Advice

WLBP has commissioned a software platform to bring together the data needed to provide advice to farmers. The platform will permission, aggregate and standardise data from vet practices, and other sources, to produce reports for scheme members to discuss during the annual vet review.

From spring 2022 the calculation of antibiotic use on sheep, beef and dairy farms using the WLBP platform will form an additional part of this review in the FAWL scheme. WLBP believes having this data available will help demonstrate that farmers and vets in Wales are able to easily work with the data of the farm to determine appropriate and responsible levels of antibiotic use. It will allow:

- Farm-level monitoring of antibiotic use (benchmarking).
- National monitoring of use (benchmarking).
- Targets to monitor use and responsible use.
- Informed decisions for health planning.
- Contribution towards sustainable production of animals and helping the environment.

NSA is interested in the next step, which will see WLBP liaise with AHDB and other industry stakeholders across the UK to determine methods to enable the sharing of the data to contribute to UK-wide reporting.

The Medicine Hub is also working on the development of interfaces to transfer in data collected by the STAMP antimicrobial usage

benchmarking tool in Northern Ireland. Quality Meat Scotland's commitment to promoting good antibiotic stewardship includes collation of antibiotic data. It is planning to consult with industry in Scotland to explore the possible options, including the need to be able to aggregate data across borders in order to report antibiotic use on a UK-wide basis.



Blood testing can help to inform health planning decisions.

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Reference:

1. J. Onyango et al (2014). Prevalence, risk factors and vaccination efficacy of contagious ovine ecthyma (orf) in England. *Veterinary Record* 10.1136/vr102353

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HGV drivers are in short supply.

SPECIAL FEATURE

Supply chain challenges present opportunities for UK lamb sector

Demand for lamb is at an all-time high and, while this is great news for farmers, processors need to work even harder to achieve carcase balance and stand a fighting chance of generating any sort of positive margin.

The supply-chain squeeze – caused by a nationwide shortage of HGV drivers, rising fuel costs and issues with labour shortages, particularly in abattoirs – is impacting the UK lamb market. Steps are being taken, and more are needed, to alleviate the pinch points.

So says the Scottish Association of Meat Wholesalers (SAMW) Executive Manager Martin Morgan. He explains the key drivers behind high UK lamb prices are lower supplies from New Zealand (NZ), particularly into Europe (there are indications more NZ lamb is going to China), and a strong export trade for carcasses running in parallel with a fairly strong UK retail trade.

Bounce-back

“Domestically, we are seeing a bounce-back after the Covid-19 shut down and also because cost inflation has not yet fed through to retail prices in the UK,” says Mr Morgan.

“It is also worth noting that the red meat supply chain is being hit with increased costs in so many areas – not only raw material, but also utilities, transport, labour – and these are slow in flowing through to the consumer and are, therefore, hitting profitability at various points in the chain.”

Ultimately, says Mr Morgan, they will feed through to higher consumer prices and could have an impact on demand as we get into 2022. He

suggests it’s a kind of warning shot across the bows for any ‘happy days are here to stay’ sentiment at the producer end.

Farmers First Director Mike Gooding says: “It’s a fascinating time - but straight forward supply and demand remains the key driver. Of course, what influences supply and demand can be many different things and all will impact the balance and have a bearing on farmgate price.

“Reflecting on this year, probably the most significant moment for the sheep sector was maintaining access to the European market on 1st January. This is not to say Brexit has added anything positive, rather the opposite with the challenges of customs declarations and health certificate protocols that are not fit for purpose, but the fact that we could continue to trade across the Channel has maintained the level of demand.”

He adds that many farmers reduced breeding numbers in the run-up to Brexit, with breeding ewes down by approximately one million animals. “With demand staying firm and supply tight, farmgate prices have remained good,” he says.

“It would have been different without the European customers. Establishing new export markets outside the EU is, as we have said consistently during the past three years, a long hard slog, and no new markets could possibly pick-up the volumes exported to the EU in the short or even medium term.”

Shortage

So what about the HGV-driver shortage – is it as bad as the media says and does it threaten this hard-won EU trade? “Yes, it is really a serious issue and creating real challenges throughout the entire food supply chain – and beyond,” says Mr Morgan.

Mr Gooding agrees things are difficult: “But, with all our operations, we have built a business based on working in partnership with our customers and suppliers. Without that partnership approach to business practice, it would have been extremely difficult to navigate a way through the challenges of Brexit.”

There are also practical problems that have exacerbated the issue. “The journey to Italy, for example, now takes three days rather than two, due to the new post-Brexit border controls. And that means it takes two drivers rather than one. So, as well as the obvious problems of fewer EU nationals working in the UK, the added inefficiencies of the new procedures have increased time and cost,” Mr Gooding says.

Randall Parker Foods’ Managing Director Jim Gaffney says the driver situation is not getting any better. “Our transport costs have increased by 40% in the UK. And for exports, for example, the cost of containers required to ship to the Middle East work has increased from £2,500 to between

£5,000 and £7,500. Coupled with rising livestock prices, this had put on stop on trade.”

The issue with shipping containers and shipping lines is a major problem, according to Mr Gooding. “We have developed new trade to Canada and every load, so far, has been delayed because of shipping container logistics,” he says. “It’s a global supply chain problem. We’re hearing that infrastructure problems have significantly reduced the number of NZ shipments arriving in the UK too. It will have had an effect and, with the NZ commitment to their Asian customers taking a priority, volumes will have headed to those markets rather than the EU.”

Mr Morgan has found this to be less of a problem. He says: “As far as I am aware, our members who do export are not experiencing issues with gaining access to containers and lines, because the vast majority of product is transported by articulate lorries.”

Mr Gaffney says shipping from New Zealand has been a problem since 9/11: “But Covid-19 has exacerbated this during the past two years. So much so that our main supplier has stopped shipping chilled lamb to the UK and switched its whole offer to frozen only. This is putting more upward pressure on the British lamb price. I don’t think farmgate lamb prices will drop much below £5/kg during the next 12 months.”

Another Brexit consideration is the new visas and language requirements for non-UK abattoir workers. Had that had an impact? “We have always had staff for whom English is not their first language, and that is all built into our practices and protocols. It’s not a new problem,” says Mr Gooding.

Restrictive

Mr Morgan adds that the new visa system and language requirements are too restrictive. “They’re stifling our ability to recruit much-needed skilled staff from overseas. What the Government has offered us so far has been of no significant benefit to solving the meat sector’s labour shortages.”

Mr Gaffney says until Brexit around 35% of employees in his company were northern European. “Now they make up just 10%. We have signed up to sourcing 40 staff from the Philippines, at a set up cost of around £200,000. But they will not arrive before March/April if all goes well.”

It’s certainly a costly solution and sourcing skilled labour closer to home would be a lower cost and more secure solution. Gordon King, Executive Manager at Scottish Craft Butchers/Scottish Federation of Meat Traders Association says, with that in mind, QMS has recently launched a scheme, in partnership with Skills Development Scotland, to tackle the skilled labour shortage and encourage young people to train as butchers.

“The scheme has flagged up 750 potential vacancies and is promoting the career path as a chance to learn a craft, as well as develop skills in traditional techniques and cutting-edge technologies,” Mr King says.

A website, www.butcherycareers.co.uk, has been launched to support the campaign and help potential candidates learn about training opportunities, read and watch the real stories of young butchers’ careers, and explore job postings.

Labour may be short, but Mr King says there’s no shortage of turkeys for Christmas, which may have increased demand for lamb and other alternatives, potentially tightening supplies even further. “There may be an issue with availability and supply of larger birds, but the turkey growers have planned for people looking to have bigger family celebrations this year. Christmas 2020 saw huge demand for smaller birds, due to continuing Covid-19 restrictions. I think the converse will be the case this year, as consumer prepare for larger, unrestricted family gatherings.”

Mr Morgan says it’s debateable whether there will be a turkey shortage this Christmas. “But should there be, I hope our members can fill the gap on supermarket shelves and butchers’ chillers.”

Mr Gooding is less optimistic about a surge in demand for lamb during the festive season. He says a turkey shortage is ‘unlikely’: “And lamb is not typically on the traditional alternative Christmas menu, and there will be

cheaper alternatives. So I don’t see any opportunities here for the sector.”

So what opportunities are there? Will any permanent changes emerge from these short-term problems?

“There is certainly much more interest from customers about the provenance of the meat they purchase. So the quality assurance credentials of Scotch lamb and beef should stand us in good stead,” says Mr Morgan.

Susceptible

“The lesson we’ve learned is that trade is more fragile and susceptible to global issues – be that pandemics, ships getting stuck in canals, labour shortages, shifting consumer behaviour, or global politics – than we’d previously appreciated,” says Mr Gooding. “But what is also clear is that consumers quickly revert back to old habits, when possible. The improved domestic market for lamb through lockdown, as everyone had to eat at home and fell in love with roasting lamb again, has receded to pre-pandemic levels now people can once again go out and eat.

“This demonstrates the importance of the export market for the UK sheep sector, and the vital role played by businesses like ours in continuing to export despite all the problems.

“But if the UK really aspires to be a global trading leader, we have a lot of basic systems, procedures and investments to sort out to be efficient and competitive in the world market. Current systems are not fit for purpose and hindering the UK’s export efforts rather than promoting our produce and capabilities,” he adds.



Market prices are strong.

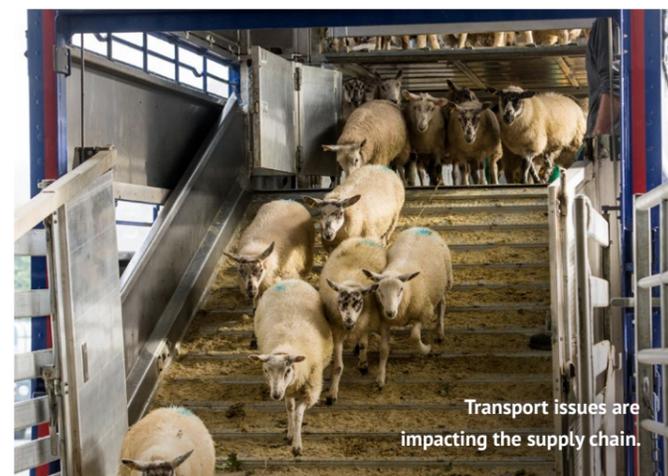
Time to invest and keep pushing forward

“We are currently in as good a position in the market place as we could hope for but NSA has said, repeatedly, that sitting back and basking in the sunshine should not even enter our minds,” says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker.

“Now is the time to invest more in all our markets and keep driving forward. And we need to do anything we can do to help processors resolve the problems they have with labour and export bureaucracy. We all need to make a reasonable margin otherwise things will fall apart.

“But having to see prices fall to make the supply chain work will not be in anyone’s interest and it should not be our aim. For years we have said that food is too cheap and we may well now be in an era where people have no choice but to pay more for essentials – food being one. What we have to do is make sure they get a great experience when they choose British lamb so they come back and buy it again.”

SPECIAL FEATURE



Transport issues are impacting the supply chain.

Give the gift of NSA membership this Christmas



Are you stuck for a Christmas gift idea for a sheep farming friend or family member? If so, NSA is here to help.

NSA has teamed up with Lake District-based gift manufacturer 'Herdy' this Christmas to create an NSA gift membership package, ideal for sheep enthusiasts or budding young shepherds.

All new members joining NSA in December will receive a Herdy handmade fine bone china mug, as well as becoming the recipient of the many benefits NSA membership delivers.

With popular events including NSA Sheep Event and NSA Scot Sheep taking place in 2022, membership would not only be a welcome Christmas gift but would also give further enjoyment by providing free or discounted entry to these events. And, of course, all members receive Sheep Farmer magazine six times a year, as well as a host of other benefits.



Herdy 'Herdy' fine bone china mugs.

Alternatively a 100% certified British wool Harris Tweed tie would make a lovely gift for a fellow NSA member. NSA's wool ties are made using an attractive navy hand-woven tweed. From the Outer Hebrides and carrying NSA's recognisable logo, the ties are priced at £29.17, plus VAT and postage, and can be delivered in time for Christmas.



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uk/bookings-and-payments, or call NSA Head Office.
Last day for guaranteed Christmas delivery is Friday 17th December.

Christmas wishes from NSA

This issue of Sheep Farmer is perfectly timed to be able to include some Christmas and New Year messages to all our members and readers.

It's been a tough and challenging year with our final departure from the EU, ongoing Covid-19 restrictions and challenges, and a sheep shed full of consultations and farming politics. But there is absolutely nothing more likely to put a smile on the faces of sheep farmers than good sheep prices and, fortunately, this is what we've enjoyed for much of 2021. Good prices and smiling faces undoubtedly help get us over life's hurdles and, as we face a period of rising costs, it's far better to do that with strong prices behind us.

I'd like to take this opportunity to particularly thank our processors and exporters this year. They have been through some challenging times and have helped to build hope that strong sheep prices can work right along the supply chain.

Our livestock markets deserve appreciation for their work in keeping the live sales going throughout lockdown, and strong prices put a smile on their faces too.

British Wool has also had to respond to some difficult times but, if anything, has strengthened its resolve to stand behind what is the most sustainable fibre on earth.

So, as far as possible, I'd like to wish everyone a peaceful, restful and Happy Christmas and, looking forward, let's not only hope 2022 continues to result in smiling faces but also let's keep working hard to do what we all can to make sure this is the case.

