

SHEEPFARMER

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2022

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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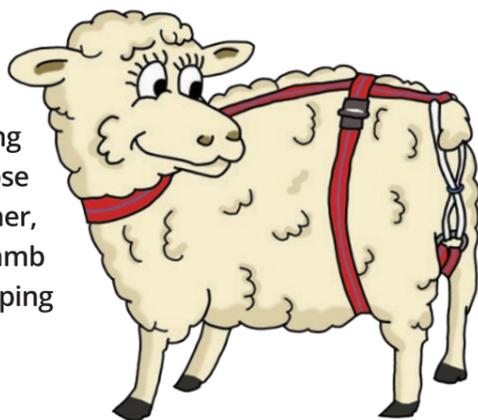
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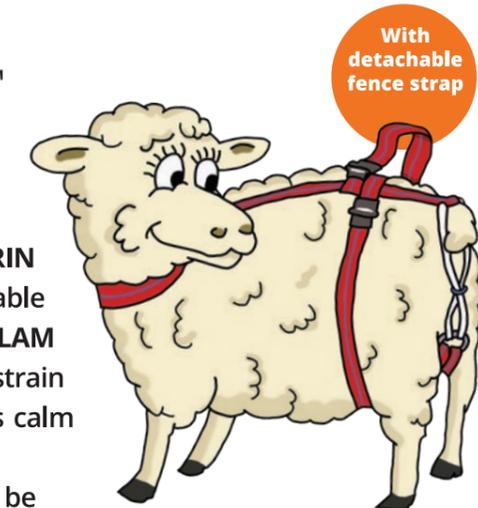
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Focus on lambing, mental health and people

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



INSIDE YOUR SHEEP FARMER
FEBRUARY / MARCH 2022
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Although some will have finished, for most sheep farmers lambing is just around the corner.

It's a great time of the year when, if we've got things right, we start to see the fruits of our labour. Even when it goes well its hard work, with long hours that can test tempers. When things don't go so well it can leave you feeling isolated and alone. At times like these it's good to talk. There will always be someone who has been through even worse times and who will listen and, if it's easier to talk to someone other than family or friends, we are fortunate to have organisations who have specialists to support farming people who are struggling. Remember, feeling down or depressed is not a failing or a weakness, it's far more common than many people think and, fortunately, there is rarely stigma attached.

People

You'd be right to think NSA's core interest is sheep, but in a sheep-farming context sheep are nothing without people. And NSA is an organisation for people – our sheep farmers, shepherds, vets, advisers and a host of others who work within and on the fringes of our great industry. For the past couple of years we have worked hard to make the case for the public good of grazed grasslands. We have drilled home the sustainability credentials of sheep farming as being almost the ultimate in renewable technology, producing highly nutritious meat and wool mainly from grass grown using not much more than sunshine, rainfall, and soil nutrients. In its wake, sheep farming creates a landscape that most people appreciate, a reservoir of soil carbon and, at various levels, habitats for nature.

We have never ignored the social side of sheep farming. It's the bedrock of many remote rural communities and services, and contributes sustainably to local economies. It supports tourism and many other rural businesses, and sheep farming still offers attractive jobs and achievable business opportunities for young people making that first step on the farming ladder. But this year I believe we need to step up the focus on our people.

The whole country has been through a tough couple of years, and sheep farmers are no different, even though we have had more space than many and our work and social lives are often indistinguishable. This year, whatever happens with covid-19, many of the tougher restrictions will be relaxed and we will get back to some form of normality.

NSA Scot Sheep and NSA Sheep 2022 are very definitely scheduled for this summer. I hope as many members as possible will join us for a real celebration, putting our community and friendships firmly back on track, alongside all the technical and business activities on offer.

Trepidation

It would be wrong not to make a mention of ELMS, even if it is with some trepidation because it's becoming a bunfight. Maybe I'm wrong, but I thought public money for public goods was a government idea that Defra was charged to implement. It's ironic that we have MPs now starting to blame Defra when the policy comes under fire.

The devolved nations are distancing themselves, or are watching with interest, to avoid the same mistakes. The policy is under criticism for risking food security but if we were serious about food security and protecting the environment it would not be beyond reach to have both.

And then there is food inflation. Farmers have long said that food should be more expensive and better valued, but now many are calling for support schemes to keep food prices down. Contradictions between trade policy and farming policy aren't helping and you can see Ministers becoming nervous about high standards contributing to high food prices, and then using trade liberalisation to peg food prices back. And then, within all these unknowns, the farmer is told to do more business planning...

Stay strong, and I wish you all a successful lambing season.

If you ever need extra support, call Farming Help on 03000 111999. Or find signposting to various services at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/farminghelp.