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NSA Next Generation – preparation underway for a busy year



With 2022 just around the corner, plans are well underway for a jam-packed year of events and initiatives for the NSA Next Generation programme.

Kicking off the year will be the selection of the 2022 group of Next Generation Ambassadors to join the programme. They will become part of a scheme to support the future of the UK sheep sector through young people, signalling the start of a lifelong journey with NSA.

The programme, now in its seventh 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.

Programme

As well as providing the chance to visit varied sheep farming systems and parts of the sheep farming supply chain, the programme also delivers an abundance of networking opportunities – from working with a group of likeminded young sheep farmers to meeting with industry experts and leaders. The scheme can open doors to many new and exciting opportunities.

From all UK nations, the 12 successful applicants will come together for the first time in February. The Ambassador journey will be frequently shared with NSA members via Sheep Farmer magazine.



NSA is looking forward to running face-to-face activities again in 2022.

Also open for applications early in the new year will be the Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation. The award, which takes the form of two £2,750 travel bursaries funded by NSA and the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, supports young people (under the age of 35) on a study trip to explore the application of science in sheep production.

With Covid-19 restricting overseas travel during the past 18 months, the return of this special award, given in memory of past NSA Chairman Samuel Wharry, will be even more welcome. It is hoped the award will be of interest to a plenty of young sheep farmers looking to investigate the role of sheep farming on a global scale.

Growth

The Covid-19 pandemic may have halted travel plans and impacted the previous group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, but it has certainly not impaired the growth of the wider Next Generation programme.

A further addition to the scheme in 2021 was the NSA Next GENE-eration ram giveaway, which saw six lucky young sheep farmers gifted a high performing Romney Ram, courtesy of Rob and Jo Hodgkins of Kaiapoi Romneys. This new initiative proved extremely popular with more than 70 people applying to be a recipient of one of the rams. NSA is pleased this programme will be repeated again in 2022. Look out for more details in early summer.

A further competition is also set to be added to the Next Generation programme in the spring.



Teaming up with the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA), NSA is to offer some free mentoring advice, from highly-experienced and qualified RoSA members, to deserving young sheep farmers.

Hoping to appeal to as many of the next generation of sheep farmers as possible, this will be a simply online application with three lucky winners selected randomly. Support from NSA is, of course, always available to any young sheep farmer in the UK requiring help or guidance. Contact NSA Head Office with details of how we can help.

Katie James coordinates the NSA Next Generation programme. She says: "All at NSA are looking forward to a busy and exciting 2022, and are pleased to be able to continue to grow the support the Next Generation programme can offer.

"Thanks to the generous financial support from NSA regions and ram sales, the programme can offer so much more for young people in the sector than might have once been available. With existing and new initiatives, the return of the NSA Sheep Event, including the Next Generation Shepherd of the Year final, as well as winter conferences and more, we hope to reach an even greater number of young sheep farmers in 2022. There will be so much to get involved with."

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NSA Next Generation winter conferences inspire and educate

NSA Next Generation recently brought together more than 100 enthusiastic young sheep farmers, for the first time in two years, for the programme's popular winter conferences.

Returning after an enforced absence in 2020, two events were held on consecutive Fridays in November and catered for everyone with a passion for sheep farming – from new entrants looking to get a foot on the ladder, to those wanting to expand an enterprise or take on more responsibility in a long-established business. The conferences were also of interest to anyone just keen to learn more about sheep farming.

Offering an inspiring mix of presentations from NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, who shared their experiences in the sheep sector to date, with interactive workshops delivered by industry experts, this year's events were particularly welcomed after an absence of face-to-face NSA Next Generation activity.

Motivated

For the first time since the programme began, a Next Generation event was held in Scotland and opened the conference to a greater number of young sheep farmers. This move was certainly welcomed by the motivated young shepherds joining the conference at Stirling Auction Mart, by kind permission of United Auctions.

Following a welcome from NSA staff, NSA Scottish Region Ambassadors Alister Watson, from Lockerbie, and Amy-Jo Reid, from Moray, engaged the audience with their varied experiences to

date. Both inspired delegates and encouraged them to be confident but resilient in their approach to their farming careers.

Attendees were then invited to take part in informative workshops from a choice offered by Moredun, workshop-sponsors MSD Animal Health, levy board QMS, Scottish Craft Butchers, and NSA Scottish Region.

Delegates were also treated to a celebration of lamb on the menu, ensuring everyone was well fed and ready for an afternoon of discussion and networking during the workshops.

Inspiring

The second event took place at Shrewsbury Auction Centre, by kind permission of Halls. As a venue with easy access from many areas of England and Wales, it proved ideal to host a good number of young farmers.

Once more attendees heard from two inspiring young sheep farmers and NSA Next Generation Ambassadors to start the day. Caryl Hughes, from Powys, and Tom Chapman, from Staffordshire, both spoke about their varied backgrounds that led to their current work with their families' flocks, as well as working off farm, to sustain successful businesses.

The first of the day's workshops then took place before attendees once again enjoyed a delicious lamb lunch, ensuring everyone was well fuelled for a day of interactive discussion and learning.

Attendees at Shrewsbury were able to take part in workshops sessions about best vaccination practice, from MSD Animal Health, and successful business planning, from levy board AHDB. British Wool, Halls and Wynnstay Agriculture also held

practical sessions.

Thanks go to workshop sponsors MSD Animal Health and lunch sponsors British Wool, who both helped ensure the successful running of the day.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James coordinated the two events and says: "It was difficult to gauge what interest there would be after the covid-enforced break, so it was fantastic to welcome more than 120 young people – the highest number since we created these winter events.

"The group presentations and smaller workshops at both conferences provided opportunity for interesting discussion between motivated and passionate young sheep farmers. Their dedication to the future of the UK sheep sector was clear and encouraging to see."



Lamb butchery demonstration.

Workshops

- **What makes a successful business?**
Sarah Hurford, AHDB / Stuart Ashworth, QMS
- **Making the best use of vaccinations**
Hannah Donegan / Lisa O'Donnell, MSD Animal Health
- **Targeted selection treatment of roundworms**
Fiona Kenyon, Moredun
- **Lamb butchery demonstration**
Sean Graham, Scottish Craft Butchers
- **Principles of sheep nutrition**
Bryn Hughes, Wynnstay Agriculture
- **Creating demand for British wool**
Graham Clark, British Wool
- **Getting the land you want**
Shaun Jones, Halls
- **Making sure young sheep farmers' voices are heard**
Grace Reid, NSA Scottish Region



Meet the Ambassadors who shared their stories

Alister Watson Dumfriesshire

There is no shortage of strings to Alister's bow. He has worked on the family farm, contract shepherded, sheared, driven haulage lorries, and is now a fieldsman for Scottish buying group Farm Stock. But, within all this, his passion is breeding Lleyn sheep. His long-term plan is to spend more time with the pedigree and commercial flocks, developing an enterprise for the future alongside his full-time employment.



Caryl Hughes Powys

The opportunity to farm a 240ha Snowdonia hill farm for 12 months with the National Trust and Wales YFC in 2013/14, as part of the Llyndy Isaf Scholarship Scheme, was a huge turning point for Caryl. It was not only an incredible learning opportunity but, coupled with a year in New Zealand as part of her university course, made her realise she definitely wanted a sheep farming career. Caryl has since become a partner in the family beef and sheep farm at Llangollen and taken on a nearby tenancy. She also carries out contract shepherding work in the area, as required.



Tom Chapman Staffordshire

Tom's career to date has certainly been varied, and serves as a reminder to never give up on your aims and ambitions. Having secured a county council farm at the start of his sheep farming journey, Tom was forced to change his plans when this was sadly sold from under him. Moving to the role of shepherd at a large estate in Gloucestershire gave him the chance to meet new people and work with a larger number of sheep. He then moved back closer to home, in Staffordshire, to work on a family farm, as well as taking on a new challenge of joining the team at Flock Health as an adviser on sheep flock health planning.



Amy-Jo Reid Moray

As a self-employed shepherd, Amy-Jo is currently running a 700-ewe organic flock under contract for the Drummuir Estate, producing organic prime lambs and replacement females. She also has 200 breeding ewes of her own and grows on 200 ewe lambs each year, on seasonal and annual grass lets. It's an enterprise that will surely help her achieve her five-year goal of securing long-term grazing to develop her flock further, whether that be owned, tenanted or as part of a share-farming agreement.



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Stirling's conference drew a crowd.

Much-loved hobby adds value to sheep farming businesses



Taking time off farm and enjoying hobbies can be time well spent. But when this combines work with pleasure and benefits the business, the gains can be even greater.

That is certainly the case for NSA Next Generation Ambassador Sion Morgan, who believes sheepdog trialling has really helped his career.

Originally from mid-Wales, Sion now shepherds 3,500 sheep on a hill farm in the Scottish Borders. He says he could not do this without good working dogs.

"I have always had a passion for working dogs and had my first lessons with Meirion Owen, in Wales," he says. "After this, I worked in New Zealand with a small team of dogs. I would spend the evening with other shepherds in the training paddocks. I learnt a lot and helped train the young dogs. As well as helping to improve my work this was also an enjoyable social activity, with a beer in hand, after a busy day in the sheep yards."

"I started sheepdog trialling in November 2016 after moving to Scotland and was introduced to the Lanark, Lothian and Peebles nursery/novice league. This was a great decision as it fed my trialling passion and introduced me to so many likeminded people."

Trialling

Sion says he has reaped the rewards since, in many ways, as a well-trained dog that may be used for trialling is much more efficient at getting the task done and teaches valuable stock sense. And, for employed shepherds, a good team of dogs will always impress future employers.

He continues: "Trialling is also a hobby that gets you off farm, which I think is important, and any success it brings can grow your reputation. My first open trail placing was in 2017 and I've had numerous open trial placings since."

"My best achievement to date was making the Scottish team in 2021 with Middy Kim. She was placed fifth out of 150 in the Scottish National competition.

"Having gained a good reputation for dogs that work well under command, I can complement my work as a shepherd by selling puppies and trained dogs. I hope trialling is something I can continue to do in the future with further success giving me both pride and enjoyment, as well as acting as a valuable asset to my business."



“Good working dogs are crucial for my work – I couldn't do my job without them.”

Sion Morgan

Robin Dean is Senior Vice President for England of the International Sheep Dog Society (ISDS) and urges the next generation of sheep farmers to gain the best from their working dogs, suggesting trialling as an enjoyable way to do this.

"The value of a good working dog cannot be underestimated," he says. "I have been involved with sheepdogs all my life. Having grown up with dogs I was keen to take the farm dog training to the level I had seen in sheepdog trials at local shows. And so, for the past 40 years, I have been involved in training, breeding and running at trials."

"While the trialling has always been a hobby, the benefit of having well-trained working dogs has allowed me to make a living out of sheep farming. I cannot imagine how I could have managed without dogs. They make shepherding jobs easier and also helping with the well-being and welfare of my flock."

"There have been trialling disappointment during the years, but also some success. It has been an honour to have been in the English team five times and compete at international trials. Another highlight was being asked to take part in the BBC One Man and His Dog programme in the 1990s where, fortunately, things went well. We won the doubles competition and came runner-up in the singles."

Challenges

Robin encourages all younger shepherds to get involved with training their dogs to a higher standard, to make the challenges of the job so much easier.

He says: "There is a vast amount of useful information on trialling and breeding online, particularly on the ISDS website. Most areas

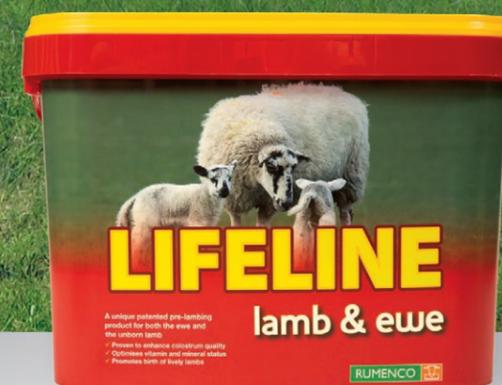
will have nursery trials during the winter. These are often informal events and useful for those starting out, bringing a welcome break from the farm to indulge in a bit of light hearted banter. And there are always experienced trainers on hand to offer advice.

"One of the best aspects of being involved with sheepdogs has been the characters I've met and the friends I've made across the UK and beyond."



“I would encourage all younger shepherds to get involved with training their dogs to a higher standard.”

Nick Hart



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Traditional upland system fits with future farming policy

By Katie James, NSA

A lifetime's involvement in policy impacting UK sheep farming demands a level of commitment that few hard-working sheep farmers could muster.

But, following in his father's footsteps, NSA Vice President David Raine has taken many positions of responsibility since he began his career in the sector.

Previously holding the position of NSA Chairman, NSA Northern Region Chairman, and NSA Health and Welfare Group Chairman in the early 1990s, as well as many other positions for other farming organisations, David's commitment has had a positive impact on agricultural policy. But the time required to do this has never diverted David's attention away from his priority – his family's farm and the core ethos of the Cumbria-based business.

"Practical farming and producing quality food in a sustainable way has always been, and remains, my number-one concern," he says.

The family farm, Old Parks, sits at around 600ft (180m) at Kirkoswald in Cumbria's Eden Valley, with 840 acres (340ha) of additional fell grazing extending to just above 2,000ft (600m). The upland system comprises 980 breeding ewes, including a Swaledale flock of 620-head to produce Mules, homebred Blufaced Leicesters, and a flock of 330 North of England Mules producing finished stock. "The system accommodates all the elements seen within the stratified sheep industry, from the pure-bred Swaledale, which excels on the high fells, to terminal sired lambs grazing forage crops during the winter," explains David.

Traditional

"We run the sheep on a traditional system. Although we have made some changes during the past few years, when you look at your farm, you look at its resource and how best you can use it. We have chosen to stick with our system because it works and has done for several generations"

The Raine family has been breeding and selling North of England Mules at Lazonby Auction since



David Raine.

at least the 1930s, when the hill-sheep stock switched from Scottish Blackface to Swaledale to suit the upland farm.

The flock of Blufaced Leicesters was established in 1950, when David's father Joe brought three ewes with him, from the Alston family farm, when he took on the farm tenancy. When day-to-day management of the flock passed to David and his cousin Robin, Blufaced Leicester numbers started to expand with much success on farm and in the show ring. But the flock suffered devastating losses during the foot-and-mouth disease outbreak in 2001.

"Old Parks' flock has been re-established and now comprises both traditional Blues, sold for use on white faced breeds, and so-called crossing types, used on Swaledale flocks," explains David, who is a Blufaced Leicester Sheep Breeders Association trustee, having previously served as chairman and president.

Upland

Purebred Swaledale ewes are mated on upland grazing and stay there, weather permitting, until scanning at the end of January. All stock is brought down to in-bye land or housed for lambing, which starts in February for the Mules. The Blufaced Leicester flock lambs in March,

with the Swaledales lambing outside in April. "The early-lambing Mule ewes usually scan at just above two lambs per ewe, with the later lambing shearling ewes having a lambing percentage of about 10% less. We use Texel rams as a terminal sire," David adds.

After lambing, pure Swaledale singles return to the fell along with all crossbred singles. "These are ewes and lambs that are strong and able look after themselves, as they will not be gathered again until mid-July. They need to be sound on their feet. We will treat ewes for worms and fluke, and give long-lasting blowfly protection for the lambs, although we find at altitude fly strike is less of a problem," David explains. Swaledale ewes with twins remain on the lower permanent pastures until weaning, at the end of July.

Swaledale male lambs are kept pure but everything else is castrated. David explains: "All males will be finished on farm using forage crops and concentrates, mostly homegrown grain, with the Swales being sent deadweight to Dunbia at Preston. They do quite well, but the rams are a high intensity job. Finishing them off grass is difficult in the UK at the time of year when we are looking to send them, so we feed concentrates to ensure they are good to go from February."

Committed

All other prime stock will be sold via Penrith Auction, where David is one of nearly 300 partners in the marketing cooperative, a practice David considers of utmost importance. "We are committed to supporting our local auction marts whenever we can," he says.

Around 250 ewe lambs are kept as replacements, with some Swaledale ewe lambs bought in. All replacement stock is vaccinated against clostridial diseases, and breeding stock is vaccinated against enzootic abortion and abortion caused by toxoplasma.

A strict vaccination programme was introduced after the foot-and-mouth restock. "With stock then being bought in from several different flocks, it was important to protect our existing flock from disease, and we've continued the vaccination programme – the day we stop doing this will be the day we discover a problem," David says.

To remain sustainable and self-sufficient, arable crops are grown on some of the 400 acres (160ha) of lower land at Old Parks, including fodder beet, swede and stubble turnips. There are also 80 acres (30ha) of barley each year, for feed and straw bedding for the farm's 65-cow suckler herd.

"Sheep and cattle grazing is part of the arable rotation," says David. "Land is cropped for five years before returning to grazing, for seven years, with a heavy emphasis on clover. We have found this system has really benefitted our soil.

“

We've continued the vaccination programme – the day we stop doing this will be the day we discover a problem.

David Raine

”



Swaledales on the upland farm.

Farm facts

- 400 acres (160ha), comprising grazing and arable crops (including fodder beet, swede, stubble turnips and barley).
- Upland system running 980 breeding ewes, including 620 Swaledales, 300 North of England Mules, Blufaced Leicesters and Texels.
- Lambing indoors and outdoors, from February to April.
- Castrated ram lambs finished and sold direct to Dunbia. Other stock sold via local auction marts.
- Part of a Higher Level Stewardship scheme since January 2020.

"It has always been a priority to look after the soil. It's the foundation of any good farming system so we have to do what we can to enhance it. We are aiming to return organic matter to the soil and trying to increase the depth of the top soil. Much of the land at Old Parks is permanent pasture that hasn't been reseeded for 100 years or more. We use a little fertiliser and lime to maintain good, stable grazing for our stock."

Despite food production remaining the main focus of the farm, it has been part of a Higher Level Stewardship scheme since January 2020. Strategic areas of woodland pasture have been restored and created to assist water quality and improve wildlife habitat. New hedges have been planted, adding to the existing 20-year-old boundaries that already provide windbreak, shelter and shade for sheep.

Custodians

David recognises farmers' roles as custodians of the countryside: "Our farming system leaves room for much of what is being called for by the new government environmental schemes. We work in harmony with the environment and have an abundance of diversity and wildlife on farm.

"I see lapwings and skylarks every day. And we have breeding curlews, snipe, oystercatchers and black grouse. There are many birds that thrive alongside our farming system. We must recognise farmers can have an impact, but this can be a positive one."

Despite outward pressures, David has no plans to make significant changes to his flock. "Trade for Mules is good at the moment. Recent prices have brought confidence back in the sector,

particularly breeding stock sales. We can respond to significant changes if required and could alter the balance between cattle or sheep, or produce more arable crops. But, currently, we are focused on being self-sufficient. The numbers are working for us and we believe our system fits well with what sheep farming should look like in the future."

Continued overleaf.



Breeding on the farm includes Blufaced Leicesters to use on the Swaledales.

David is supported on farm by his wife Anne and son Michael. The small team has no additional help apart from some arable contractors and the exchange of some machinery and labour for silaging and cultivating with other members of the wider Raine family.

"It's always busy, but we seem to get everything done. I do wonder, though, how I used to find time for all the NSA commitments and other policy work," he says.

But find time is certainly what David did for many years. His varied involvement in many agricultural and specific sheep groups has included time on red meat levy board strategy panels and think-tanks discussing international trade. And he's also passionate about livestock farming's role in mitigating climate change.



David surveys some of his Bluefaced Leicester sheep.

Efficiency

"We are, in effect, farming carbon. At the beginning of every food supply chain is the assimilation of carbon dioxide into carbohydrate, and this gives us building blocks to produce food. It's a natural process," he says.

"Farmers must improve efficiency, but it is unrealistic to think managing the carbon cycle in a certain way will cut long term emissions. It is not burning carbohydrate that drives climate change, its burning hydrocarbons – fossil fuels. So

we need to make sure the public don't lose focus of that, because adding carbon to the atmosphere is the main issue we all need to address."

Despite what seems like a growing anti-meat agenda, recently highlighted by the media during the recent COP26 summit, David is confident the UK sheep sector has a positive future.

"Farmers should recognise that within the world population, which has doubled since I started farming, there are many consumers who value our product.

"The news of trade deals with Australia and

New Zealand has initially, of course, been seen as a threat to us. But global sheepmeat supply is tight and we are not the only lucrative market that these two southern hemisphere nations are trying to supply," adds David.

"The UK sheep industry has developed a diversified customer base both within the UK and across our export markets. If we continue to produce high quality food, working with the environment, then there will always be opportunities for our dynamic supply chains to seek out and grow new markets."

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Farming charity rolls out additional services

More support to help the farming community is on its way from the sector's biggest charity.

This is a direct response to the recent findings of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution's Big Farming Survey, with new services being rolled-out in January.

The agricultural charity has already extended its support by introducing a 24-hour, 365 days a year confidential freephone helpline, which is managed by a small team of agriculturally-trained specialists.

"It's available to all farming people across England and Wales," says RABI's Corporate Partnership Manager Suzy Deeley.

Depression

The survey revealed a concerning level of depression among sheep farmers and the wider livestock sector. In all, it showed that more than a third of these farmers are probably, or possibly, depressed. "The pressures on the sheep industry and other farming sectors are taking their toll," adds Ms Deeley.

Further services being introduced in 2022 include a bespoke and accredited mental health

first aid training service, a face-to-face and telephone-based mental health counselling service, and further trials of RABI's Community Pillars initiative.

The latter will introduce a peer-to-peer and confidential network of local support to help normalise the conversation around mental wellbeing. These new initiatives will supplement the support the charity is known for, including financial support to non-working and working farmers, benefits advice and practical support.

Opportunity

"I believe the sector has an important opportunity to build on the resilience and optimism also highlighted in our research. We all have a part to play to normalise conversations around our mental wellbeing, and to work to help create better futures for people working in the farming sector," says Ms Deeley.

"RABI's focus is to ensure we use the evidence we have to expand services and to support a greater breadth of the farming community.

"We know farmers face an average of six stress-causing factors. Some, such as bad or unpredictable weather, are largely outside their control, but some can potentially be mitigated.

"Uncertainty arises from delays in policy or the burden of regulation. And this is why RABI is targeting action in areas that can help address some of these challenges, such as mental health," she concludes.

Anyone seeking support can call RABI's 24/7 helpline on 0800 188 4444. For anyone not feeling ready to speak in person, RABI's online well-being platforms provide free, confidential access to advice and counselling support via rabi.org.uk/kooth.



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What RABI's Big Farming Survey said

- 36% of the farming community are probably or possibly depressed.
- Men working in the livestock sector are more likely to be depressed compared to cereal farmers.
- Livestock farmers are more likely to experience moderate or severe anxiety compared to cereal farmers.
- More than half of women surveyed (58%) experience mild, moderate or severe anxiety.
- An average of six factors cause stress across the farming community. The most commonly reported sources of stress are: regulation, compliance and inspection, Covid-19, bad/unpredictable weather, and loss of subsidies/future trade deals.
- More than half (52%) of the farming community experience pain and discomfort, one in four have mobility problems, and 21% have difficulties in undertaking usual tasks due to health issues.
- 59% of respondents believe their business will remain viable during the next five years.

RoSA-registered advisers can help take your business forward.

BUSINESS



New online map makes it even easier to find a RoSA adviser

As the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) continues to grow since its launch in the summer, so does the service it is providing to the country's sheep farmers.

RoSA, the network of advisers working within the UK sheep industry, is making it even easier for sheep farmers to locate recognised professionals who can support them to develop their sheep enterprises. It has launched an interactive online map of members, showing geographical regions covered and advisers' specific areas of expertise.

The listed members found on the map reveals the varied skills of the RoSA members around the UK and demonstrates the network's value to sheep farmers, and the wider sector, in further developing a UK sheep sector that is sustainable and maintains the highest animal welfare and environmental protection.

Expertise

One member who can be found on the list is Ayrshire-based independent consultant Kev Bevan. He has a wealth of experience in the UK sheep sector, but is continuously seeking to build on his knowledge and expertise. He's confident his RoSA membership will help him to do that.

Mr Bevan says: "To be a good adviser you need up-to-date knowledge and the ability to communicate. I believe RoSA will help me keep

my feeding, breeding, health and marketing knowledge and skills honed. I trust it will also help me improve the communication and soft skills needed for both one-to-one and project work."

Mr Bevan is a RoSA member offering specialist farm business advice, highlighting that the network offers sheep farmers more than just guidance on health and nutrition. He recently moved into independent consultancy having spent more than 25 years working for SAC Consulting and ADAS.

Experience

"In 2020 I decided to go solo so I could focus more on farm business work. Brexit and climate change means we're entering a period of great change for agriculture. Hopefully, my experience will be of value to a sheep industry that must become more sustainable – both economically and environmentally," he says.

"Having trained as an agricultural economist in Wales and New Zealand, I specialise in farm business management, livestock market analysis, and agricultural policy. I speak regularly at farm open days and industry meetings on prospects for the beef and sheep sectors, and work both on a one-to-one basis and via group project work.

"The former typically involves reviewing business performance, budgeting and succession planning. While the latter often focuses more on technical improvement. One example is a recent project, involving Farm Stock Scotland and Scotbeef, to provide blueprints for producing lamb for M&S."

Mr Bevan believes providing farmers with access to advisers through RoSA is a great way to upskill all involved in the sector.

"Research shows the best performing farmers are marked out by their willingness to use farm advisers to drive continuous improvement. But advisers need to be good," he stresses.

"RoSA was established to make sure farmers had guaranteed access to advisers who would add value to their businesses. Through coordinating a rolling programme of adviser learning and facilitating adviser-to-adviser communication, RoSA is in effect 'training the trainers.'"

Further information on RoSA, and access to the online map of advisers working in the UK, can be found online at www.sheepadvisers.co.uk.



Kev Bevan.

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Condition score your flock, and determine who needs to be managed separately due to either below or above average scores.

Ensure animals feet are sound before grazing forage crops. Grazing in a long narrow strip can increase the likelihood of disease & infection spreading.

Its advantageous to use a strip grazing system with temporary electric fencing. If you strip graze in long shallow strips, you will prevent wastage & trampling of the crop. Pel solar electric fencing systems are perfect for grazing Winter root crops, because they run off daylight, not sunlight! And they can store enough energy to see you through the dark nights.

Avoid earthing the bottom wire on leafy crops, as this may lessen the power given out by the energizer.

A simple yield assessment and calculation can be carried out to work out the dry matter yield and required daily allocation to the livestock; this forms the basis of how far to move the fence on a daily basis. This is much easier to calculate and manage when working with strips.

If your grazing on a hill, make sure to graze uphill! This will avoid spoiling crops & contamination from excrement running into fresh grazing.

Try to slowly introduce the root crop to the animals to minimize digestive upset, roughly 1-2 hours a day initially on the crop is advised. This can slowly be increased to full access.

Daily or twice daily moves of the electric fencing is recommended, ensuring the freshest crop is being offered. A fully flexible, and portable grazing system will make this job 100 times easier, and once root crop grazing is finished into the new year, you can use your solar energizer into spring to split up your pasture, and encourage better grass growth.

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Flock and farm insurance – check you have it all covered

By Chris Walsh, NFU Mutual



With so many major issues beyond sheep farmers' control, it's more important than ever to protect stock, machinery and farm equipment.

Covid-19, changes to farm support payments, labour shortages, climate change and new trade deals threatening to undercut UK farmers, present unprecedented challenges to flocks and businesses. And, while so much is beyond farmers' control, it makes good business sense to make sure assets are insured correctly.

The first thing to check is that farm insurance cover offers sufficient protection for property and livestock. Prices – particularly for fertiliser and diesel – continue to spiral upwards, making these inputs a target for rural thieves stalking the countryside on dark winter nights.



Talk to your insurer for advice on flock and business cover.

Rising prices

Farm vehicles and machinery values are also increasing – and not just new kit. Second-hand tractor prices are also rising, as farmers who've recently had to replace a trusty old yard tractor have found. In times of price instability and shortages, regular reviews of the sums insured on farm and tractor insurance policies are important to avoid being out of pocket in the event of a claim.

Turning to flocks, one of the main worries sheep farmers raise is the rising cost of dog attacks. A tragic effect of the Covid-19 lockdowns and subsequent surge in dog ownership has been a 10.2% rise in dog attacks on farm animals.

The cost of dog attacks on sheep and cattle was £1.3m in 2020, according to NFU Mutual claims figures.

Sadly, latest figures suggest the situation is worsening. Data shows the cost of attacks increased by 50% in the first quarter of 2021. But the story behind the figures is even more concerning. Livestock worrying causes horrific suffering to sheep and cattle – and repeated attacks devastate the lives of farmers and their families. There is increasing pressure for strong law enforcement and raising awareness of the problem among dog owners who don't know, or sometimes don't even care, that their pet could kill sheep.

Sheep rustling is another ongoing concern for the industry. The good news is that figures reveal livestock rustling fell by a quarter in 2020. The sharp fall in the cost of livestock thefts followed the prosecution of livestock thieves who horrified the public by killing hundreds of sheep in fields and leaving heads and entrails behind.

But, despite the decrease, NFU Mutual's 2020 claims figures show that farm animals worth more than £2.3m were stolen in 2020 making rustling the most costly crime for UK sheep farmers after vehicle and machinery theft. We're concerned that as the economic impact of Covid-19 hits hard across the country, rustling may increase. So we are working with farmers, police and security companies to tackle the crime on all fronts.

One initiative, which shows particular promise for farmers in remote areas, is a joint initiative

with Devon and Cornwall Police to tackle persistent rustling on Dartmoor.

The Devon Livestock Initiative will provide farmers with gate signs, which show the times stock are typically moved, and ask members of the public who see sheep being moved outside these times to call a phone number for a local farmer or the police.

The scheme is designed to help farmers like Colin Abel, whose family have farmed sheep across thousands of acres of rugged Dartmoor for more than 100 years.

During the past decade, they have been plagued by sheep theft and estimate the farm is now losing 200 sheep a year to thieves.

Latest advice on protecting flocks from dog attacks and thieves is available in NFU Mutual's 2021 Rural Crime Report.

Contractors

As contractors take on a larger role on many sheep farms, we have dealt with claims where inadequate insurance held by contractors could put farmers or members of the public at risk of high costs in the event of an accident or incident.

So always carry out an insurance check when taking on a contractor. It can be a temptation to assume their insurance will be in order. But whether they are a small outfit, carrying out shearing or hoof-trimming, or a large-scale building contractor, it's vital to check they are insured correctly, and that they are trained and competent to carry out and complete the work.

Sheep rustling is an ongoing concern.



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Be sure to rest paddocks after a challenging year.

Tips for managing grass during winter in sheep grazing systems

By Liz Genever, contributor

For all grass-based systems, winter is the pinch point – from early October, pasture cover falls until sometime in the spring, as demand outstrips supply.

This season has been challenging due to variable growth, with some farms short of grass and some with more grass than in more typical years. For some farms, there is a need to re-set pastures now, because utilisation was lower than ideal after the rapid growth of late spring.

Paddocks

One option to ration grass during winter, to prepare for the following spring, is all-grass wintering. The concept is based on cell grazing, where sheep are managed at high stocking densities and moved frequently through electric-fenced paddocks. The aim is to ration grass that has been stockpiled (and grown) for the winter for up to 100 days. Standard advice is that grass covers need to be 2,000-2,500kgDM/ha before winter systems begin.

To deal with variable pasture covers this year, sheep farmers may have used more nitrogen in late summer to boost growth, sown more forage crops

or annual grasses to reduce pressure on grass, or increased supplements being fed in the system.

It may be more of a challenge this year, but accurately rationing grass and forages is important because reserves may be limited and the use of nitrogen in the spring is likely to be low. Available kgDM/ha can be measured using a calibrated sward stick or a plate meter. The feed is then rationed and allocated to the group based on ewe requirements. All-winter grazing also gives the paddocks a long rest period, which will help aid their recovery after a challenging year.

Utilisation

In a set-stocking grazing system, sheep may utilise only 50-60% of grass due to rejected and trampled material. All-winter grazing gives sheep less opportunity to do this, so waste is reduced and utilisation can be increased to around 80%, producing significant savings in feed costs.

Fields that will be grazed by ewes at the beginning of winter should be not be grazed from September. Closing up fields should be staggered to ensure they are at different stages of growth. This also means feed quality of the grass on offer is consistent throughout the winter.

Table 2. Paddock closing plan for an early-March turnout lambing system.

Date	Target % of area closed	Actual % of area closed	Area for this farm (ha)	Grazing (+120 days)
Late October	20			Early March
Mid November	40			Mid March
Late November	60			Late March
Mid December	80			Early April



Ewes need to be in good condition for all-winter grazing.

Table 1. Feed budget for 950 mature ewes assuming 10kgDM/ha/day grass growth, high feed quality and 200% scanning. (Source: AHDB)

	Initial cover = 2,000kgDM/ha			
	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
Grazing area (ha)	110	110	110	110
Grazing days	31	31	28	20
Net growth rate (kgDM/ha/day)	10	10	10	10
Animal Intakes				
Number of ewes	950	950	950	950
Weight (kg)	65	67	69	70
Intake (% of bodyweight)	1.5	1.5	2.7	2.7
Daily intake (kgDM)	1.0	1.0	1.9	1.9
Total daily requirement (kgDM)	950	950	1,770	1,796
Total monthly animal intake (kgDM)	29,450	29,450	49,556	35,920
Animal intake per ha (kgDM/ha/day)	8.6	8.6	16.0	16.3
Difference between growth and intake (kgDM/ha/day)	1.4	1.4	-6.0	-6.3
Average farm cover (kgDM/ha)	2,043	2,086	1,919	1,793

NB: The feed budget accounts for weight increase as pregnancy progresses. Animal intake per ha per day (daily intake/area) is calculated to determine difference between intake and growth per ha which will affect cover (difference x grazing days plus starting cover).

Check ewes' teeth, feet and body condition score (BCS) before they start all-winter grazing. Ewes with a BCS below 2, or any lame ones, should not be put onto this rotational grazing system. Shearlings (two-tooths or gimmers) should be grazed separately where possible, because they will struggle to keep up with full-mouthed ewes.

Feed budget

To determine how many ewes can be supported and the supplements needed, a feed budget is essential for all-winter grazing (see table 1).

The daily allocation of dry matter and grazing residual will need to change as ewes progress through pregnancy, from 1.5% of body weight in early pregnancy to 2.7% later in pregnancy. The residual for each paddock should be around 900kgDM/ha pre-scanning and 1,200 kgDM/ha post-scanning. Supplements can be introduced if paddocks do not have sufficient cover.

Another similar approach is a closing plan, with the aim of resting fields for 100-200 days from the final autumn/winter grazing to turnout. Table 2 shows an early-March turnout lambing system example. It can be adjusted for different lambing dates.

In the example, from mid-December, the ewes could be on the remaining 20% of the farm and fed supplements, which can be done cost-effectively during mid-pregnancy with only maintenance requirements if ewes are in good condition. Most ewes could have been moved onto forage or cover crops, or off farm onto keep, or housed.

The key is for the rest period to be built into each field. This will help boost spring growth and hopefully reduce the need for supplementary feeding when requirements are high pre or post-lambing.

This article has been written as a joint initiative between NSA and the British Grassland Society.



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Mixed-species swards play vital role in climate-change mitigation

By Ellie Sweetman, NIAB

Recent NIAB and SRUC work on forage opportunities and barriers for UK livestock productivity and sustainability reviewed a wide range of crops.

Key themes included the need to improve nitrogen-use efficiency, as well as the growing interest in the value of mixed-species swards.

The Met Office forecasts warmer and wetter winters with hotter, drier summers. Summer rainfall will be less frequent but heavier, with more droughts expected. Prolonged dry and wet weather spells, which have been experienced more frequently in recent years, are the biggest challenges faced by farmers.

Water-logged soils restrict root function, while hot and dry summers stunt or stop plant growth. Higher temperatures and CO₂ content in the atmosphere mean crops need to adapt.

Productivity

In prolonged wet weather, well-developed sward bases cope best with carrying livestock. But stock should be kept off short-term leys, where possible, to avoid longer term damage to soil structure and ongoing sward productivity.

Long periods of dry weather require grazing to be rested as much as possible, grazing swards less hard before moving on, rotating around fields, or grazing blocks within larger fields, leaving higher residues to support sward survival and recovery.

Cocksfoot and tall fescue are grass species that can survive well on land at risk of drought. Tall fescue has high water-use efficiency and a deeper, more extensive root system. Cocksfoot can go into dormancy.

Deep-rooting legumes (sainfoin, lucerne and red clover), permanent-pasture grasses (meadow fescue, cocksfoot and smooth-stalked meadow grass) and grass species (timothy, festulolium) and herbs including chicory and ribwort plantain (ribgrass), are resilient in prolonged dry weather. Deep-rooting plants have higher mineral levels.

Mixtures

Grass-legume mixtures can produce 40% higher yields than monocultures of each species, depending on the combination, and usually provide improved nutrition compared to grass alone.

Legumes offer great potential for sustainable intensification at many different stages and are most effective at inclusion rates of 30-50% in mixed swards. Voluntary intakes of forage legumes are 10-15% greater than that of grasses of similar digestibility.

As well as the reduced use of mineral nitrogen fertiliser, other benefits of including forage legumes in swards and mixtures include lower emissions of carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and methane both from the farm and per unit of meat produced. Including forage legumes also lowers production costs, reduces the requirement for bought-in protein feeds, increases forage production, increases nitrogen-use efficiency, offers a higher forage nutritional value, improves feed-conversion efficiency, and improves livestock health and performance.

Including legumes in short-term grass leys could increase the carbon sequestration and also enhance biodiversity and support soil organic carbon, reducing decomposition by producing decay-resistant substrates.

Methane production decreases with inclusion of the condensed tannin forages, such as the legumes sainfoin and bird's-foot trefoil, and the herb chicory in ruminant diets. Condensed tannin activity has been found to reduce nitrogen excretion by protecting dietary protein from degradation in the rumen for more efficient digestion and absorption further down the digestive tract. Tannins also shift nitrogen excretion from urine to faeces, reducing the rate of volatilisation and leaching. Reducing methane production will also improve the



efficiency of productive ruminants and decrease their carbon footprint.

Sainfoin produces high quality forage at reasonably high yields in drought-prone soils. Including sainfoin at a rate of 20% within a lucerne stand can prevent bloat and improve digestibility in sheep.

Sainfoin can also be particularly beneficial due to its anthelmintic properties when fed before and after lambing, when the immunity of the ewe and lambs are low. The condensed tannins in sainfoin can also stimulate the immune response to produce more T cells, particularly important as parasites are inherently immune-suppressive.

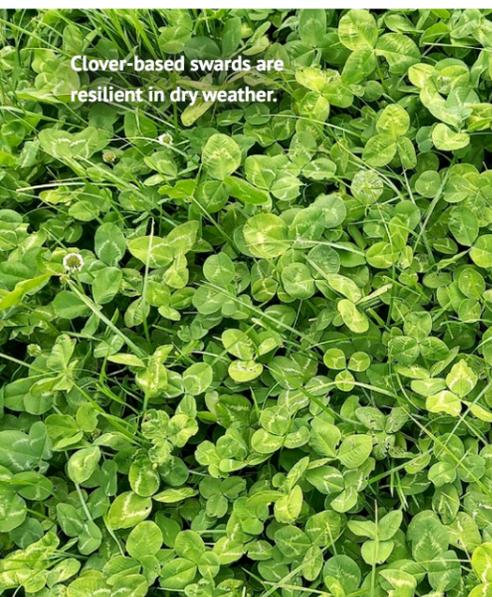
Adaptability

Plant breeding across Europe focuses on increasing genetic diversity to increase variation for key traits that aid adaptability in changing climatic conditions, such as the resistance to fungal diseases where temperature and rainfall shifts increase their range and viability.

Increased and more precise use of organic fertiliser, and decreasing losses and leaching of applied nutrients, is essential to increase nutrient-use efficiency.

Species mixtures use resources more efficiently, making mixed cropping a promising strategy for sustainable intensification. Further work is needed to assess species compatibility.

The increased role of legumes in ruminant systems will support more sustainable ruminant production and, along with grass leys in arable rotations, their value is expected to be more widely embraced in the future.



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Tips to help mitigate high fertiliser prices

Manure is now an even more valuable resource.

By Liz Genever, contributor

With ammonium nitrate at its highest price ever, and also difficult to source, farmers are thinking differently about buying in a bit of nitrogen ready for the spring.

Grass will grow once soil temperature hits around 5°C, and clover starts growing at around 8°C. Artificial nitrogen (N) is used to help the grass grow until the clover starts growing and fixing/releasing nitrogen. The nitrogen produced and fixed into the soil by clover during the previous year has been taken up by winter growth. This will be particularly relevant for this year, as the warmer autumn meant grass grew for longer.

Manure

There are several factors to consider, including identifying the best fields for applications, soil testing, and the use of organic manure.

If you have nitrogen available either in urea or ammonium nitrate, it is important to only apply it to fields that will have the best response rate.

These would be:

- On target for pH (6 - 6.5), with phosphate and potash indexes of 2.
- Good soil structure – look at AHDB Healthy Grassland Soils resources to help determine if there are any structural issues.
- Productive grass types – think perennial ryegrass, cocksfoot and timothy making up the majority of the grass species.
- Sward height of 4cm to 8cm – the optimum height range for grass growth.
- South-facing slopes and well-drained lighter soils will warm up quicker, which means grass they will grow earlier.
- Do not use urea in dry conditions and on windy days.

There is no point applying nitrogen to fields without the correct soil-nutrient levels. Grassland that's mainly grazed should be soil tested every five years, and frequently cut fields should be tested every three years.

Sampling

Take samples from the root zone when testing, which is typically at a depth of around 8cm. If plans involve cultivating the land the following year, it may be worth sampling down to 15cm as there will be some soil movement. The samples need to be taken from across the field, ideally in a W shape. Gateways and areas used for feed troughs, silage or hay feeders or muck heaps should be avoided.

Outside companies will come and carry out soil testing, which is easier but will be more expensive than using kits available through local agricultural merchants. Once test results are back, adjust soil pH first, if necessary, with applications of lime. Lime can be applied at any time of year, providing ground conditions allow.

Organic manures do contain some N but farmers must be careful when spreading to comply with NVZ rules. Consider timing (end of closed period) and amount (no more than 250kg of total nitrogen within a year), as well as storage and ground conditions.

Farming rules for water also need to be adhered to, which cover soil testing and application of manures to crops with a nitrogen requirement. Grass does require N in the autumn (August) and from February, according to the Nutrient Management Guide.

Applications

Care is needed not to apply high levels of manures, particularly from pigs and poultry, to fields already at P and K indexes of 3 or above. Sulphur plays an important role in nitrogen efficiency and its uptake by grass. Light soils in high rainfall areas, with high number of cuts with minimal manure returns, are at most risk of sulphur deficiency. Grass samples can be tested for sulphur and nitrogen levels to determine whether there is any need for sulphur applications.

In some systems N is used as a 'get out of jail free card' in the spring, as the farm has been well-grazed through to early spring. Nitrogen is applied and grass growth recovers enough to graze through to when grass starts growing well. The past two springs have been slow and cold, which means grass growth has struggled, even with nitrogen applications.

Farms managed well during these springs saw better covers through the winter. This means sheep were moved off the grazing platform (typically onto forage or cover crops, into a shed or to tack grazing) to ensure leys have at least 90 days of rest between the final graze and the first graze in the following spring. Grass has been

allow to rest and is more resilient to a colder spring. And, because there is leaf present, grass can utilise any sunlight that is available at that time of year.

If the fertiliser price stays high for a while, lambing date could be adjusted to fit better with grass growth.

Clover

Many sheep farmers have been focusing on increasing the level of red and white clover and herbs in their swards during the past few years. Herbs like chicory and plantain don't fix nitrogen. White clover can fix up to 150kgN/year and red clover up to 250kg. These levels will vary to do with the level of these plant species in the sward.

White clover is more versatile than red clover, as it is better able to withstand grazing. It doesn't fix as much nitrogen as red clover, but has more flexibility around tugging time. Ewes should not be grazed on swards with moderate to high levels of red clover from six weeks either side of tugging.

For farms without clover-dense leys, this can't be solved by next spring. But it could be useful to identify fields where white clover could be introduced, perhaps by over-seeding after a silage cut or hard winter grazing. Farms where artificial fertiliser applications have been reduced find clover levels increase in time.

Is spreading nitrogen cost effective?

If the concentrate price is £250/t, 1kgDM costs 30p. But if it is £350/t, 1kgDM costs 42p. The table below shows that even when nitrogen fertiliser costs £650/t, if spread on the right grassland at the right time, the cost of grass grown with nitrogen is only 13p/kgDM. So compared to concentrate costs, the cost of grass dry matter is still lower. But it is important to think about the return for each kgDM consumed.

For lowland breeding ewe systems, for example, the return per kgDM consumed is 15-18p. This is calculated by dividing the gross margin by kgDM consumed. For example, if a 65kg ewe's annual dry matter intake is 650kg, with a gross margin of £100, this equates to a return per kgDM consumed of 15p (100 divided by 650). It is worth thinking about how the fertiliser price relates back to concentrates plus the return from each kg of dry matter consumed.

Ready reckoner for nitrogen price.

Fertiliser price £/tonne	p/kg of N (ammonium nitrate)	p/kg of dry matter (assuming 1:15 response rate)
350	102	7
450	132	9
550	162	11
650	192	13
750	212	15
850	242	17

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Sales of performance recorded hill rams were up 53% in 2020, compared to 2019.

Scheme success reflected in sale-ring performance

When HCC first launched the Hill Ram Scheme in 2018, the goal was to have 45 participating flocks by the end of the five-year project.

To date, and three years in, 54 flocks have been recruited. This unexpected progress reflects the positive response to the innovative genetic improvement scheme from Welsh hill sheep farmers, says HCC.

The scheme was launched to help farmers select stock that thrive in the hill environment, based on sheep performance records. Prior to this, hill farmers faced real challenges in performance recording manually, with many having their flocks out on the hills throughout the year.

A wide geographical range of flocks from across Wales have joined the scheme. And not only has the large numbers of participating farmers made the scheme successful, but also the number of breeds – the scheme includes seven different sheep breeds.

Samples

Tissue sampling technology offered by the scheme has enabled the collection of large numbers of DNA samples – the latest count is 43,000.

“The scheme’s ambition is to achieve a critical mass of performance recorded flocks in the hill sector in Wales,” says HCC Project Coordinator Heather McCalman. “But many farmers are participating not to breed performance recorded rams but to improve the overall performance of their flock by using records to identify the animals that thrive in their system and environment.”

As the scheme has moved forward it has also evolved. Geneticists have formulated the Welsh Hill Sheep Breeding Index to ensure commercially important traits are developed.

In consultation with the hill and upland sheep breeders in Wales, the index was developed to allow farmers to select the most profitable hill rams and ewes for commercial hill farming enterprises.

This index is already helping breeders to select stock based on traits including maternal ability and lamb weights that best suit the system and flock. The long-term aim of the index is to improve the performance of hill ewes by increasing the growth rates and carcass conformation of lambs, and improving the maternal traits of milk production and mothering ability.

It will enhance the efficiency of hill ewes and make them more productive, without compromising their survival or fitness in the hill environment. They will produce more marketable lambs and this will help to reduce the cost of running hill flocks.

The Covid-19 pandemic meant there were challenges with delivering the planned on-farm support for farmers in the scheme, but these were solved with some slight adjustments.

Both the recruitment of new flocks and the activities of those already on the scheme continued successfully with virtual support for training and remote support for key activities such as tissue sampling.

Farmers, some of who joined the scheme in autumn 2020, rose to the challenge of learning how to use new technology via virtual workshops and online guidance.

“The willingness of farmers to adapt, and to actively participate, allowed the scheme to progress well during the pandemic,” says Dr McCalman.

“As the scheme gains momentum, we are seeing an increase in the number of performance recorded hill rams being sold in the hill sheep sector.”

Commitment

She adds that, in 2020, 53% more performance recorded hill rams were sold compared to the previous year. “This clearly demonstrates a growing commitment by farmers to using technology and best practice to develop more productive flocks.”

The 2021 data is not yet available, but growth is expected to continue as there are more flocks involved in the scheme.

HCC’s Hill Ram Scheme is one of three five-year projects in the Red Meat Development Programme funded by the Welsh Government and EU Rural Development Programme.



This HCC map shows the geographical range of participating farms.

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Good uptake, engagement and plenty of enthusiasm for scab project

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS **FOR FLOCK'S SAKE**

The Moredun-run 'For Flock's Sake' sheep scab project, funded by the Rural Development Programme for England and supported by SCOPS, was launched earlier this year.

Its objective is to demonstrate the effectiveness of a community-led approach to improve the control of sheep scab in three of England's hotspot areas.

Within each hotspot there are 'clusters' of farms that share common boundaries or use the same common grazing, and the aim is to foster cooperation within each cluster to control scab. The two-year project offers up to 300 participating farmers a unique combination of on-farm advice, best-practice training and free blood testing using the sheep scab ELISA test, developed by Moredun. It also covers the cost of vet visits to take two sets of blood samples for ELISA testing, plus a face-to-face advisory session for each farm to discuss scab control and biosecurity.

The ELISA blood test results for each farm are carefully analysed in relation to the scab-history of the farm in question and its neighbours, before advice is given about whether treatment, or follow up monitoring and inspection, are required. The key aspects of this approach are communication, cooperation and coordination within clusters.

Update

Since April 2021, project coordinators have been working hard in their areas and the three hotspots are now approaching their limit in terms of the numbers of participating farmers for which funding is available.

Stewart Burgess of Moredun says: "The levels of engagement and enthusiasm are so high that in some clusters the coordinators have more farmers than can be funded under current budgets. The vets in most areas have also been keen to be involved and have been instrumental in encouraging their clients to get involved."

"By the end of October 2021, we had already processed 113 sets of blood samples, with the results reported back to vets and coordinators. Discussions on coordinated treatments are now taking place in many areas, with farmers being encouraged to plunge dip where scab has been diagnosed and where it is possible to do so."

"We've seen a great response to the project in the north, with seven farmer clusters established," says Northern England Coordinator Ruth Dalton. "There is a willingness to tackle this disease and appears to be little stigma associated with it now. There's also a recognition that by working together, and prioritising coordinated dipping over other treatment options, we can start to make a difference to the amount of scab circulating."

Engagement

As expected, it has been a little harder to win farmer engagement in some areas where there are not the same historical links of cooperation present. For example such as those that exist between farmers around common grazing. These clusters tend to be less well defined and this has been a particular challenge in the Midlands, where independent sheep consultant Kate Phillips has been driving the project in the Long Mynd and Stiperstones area of Shropshire.

"Many farmers have been keen to be involved, recognising the cost and effects of sheep scab in their flocks. But we have a few farmers who are still reluctant to take part," she says. "So far 75 farmers have signed up and we have tested more than 50 flocks, with around a quarter proving positive. Our local vets have been extremely supportive and the team is working well together. With peer pressure and concerted effort from the team, we are likely to fill our complement of 100 farmers."

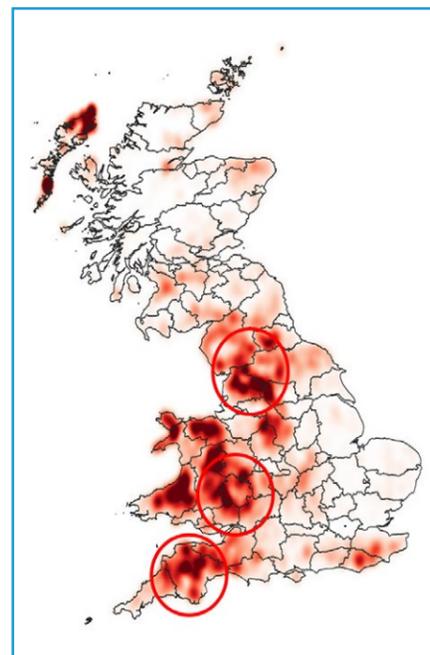
In South West England, NSA has been working in close collaboration with Katherine Williams from the Exmoor Hill Farm Network (EHFN) to engage with farmers across the moor. The local knowledge Katherine brings, coupled with the trust farmers have in EHFN, have been key to gaining engagement.

"We have now reached our target of 100 farms and blood testing is well underway," says Ms Williams. She adds that, as the test results come back, it is becoming clear that the variety of farming business structures (buying and selling policies), the patchwork nature of some farms, historic understanding of scab, and a farmer's pre-existing relationship with their vet all have a huge impact on the way the project coordinators need to proceed.

"It has meant the coordination aspect of the project has become increasingly important, and not just between the farmers involved in the

project but also between vet practices and reaching those farmers who haven't yet engaged.

"This project represents a relatively new way of trying to work with farmers, so it's been a steep learning curve for all involved to make the best use of the opportunity we've been given."



Scab hotspot areas

The project is running in three hotspot areas in England.

- **North** (coordinated by Cumbria Farmer Network).
- **Midlands** (coordinated by ADAS).
- **South West** (coordinated by NSA).

In each cluster, farm vets work directly with farmer clients and regional coordinators. This community-led approach to sheep scab control brings together people with a wide range of expertise. They're collaborating with farmers to control this disease. The overarching aim of the project is to provide a model that other farmers and vets can use to control sheep scab in their own areas.

Liver fluke – is your flock at risk this winter?

The dry, cool spring of 2021, followed by some hot, dry spells during the summer, has resulted in forecasts of a relatively low liver fluke risk this autumn and winter, across much of the UK.

But there are always exceptions to any rule. For example wet conditions, which support the mud snails around watering areas or ponds, can mean farms have some areas where the fluke risk is still high. To avoid either being caught out or treating unnecessarily, it is important to test to detect liver fluke in sheep.

"The days when we could just treat once or twice a season are over," says Moredun's Philip Skuce. "We cannot simply make assumptions based on forecasts or previous history. Each farm needs to work out whether treatment is necessary, when is the best time to treat, and the best product to use. Even if farmers have already treated their flocks this autumn, we are heading into the winter months. So if sheep are still grazing outside, farmers need to test to see if treatment is needed."

Choice of tests

At this time of year, liver fluke picked up by sheep in the autumn will be maturing inside them and there are two tests available to examine dung samples for evidence of liver fluke infection.

One is a fluke egg detection test (individual or mob samples), which looks for fluke eggs in faeces. Results are reported as positive or negative. The second is a coproantigen ELISA test (recommended only on individual animal samples), which looks for a fluke antigen in faeces and can detect infection between two and three weeks earlier than the egg detection test.

If either of these tests is positive, farmers will need to treat their flock for liver fluke. But egg production and antigen levels can fluctuate, so talk to your vet or adviser about whether you should re-test and at what interval.

In addition to faecal testing, post-mortems on any dead sheep, together with abattoir feedback, also provide invaluable information when monitoring for the presence of liver fluke.

So, which product should farmers use to ensure treatment is successful? Lesley Stubbings of SCOPS says: "Triclabendazole has been the 'go to' choice in recent years, because it kills liver fluke as young as two days of age in sheep. Unfortunately its popularity means there are now farms where there

Efficacy of flukicides against the various ages of liver fluke in sheep.

Active ingredient	Age of fluke (% 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*	90-99%											99.0-99.9%	autumn

* Resistance has been found on some farms to triclabendazole – but do not assume there is resistance; take advice on how to test.

** No nitroxylin-based products are now available in the UK.



Wet areas represent a high fluke risk.

is triclabendazole resistance, so farmers must try to reduce reliance on this active if possible. It's also important to test to see if you have resistance on your farm. Talk to your vet or adviser about this."

As winter approaches and liver fluke are maturing, farmers can use a closantel-based product that kills liver fluke down to between five and six weeks of age, as an effective alternative to triclabendazole. In the spring and early summer, when only mature fluke are present, an adulticide (albendazole or oxyclozanide) can be used, to take the pressure off closantel.

Reduced options

The withdrawal of Trodax (a nitroxylin-based product) from the market means there are now only four actives authorised in the UK for use in sheep, making it even more important to test and treat only when needed with the most appropriate active. Outside the UK, there are other nitroxylin flukicides and it may be possible for your vet to import one of these under a special import certificate obtained from the VMD in accordance with their clinical assessment.

Ms Stubbings adds: "It's also important to remember none of the available fluke treatments have any persistence. This means if farmers treat and then put sheep back out onto pasture that is carrying fluke, the sheep will become reinfected immediately. And never use a flukicide in combination with a wormer unless you know it is necessary. Using these products 'just in case' will increase the selection for wormer resistance on your farm."

For a full list of products visit www.scops.org.uk.



Treat flocks early to get on top of lameness problems

By Mark Pass & Eleanor Rawson, Willows Farm Vets **vetPartners**

From reduced weight gain and poor lamb growth to fertility issues and repeated veterinary visits, lameness can be a serious issue in sheep flocks.

Sheep farmers across the UK have worked hard to reduce lameness in recent years, but for some flocks it remains significant and costly.

Five years ago the Farm Animal Welfare Committee set a target for all sheep flocks to cut lameness rates to 5% – a figure updated to 2% in 2021. But, as the year draws to an end, there are flocks struggling to get to that 2% goal.

Even in relatively mild cases, lameness can have a significant impact on productivity and profitability. As well as reduced weight gain, which leads to more days to reach finishing or mature weight, it can lead to poor fertility, reduced scanning percentage and poor colostrum production. The knock-on effect can be increased vet and labour costs, and antibiotic use.

When it comes to reducing lameness rates, farmers must follow the national five-point management plan, which is designed to help address

weak areas and reduce overall disease pressure from infectious lameness.

To get on top of lameness, it's important to treat early – ideally in the first three days of symptoms appearing.

Sometimes lameness can be difficult to spot, but weekly locomotion scoring, lameness scoring using the three-point scale (see panel), and turning over poor sheep to check for lesions, will save time and money in the long-run.

There are several causes of lameness, including contagious ovine digital dermatitis (CODD), scald, toe granuloma and shelly hoof. But the most common is footrot, which is extremely painful and can affect sheep of all ages.

Infection

Footrot is caused by *Dichelobacter nodosus*, a naturally-occurring bacteria carried by healthy, as well as lame, sheep. The bacteria can remain infectious for up to 14 days on contaminated pasture, which means feet of infected sheep play a big role in transmitting the disease.

If an issue is spotted, a clean handling system alongside footbathing is vital. If feet are particularly dirty then two footbaths may be needed – one to clean feet and one to treat them.

Treatment for footrot includes long-lasting antibiotic and NSAIDs, but farmers should always talk to their vet to make sure they're using the right treatment. If a treatment programme isn't working, ask the vet to visit and diagnose the issue.

Prevention is always better than treatment and there are important steps farmers can take to reduce risk of spreading disease.

Quarantining bought-in animals is important to prevent introducing health problems to an otherwise healthy flock. Quarantine sheep for at least a month, if not longer, to ensure there aren't any disease issues. Footbathing on arrival is also vital.

Farmers should also consider vaccinating against footrot, as early prevention helps reduce antibiotics use. A single annual booster may be

Lameness scoring

- 0 – Sound. Bearing weight evenly on all four legs, walking with an even rhythm.
- 1 – Mildly lame. Uneven steps, but not clear which limb is affected.
- 2 – Moderately lame. Steps uneven, stride might be shortened and affected limbs easily identifiable.
- 3 – Severely lame. Mobility is compromised, animal stops walking or is lying down, affected limbs clearly identifiable.



There are steps farmers can take to reduce the risk of lameness.

Top tips for vaccination

- Vaccinating against footrot helps stimulates immunity to footrot causing bacteria.
- Talk to your vet before beginning any vaccination programme.
- Time vaccination to coincide with times of high disease risk on the farm.
- Vaccinate at least six weeks before tupping, and four weeks either side of lambing to prevent the immune response from affecting fertility and causing stress.
- Don't vaccinate before shearing.
- Leave four to six weeks between the first and second dose.
- Make sure no other vaccines are used within three weeks of vaccination to allow the immune system to fully respond.
- During vaccination, use a vaccine gun, change the needle regularly and clean the needle with surgical spirit.
- Injection site reactions are common with Footvax. If concerned, contact your vet.
- Never inject sheep with 1% moxidectin.
- There is no minimum age for Footvax, but issues in sheep younger than four months old are usually caused by scald.

sufficient if footrot has been reduced to a low incidence. But many farms require two vaccines a year. Check with your vet to find the right programme for your flock.

Culling

Lameness should be considered when making culling decisions. Vaccination alone won't solve a flock's lameness problems. It's important vaccination programmes are carried out in conjunction with other management strategies, including culling.

If an animal needs to be treated more than twice they should be culled. From a cost and welfare perspective, if they haven't responded to treatment by then, it's not going to work.

There is also a genetic element to footrot and foot confirmation, so it's important not to breed from rams that have been unresponsive to treatment. Animals with severely misshapen feet are likely to breed lambs with misshapen feet, and misshapen hooves are more likely to become lame.

Whether using EIDs or writing down information, start recording for lameness as it will help identify recurring problems and really help get to grips with the causes of this costly issue.

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Appropriate nutrition can prevent twin lamb disease and low blood calcium.

Know the difference between twin-lamb disease and hypocalcaemia

By Davinia Hinde, European College of Small Ruminant Health



Late pregnancy in ewes often poses nutritional problems for flocks, some of which can become life threatening.

Many of the problems are caused by the fact that 75% of foetal growth occurs during the final six weeks of pregnancy.

Hypocalcaemia (low blood calcium) is caused by increased calcium requirements in late pregnancy. It can be seen with, and complicated by, pregnancy toxaemia (twin lamb disease). The signs of hypocalcaemia can be particularly

problematic in older sheep, typically three-shear and above. But sporadic occurrence can be seen in ewes of all ages. It is most common when the ewes are out at pasture and after periods of stress, particularly handling for vaccinations and dog worrying.

Treatment options

Treatment of slow intravenous administration of 20-40ml 40% calcium borogluconate sodium, given during a 30-60 second period, is often successful and a rapid response is typically seen. Improvement usually starts with the ewe burping and then, after five minutes or so, standing, defecating or urinating, and then moving away.

Calcium can be administered subcutaneously (warmed 40% calcium borogluconate at a rate of 60-80ml) but recovery is slower – it can take up to four hours. Oral preparations of calcium can also be given to help prevent a relapse.

Pregnant ewe calcium requirements.

	Early gestation (g/day)	Late gestation (g/day)	Early lactation (g/day)
70kg adult ewe with twins	6.5	8.8	7.9

To prevent further cases in the flock, the calcium: phosphorus ratio of the ewe ration must be increased to more than 1.5:1. The diet must meet the ewes' calcium requirements. If vitamin D deficiency is also present, this will exacerbate the issue. So supplement as necessary.

Twin-lamb disease is typically seen during late gestation. It is characterised by a loss of appetite, depression, neurological signs and progresses to recumbency, coma and death. It's the result of an energy imbalance in the diet in late gestation, compounded by the ewe's reduced rumen capacity due to increased foetal growth. It can be seen in overweight (body condition score (BCS) or more than 4) and underweight ewes (BCS less than 2), as well as those in optimal body condition.

It can be exacerbated by periods of nutritional stress, such as poor forage quality, inadequate

concentrate quantity or high foetal demand. The clinical signs seen can be compounded by periods of stress such as adverse weather conditions and handling for procedures including vaccinations or housing. Symptoms are typically seen one to three weeks before lambing.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be made both on the presence of clinical symptoms and measurement of blood ketones and blood glucose levels, using a hand held ketone meter. Further blood analysis can also be carried out. Normal blood ketone levels in pregnancy are less than 0.8mmol/L. Subclinical twin lamb disease is found at 0.8-3mmol/L, and clinical twin lamb disease at a level more than 3mmol/L.

In 40% of twin-lamb disease cases, ewes will have a normal blood glucose and 20% actually have a raised blood glucose level. So blood glucose on its own is not a useful diagnostic tool.

Low calcium levels can also be found with twin-lamb disease, and hypocalcaemia complicates the disease and delays recovery. It should always be considered if ewes are not recovering as expected.

Early treatment with oral propylene glycol, 60ml twice daily, can be successful. Sometimes the ewe must be induced to initiate labour to



Handling or other stress factors can exacerbate nutritional problems.

Symptoms of pregnancy toxaemia

- Reluctance to come to trough.
- Isolating themselves.
- Depressed and dull.
- Grinding teeth.
- Fine muscle tremors.
- Blindness.
- Sternal recumbency.
- Head pressing.
- Coma and death.

remove the nutritional drain on her by the lambs.

Prevention is through nutrition. Ewes should not enter the final six weeks of gestation with a BCS less than 2.5, and good nutritional management is essential. This includes adequate trough space; regular forage analysis to check energy, digestible fibre and protein levels; adequate access to water; grouping and feeding according to lamb number; regular body condition scoring; and careful ration formulation.



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Ewe nutrition key to successful lambing

Enhancing ewe nutrition ahead of lambing is crucial to a successful lambing period.

"More than 70% of foetal growth occurs during the final six to eight weeks of a ewe's pregnancy, heightening the demand for nutrients during this period," says Brinicombe Agri's Neil Ashwell.

"Meeting the ewe's nutritional requirements will ensure healthy growth of the unborn lamb and support development of the ewe's udder for milk production, all while providing enough essential nutrients for the ewe to maintain herself to permit a successful lambing."

Energy gap

Mr Ashwell says the bulk of nutrition can be provided through good quality forage and additional concentrate feed, but providing ad-lib nutritional buckets can help bridge the remaining energy gap.

A full-term ewe requires 18-19MJ of energy, with good quality forage supplying 5-6MJ and 11-12MJ coming from hard feed. A further 2-4MJ can be supplied via a high energy/protein lick.

Mr Ashwell recommends introducing a high energy/protein bucket six to eight weeks ahead of lambing and selecting a product that also contains a good supply of minerals, trace elements and vitamins.

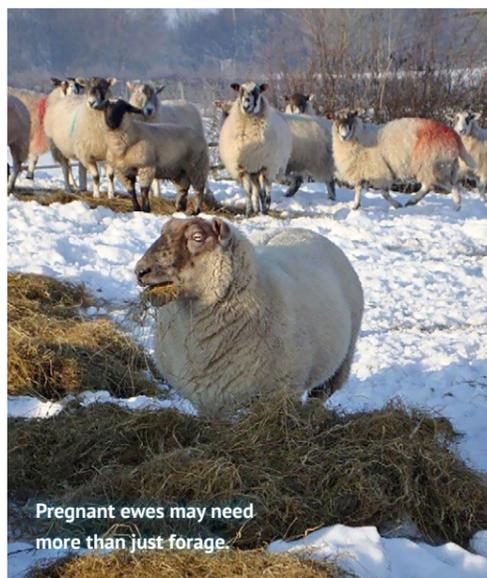
Iodine plays an important role in helping to reduce the risk of stillborn and lethargic lambs, as well as supporting thyroxine production for energy.

"Iodine is key to foetal development and lamb vigour," says Mr Ashwell. "If not enough is supplied at this crucial time, lambs are born listless resulting in dopey or, worse-case scenario, stillborn lambs.

"Iodine is important for the production of thyroxine from the thyroid gland and poor supply of iodine can result in an enlarged thyroid or goitre."

Mr Ashwell says goitrogens omitted by brassica crops absorb ewes' iodine, so extra consideration is needed where brassicas make up the diet for pregnant ewes.

Zinc deficiency can manifest as poorly-fleeced lambs, which are susceptible to hypothermia.



Pregnant ewes may need more than just forage.

Providing the correct balance of minerals, trace elements and vitamins is essential to help prevent issues such as lambing sickness, prolapse and poor udder development.

Mr Ashwell continues: "Ewes have a relatively small skeletal mass, compared to cows, and can't store enough calcium and magnesium to meet the demands of lambing, particularly ewes carrying multiple lambs. Supplementary calcium and magnesium can promote healthy skeletal

development of the growing foetus and adequate milk production.

"These nutrients are also required to help develop good muscle tone and trigger contractions, which prevent prolapses and prolonged lambing."

"Vitamin A helps with mucous production, which can help to encourage an easier birth because the lambs are wetter, while selenium and vitamin E trigger a brown fat reserve in the newborn lamb. This initiates the shivering mechanism that encourages lambs to get up and suckle."

Colostrum consumed by lambs in the first seven hours of life is crucial for providing maternally derived antibodies, which are essential to protect lambs from infection. But, according to Mr Ashwell, colostrum quality is something to think about long before lambing.

Colostrum

"An adequate supply of protein and energy will help produce high quality colostrum containing a good supply of selenium and vitamin E to support the lambs developing immune system."

Mr Ashwell adds that maintaining body condition throughout ewes' five-month gestation period should not be overlooked.

"Mid-pregnancy placental development is often neglected when it comes to nutrition, but it is key to lambing success because it provides developing lambs with nutrients. Poor placental development can lead to reabsorptions and small lambs, particularly in challenging conditions," he says.

"Providing an adequate supply of protein and energy throughout pregnancy is important to prevent ewes from losing body condition. The more protein and energy supplied, the more the ewe will put into placental development rather than just looking after herself."



FEEDING LIVE YEAST TO PREGNANT EWES CAN INCREASE COLOSTRUM QUALITY, BOOSTING LAMB IMMUNITY AND ROBUSTNESS

Sheep producers are being urged to consider feeding live yeast to pregnant ewes, following recent trial results which showed significant improvements in colostrum quality and lamb robustness.

When speaking at the 12th International Symposium on Gut Microbiology, Dr Lysiane Dunière research scientist at Lallemand Ruminant Centre of Excellence, highlighted that there can be real benefits to feeding a live yeast pre-parturition.

"The transition period is one of the most challenging times for ruminants with significant metabolic and dietary changes impacting rumen function. However, the study proves that feeding a live yeast during the transition phase can really help to stabilise the rumen microbiota," she explained.

Improved colostrum quality

She went on to say how feeding a specific live yeast not only improves rumen function, but also colostrum quality.

"During the trial, ewes supplemented with the rumen specific live yeast Levucell SC, showed significantly higher immunoglobulin G (IgG) concentrations, which is a type of antibody, in the colostrum when compared to the control group. This demonstrated an immune transfer to the lambs.

"Higher IgG levels could also be seen in the blood of the supplemented dam's new-borns at birth and at one week of age (Figure 1)," added Dr Dunière. This increased level of antibodies means they have a better chance of fighting off any disease pressures they may be exposed to."

Further to this, the results highlighted that there was also a higher concentration of the bioactive antimicrobial

molecules lactoferrin and sialic acids in the colostrum, which can also benefit new-born's robustness and digestive system development," she explained. Dr Dunière concluded by saying producers should really consider feeding the rumen specific live yeast Levucell SC to pregnant ewes to help maximise ewe and lamb performance.

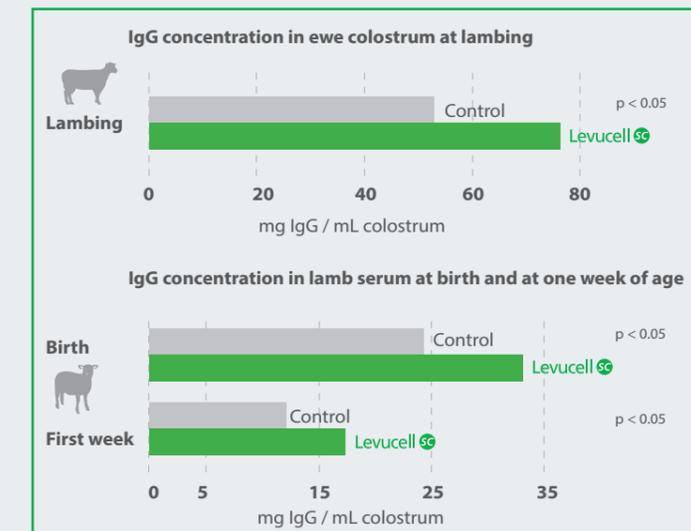


Figure 1- Effect of ewe dietary supplementation on colostrum and lamb serum IgG levels

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*Saccharomyces cerevisiae CNM I-1077



Source sheep through a health scheme to reduce the risk of buying in infection.

TECHNICAL

Test for Johne's disease to improve and protect flock performance

Johne's disease is an insidious condition of sheep, cattle and goats, caused by the bacterial organism *Mycobacterium avium subspecies paratuberculosis*.

As one of the iceberg diseases, Johne's can have a serious impact on productivity and performance, with annual losses estimated to be as high as 10% in some flocks. Unfortunately signs of the disease are non-specific, meaning under-diagnosis can be a problem.

Unlike the classic presentation in cattle, sheep with Johne's disease rarely develop diarrhoea. The primary sign in sheep is weight-loss, with bottle-jaw developing in the final stages. Although these animals are usually infected in early life, a long incubation period means that, typically, the disease does not develop until sheep are three

or four years of age. It is invariably fatal, with no effective treatments available.

The infection is shed in faeces and is typically picked up by young lambs via contamination on ewes' udders and in the environment. Control measures must, therefore, target hygiene in lambing sheds and cleanliness of ewes in the late stages of pregnancy. Sheep seem to be resistant to contracting infection later in life. As a result, while wildlife such as deer and rabbits can be a source of pasture contamination, this is not a primary source of infection in flocks.

Screening

Testing is available and can be carried out on both faeces and blood. Because animals will not test positive during the early stages of infection, negative results must be treated with caution. But regular screening, such as that carried out through a health scheme, can build a picture of

disease prevalence at flock level over time.

So, what action should farmers take if they are concerned about Johne's disease? There are several things they can do.

Investigations

Consider having post-mortem investigations carried out on a batch of cull ewes. Select between three and five that have no obvious explanation for ill thrift. This can help to identify a range of chronic diseases that could be at play – not just Johne's disease.

Screening pooled dung samples from thin animals can also be useful, or opportunistic testing can be carried out if animals are blood sampled for some other reason. Select sheep that are more than two years of age, and remember a single negative result does not exclude the possibility of infection, while a positive result in a thin animal is considered significant.

Farmers should also think about other stock. If Johne's disease has been previously diagnosed in cattle on the same holding, it is likely the infection will also be in the sheep flock, and vice versa.

If Johne's disease is confirmed in a flock, seek veterinary support to implement a control plan in order to reduce the impact of the disease.

And when buying in stock, think about sourcing through a health scheme to reduce the risk of introducing the infection. Although infected animals are the main source of the organism, other risks could include colostrum from cattle, or water sources at pasture. Farmers should discuss the risk to their individual flock with their vet, who can give specific and tailored advice.

By Eilidh Corr, QMS



Johne's disease typically doesn't develop until sheep are three or four years old.

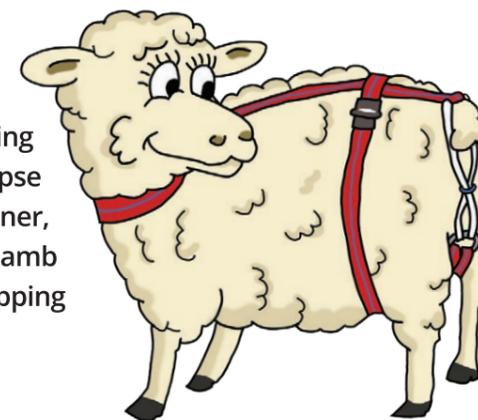
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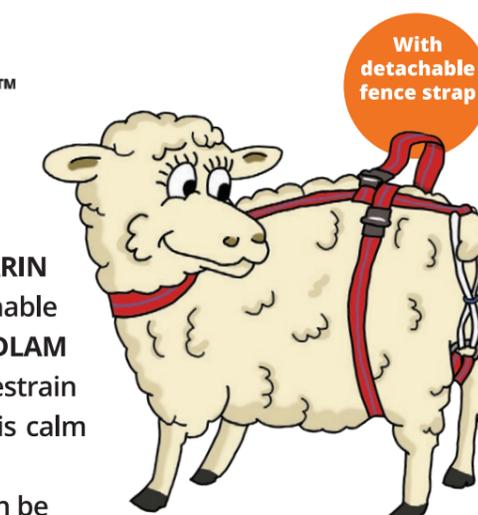
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Lambing time presents a higher zoonoses risk.

Zoonoses – time to take them seriously

By Rachael Porter, contributor

When you work with sheep every day, it's easy to forget that some of the diseases they can carry are zoonotic – meaning they can transmit to humans and cause serious health issues.

As we approach lambing-time, when close contact with sheep is greatest, it is appropriate to consider the risks of zoonoses and talk to people who have contracted them.

January 2020 was the start of many months spent in hospital for Kent-based sheep farmer Sarah Walker. She was diagnosed with a ruptured aneurysm – and was extremely lucky to survive. Hers was a rare and extreme zoonoses case.

"But I want to share my experience to highlight the problems that can be caused by zoonotic infections on sheep farms," she says.

Her health problems began back in 2015, with what appeared to be the early symptoms of a gastroenteritis-type illness. "I had a fever, fatigue and painful joints, and sought medical advice," she recalls. "But because I was diagnosed with anxiety, which I thought was nonsense, I didn't go back again for five years - by which time my back pain was unbearable."

Infection

After Ms Walker's initial spell in hospital, she was re-admitted twice, in February and March 2020, with kidney damage and an infection, which was eventually identified as *Campylobacter fetus*.

"The specialists said I picked it up through open skin on my hands because I didn't wear protective gloves for lambing," she says.

A scan showed this bacteria had caused the aneurysm, damage to both kidneys and had infected Ms Walker's spine. She was given intravenous (IV) antibiotics for almost 12 months, and then oral antibiotics but had a major relapse, further kidney damage and sepsis, in September 2020.

"After being stabilised, I was sent to a top specialist for a huge operation to replace the damaged artery with vessels harvested from both my thighs. Two further infections were also identified (*Nocardia nova* and *Variovorax paradoxus*), which the doctors believe I picked up that summer when my immune system was severely compromised," she says.

Although this experience is, indeed, rare, it does highlight the importance of good hygiene and biosecurity when working with sheep – particularly around lambing time.

Rebecca Mearns, Sheep Veterinary Society President, says: "There are many zoonoses, particularly diseases that cause abortion in sheep, and that's why farmers should take extra care to protect themselves around lambing time.

"Chlamydia, toxoplasmosis, campylobacter, salmonella and listeria all cause abortion in sheep. And all pose a serious health risk to farmers, particularly pregnant women or the immunocompromised."

Gloves

Not all zoonotic-disease risks are related to abortion in sheep. The risk is present every year, and all year round. Aborted fetuses and membranes, but also the afterbirth and fluids produced during a healthy lambing, can be a significant source of infection for some of these diseases.

Dr Mearns says: "It's possible the Covid-19 pandemic has focused minds on the importance of thorough and regular handwashing. But the risk from zoonoses remains the same. So always wear gloves when lambing ewes, wear protective clothing, wash hands well, avoid eating in the lambing shed. Also investigate the cause of abortion by submitting samples to the lab. There are vaccines available for some of these diseases that can be used in flocks if appropriate.

"Anyone who is pregnant should also stay away from the sheep during lambing time. And



Aborted fetuses and membranes pose an infection risk.

pregnant women should never handle or launder dirty work wear, because zoonoses-causing organisms can be present."

Pregnant women who come into close contact with sheep during lambing may risk their own health, and that of their unborn child, from zoonotic infections. Various Government departments and agencies issue annual advice, typically just before the lambing season starts, stressing the measures farmers can take to reduce the zoonoses risk, and also emphasising the risk to women who are, or may be, pregnant.

Precautions

Although the number of human pregnancies affected by zoonotic infections from sheep is extremely small, it is important that pregnant women are aware of the potential risks and take appropriate precautions (see panel).

Other zoonoses include orf, cryptosporidiosis and Q fever. "But, irrespective of the diseases' names and their symptoms in sheep, farmers need to be aware their flocks may carry many different zoonoses, and lambing time is one period when there may be an increased risk of picking up infection," stresses Dr Mearns.

"And, if farmers do feel unwell, it's imperative they mention they work with sheep when they visit their doctor. GPs are not always aware of zoonoses and how they present, even those in rural areas. So make sure you flag it up."

Another farmer who's certainly more aware of the risk of zoonoses when handling his flock is Herefordshire-based sheep farmer Ernie Richards. He ended up in hospital on IV antibiotics after catching orf this summer.

He manages 1,000 ewes at Hay-on-Wye and says he vaccinates his flock against orf. He says:

"I hadn't seen any cases in our lambs. But it's obviously on the farm somewhere – it can survive on surfaces for a long time. It must have got into my hand through a graze on my finger.

"I don't recall how I did it, but a few weeks later the edges of the graze started to crust and blister. It looked very unpleasant. Then, within a matter of 48 hours, the blister was huge and I began to feel unwell. There was a serious infection in my finger and it was tracking up my arm."

Mr Richards took himself to A&E: "It was telling that they didn't know what orf was, even when I explained I was a sheep farmer and what the disease was. And Hereford hospital is close to a rural area. So one thing I would urge farmers to do, if they feel unwell and visit their GP or hospital, is tell them you work with sheep. It could help speed up diagnosis and treatment – and recovery."

Breathless

Ben Smith agrees. He's a Cheshire-based livestock haulier and sheep shearer and contracted pneumonia in June, after spending seven weeks clipping sheep. "I had what felt like a cold, which I put down to not wrapping up warmly after shearing," he says. "I took a day off and that's when I knew something wasn't right. I felt weak and breathless, and the next morning I couldn't get out of bed and could hardly speak because I was so short of breath. I called my GP and they told me to go straight to A&E."

Once there, he says, the doctors were convinced it was Covid-19: "That's the obvious culprit with any respiratory symptoms at the moment. But I continued to get worse, despite treatment. A CT scan then revealed my left lung was completely congested and I was sent straight to intensive care and given IV antibiotics."

Frighteningly for Mr Smith, and his family, he still failed to respond to treatment and it was only then that he was interrogated by a concerned consultant, who, thankfully, asked the question: 'what do you do for a living?'

"I told him I worked with sheep – either shearing or loading them on and off lorries. Lots of direct contact," he recalls.

A phlegm sample was tested, and the results revealed Mr Smith was suffering from a livestock-derived pneumonia. "The consultant confirmed this was as result of working with sheep and, finally, they were able to give me the correct IV antibiotics to help me recover."

Mr Smith says he's still easily tired and often short of breath. He wonders if his treatment, and recovery, could have been quicker if he'd mentioned working with sheep at the start. "Probably not, due to the current focus on Covid-19. I am getting better, but it's taking a long time. But I'd urge all farmers and people working with livestock to flag up their job if they're taken ill – just in case it is a zoonoses. It can then be ruled out."

For more information visit www.hse.gov.uk/agriculture/topics/zoonoses.htm and www.gov.uk/government/news/pregnant-women-advised-to-avoid-animals-that-are-giving-birth-2

To avoid the possible risk of infection, pregnant women should:

- Not help ewes to lamb.
- Avoid contact with aborted or newborn lambs or with the afterbirth, birthing fluids or contaminated bedding.
- Avoid handling (including washing) clothing, boots or any materials that may have come into contact with lambing ewes, lambs or afterbirths. Potentially contaminated clothing will be safe to handle after being washed on a hot cycle
- Ensure contacts or partners who have lambing ewes take appropriate health and hygiene precautions, including wearing personal protective equipment and clothing and adequate washing to remove any potential contamination.
- Seek medical advice if they experience fever or influenza-like symptoms, or if concerned they could have acquired infection from a farm environment.

Orf can lead to a serious infection.



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PRODUCT AND BUSINESS NEWS

Auto drafter developed for industry

Following six years of development and progressive field trials, Pharmweigh is now selling its 'silent, compact, fast, calm and gentle' Draft Master electric auto drafter.

The company is pitching the product as industrially engineered and technically robust, emphasising how much work has gone into developing a labour-saving and valuable piece of kit.

The company says the electric auto drafter is more compact than its pneumatic auto drafter, being similar in size to its manual drafter but running off extremely quiet e-bike batteries (rather than a less portable generator or compressor).

A fully charged 10-amp hour battery will run the auto drafter continuously for up to five hours, at speeds of up to one lamb per six seconds in the automatic mode. An anti-jam feature means, when resistance is met, the gate retracts and tries again until closed. Gate feedback ensures only the correct weight is caught and recorded.

A semi-automatic mode allows for handling, grading and redrafting remotely from a mobile phone or tablet, using a specific app. Drafting can be done by weight, daily liveweight gain or EID. Data can also be transmitted via bluetooth to a third-party management app.



More at www.pharmweigh.com/draft-master.

'Computer vision' to revolutionise CT scanning and aid breeding

Ongoing research is automating the reading of CT scans, to speed up the process and further aid genetic progress and breeding decisions.

Work at SRUC has developed a way to instantly perform the image editing steps, such as removal of the cradle that sheep are scanned in, and use computer vision to quickly extract key information at a speed of 0.11 seconds per CT scan.



The image processing model was trained on CT scans already routinely collected by SRUC's CT scanning team and using an NVIDIA DGX Station containing more than 20,000 cores. This allowed new unseen images to be processed using machine learning with an accuracy of 98% compared to those produced manually. Important traits such as muscle or fat percentage and length or width of limbs, which are typically measured from the image by hand, were then calculated automatically.

James Robson, who led the research, says: "This tool not only saves a lot of time but also allows us to process far more data than before and gather information that can then be used to guide genetic breeding programmes.

"It's really amazing to see the wide variety of challenges that machine learning can be used to address. We are hoping to expand this research into other areas and invite any organisation to come forward if they have images or video datasets they think may contain something of interest."

More from Dr Robson at james.robson@sruc.ac.uk.

Rodenticide wins industry award

BSAF's rodenticide bait Selontra has been named 'best new product' by Pest magazine.

Products eligible for the award had to be nominated by the magazine's readers, published for pest controllers and other industry experts. BSAF markets Selontra as a highly palatable rodenticide with a non-anticoagulant formulation, capable of controlling rodent infestations in as few as seven days. More at www.pestcontrol.basf.co.uk/en.



Following the flock

This month we visit Somerset, Cumbria and Suffolk to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Kevin Harrison

NSA English Committee Chairman, Somerset



Nothing remarkable has happened here during the past few months, except maybe the lamb price.

We typically finish more than 95% of our lambs by the end of September, with a considerable reliance on bought-in feed. But this year, due to the exceptional amount of grass growth, we decided to try to reduce our costs by feeding fewer concentrates at the tail end. These lambs didn't achieve a good finish, so we sold about 300 stores through the market. They sold well, averaging as much as our finished lambs earlier in the year. Interestingly big-framed store lambs at 45-50kg actually sold better than 40-45kg finished lambs.

We have been unable to buy any breeding stock again this year, due to being in probate. So our numbers have reduced for the second year running.

Tups have gone in a couple of weeks earlier and they have been a little bit slower. But we will still finish tugging earlier than usual.

I'm now thinking about how we could restructure our business going forward. With new schemes coming on stream, and considerably higher input costs, should we be considering a lower input, lower output system that would suit the farm better, or should we continue to go for maximum performance while chasing that tantalising finished-lamb price?



Kevin is thinking about the new Government schemes.



Eddie's paddock system has improved grazing efficiency.

Edward Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Committee Chairman, Cumbria



Sales of our breeding sheep have been buoyant, with a full clearance leaving room for the next generation to take their place.

It is always a pleasure to sell sheep on a good trade and, with Covid-19 related restrictions now relaxed at the marts, the social aspect has also been pleasurable.

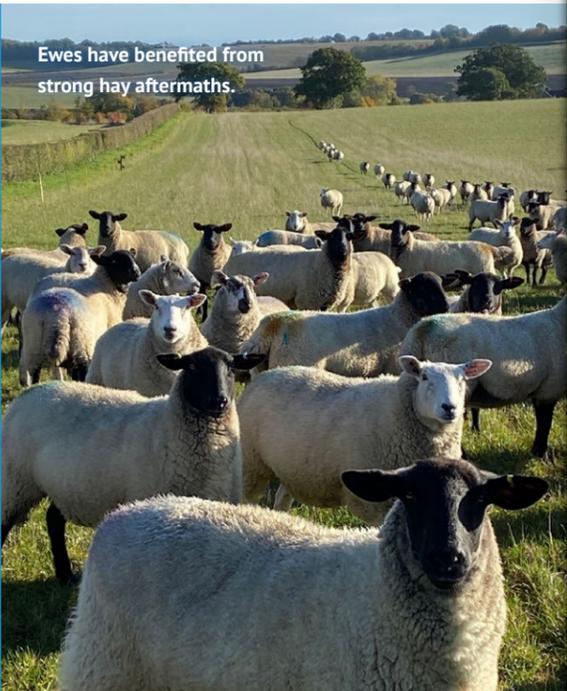
Hill-bred lambs are now being sourced for overwintering on grass, to be sold in the late spring. Others will be put onto stubble turnips in the new year and marketed from February onwards.

While ensuring we only buy healthy animals, there is always the risk of bringing unwelcome diseases onto the farm. This means we adhere to a strict period of quarantine, as well monitoring and carrying out relevant treatments.

For these sheep to produce a decent margin, current prime sheep values will need to be maintained. However, as we all know only too well, this is in no way guaranteed. Agricultural commodities have always been subject to volatility and can be influenced by events either here in the UK or globally.

The past season has seen a further extension of our paddock grazing system, for both cattle and sheep. This includes more strategically placed water troughs and increased investment in electric-fence components, including solar-powered energisers. Paddock grazing has enabled more efficient use of the grazing area, improved animal liveweight gains, and prevented the build-up of stemmy grass.

Ewes have benefited from strong hay aftermaths.



Dan Phipps

NSA and NSA Eastern Region Chairman, Suffolk



Rams have been out and, apart from a slightly odd tugging pattern, they have done their job for the early lambing flock.

We use raddles for lambing management, as it is critical to get sheep and shepherds together in the right sheds at the right time. Shearling ewes have benefited from particularly strong hay aftermaths and lambs, equally, are finishing nicely on clover aftermaths.

We aim to keep these clover leys in good order to try and reduce our reliance on creep feed for the early-lambing flock in the spring. We scanned in late November and empty ewes joined the May-lambing flock to tup in December.

We have just reviewed this season and have had a satisfying year in terms of production. This then coincided with unprecedented sale prices, with early lambs sold in advance of £7/kg. A few years ago we carried out a carbon footprint analysis and discovered the best way to lower our environmental impact was to up output per ewe farmed. That's a win-win and something we should all be striving for year on year.

Of course, we would like to see a repeat of this year's returns in 2022, considering the increase in input costs. Feed price rises are looking to be around an additional £30/tonne, compared to 2020, and fuel prices have also rocketed along with many other essential inputs.

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Dandy Farm is home to the Whiteley Hey Flock run by Paul and Nigel Slater along with Paul's daughter Claire. The flock consists of 1,700 breeding females producing top quality butchers lambs and over 500 breeding rams every year.

The rams are sold to commercial flocks either privately or through their exclusive production sales. The Slaters follow a strict culling policy, if any breeding stock doesn't meet their standards, then they are culled.

"I'm a firm believer in that you get out what you put in with stock, so with returning customers year on year and a selective breeding programme going back over 20 years it is imperative that our breeding stock are in the best condition possible and are ready to perform" says Paul.

Lambing is split into two batches; 700 ewes are lambed from February 26th until 25th March followed by 300 ewe lambs and the remainder of the shearlings are then lambed from April until Mid-May.

"We are generally very happy with the performance of the flock but we have been having issues with good, strong new-born lambs from the ewe lambs taking their first breath and then subsequently dying. We weren't sure what was causing the issue but after lots of testing, our vets confirmed it was an Iodine deficiency that was causing these losses."

"We looked at different options on how to address the issue and a fellow ram breeder from Scotland recommended the Mayo All Guard Ewe 4in1 bolus. Not only does the bolus have high levels of all the key trace elements, it's also nice and small making it very easy to administer which is particularly important with the likes of Beltex ewes."

"We gave them a go and found them a doddle to administer, and we have been delighted with the results. The boluses have completely rectified the problems that we were experiencing, lambs have great vigour at birth and the ewes have looked really well throughout lactation. The boluses will now be a firm part of our pre-lambing flock health plan going forward" concludes Paul.

Whiteley Hey Flock - Paul Slater



For more information contact:

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