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National Sheep Association

The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH
01684 892661 (Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm)
www.nationalsheep.org.uk
enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk

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NSA regions

Central



Chairman: **James Bickerton**



Secretary: **Alice Helliwell**
07860 622053
central@nationalsheep.org.uk

Cymru / Wales



Chairman: **Kate Hovers**



Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**
01691 654712 / 07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Eastern



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**



Manager: **Jonathan Barber**
01953 607860 / 07712 659262
jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk

Marches



Chairman: **Richard Vines**



Secretary: **Katie James**
07748 151235
marches@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



Manager: **Chris Adamson**
07930 225150
chris@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Jonny Farmer**



Development Officer: **Edward Adamson**
02893 366225 / 07711 071290
edward.adamson1@gmail.com

Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**



Regional Coordinator: **Grace Reid**
07787 142858
grace@nationalsheep.org.uk

South East



Chairman: **Yann Le Du**



Secretary: **Sarah Blake**
07734 428712
southeast@nationalsheep.org.uk

South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**



Secretary: **Ian May**
07913 043234
ian@nationalsheep.org.uk

NSA Rams Sales



Wales & Border: **Jane Smith**
01291 673939
jane@nsaramsales.co.uk



Eastern: **Jonathan Barber**
01953 607860 / 07712 659262
jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk



South West: **Sue Martyn**
01409 271385 / 07967 512660
suem@nationalsheep.org.uk

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Many hats recognised with industry award

The NSA George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep industry has been bestowed closer to home than in recent years, with NSA staff member **Helen Roberts** winning the prestigious accolade.

Helen wears multiple hats, within NSA and more widely in the sector, with sheep being both her personal passion and source of employment. To name just a few ongoing contributions, Helen organises the NSA Sheep Event and NSA Welsh Sheep, runs the NSA Cymru/Wales Region, helps ensure NSA members regularly receive Sheep Farmer magazine, and acts as a director for Welsh Lamb and Beef Producers.

Helen works with her father to show and sell stock from the renowned Horton Suffolk flock, while she and husband Clive run commercial and pedigree sheep on the England/Wales border.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "The George Hedley award is a really prestigious recognition of outstanding contribution to the sheep industry in the UK and I'm delighted that Helen joins the long and very worthy list of recipients. She lives and breathes sheep farming and is actively involved in so many different aspects of our industry." *Helen is the 2021 winner and will be presented with the award at NSA Sheep 2022. Nominations for the 2022 prize will open later in the year.*



Helen Roberts.



Check out the new-look NSA website

After months of hard work, NSA was delighted to reveal its new look website in January. The refreshed appearance and improved navigation makes content easier to find. The new 'NSA Community' area brings together multiple resources for members, in addition to the regular updates in the 'Our Work' area. [Take a look at www.nationalsheep.org.uk](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk).

New regional faces

With regions busy holding their annual members' meetings, elections of officeholders are happening throughout the UK.

This includes nominations to fill two positions on the NSA Management Board vacated by people who've completed their maximum six-year terms.

There will be a full update in the next edition of the magazine, but the identity of the new NSA Marches Region Chairman is already known. You can meet Herefordshire sheep farmer Richard Vines on page 22. NSA extends a huge thanks to Antony Spencer, who led the region for six years, and continues to sit on the NSA UK Policy & Technical and NSA English committees. [Find details of all NSA officeholders at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about).

Update your details

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with NSA if we do not have your email address. You are missing out on receiving the NSA Weekly Email Update, and can help us better utilise our limited resources if we can email correspondence rather than post it. Please also consider boosting your membership subscription by allowing us to claim Gift Aid. This comes at no extra cost to you but, as a registered charity, means NSA can access additional funding from HMRC. [Tell us your email address at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/contactdetails](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/contactdetails), and register for Gift Aid at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/giftaid.

Prizes for NSA members

NSA is excited to be launching a new prize draw – in which one lucky winner will walk away with a **Te Pari Racewell HD3 sheep handling system worth £20,000**.

The joint initiative between NSA and Te Pari will allow any UK-based sheep farmer to enter the free prize draw before the end of 2022, with a single winner selected early next year.

This campaign follows on from the NSA-Solway Recycling prize draw, which has now closed. NSA looks forward to revealing the final of four winners in the next edition of this magazine.

Chris Adamson, NSA Activities & Campaigns Officer, says: "It has been a pleasure to work with Solway Recycling on the 2021/22 campaign, and to see four NSA members win superb quality Solway prizes. It's a long time to wait until we know who wins the fantastic Racewell sheep handling system, but we're already enjoying working with Te Pari and appreciate the generosity that has made this prize draw possible." [See www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw) for profiles of previous winners, and NSA-Te Pari terms and conditions. Also more on page 21.



Make a real difference with the NSA team

With one staff member moving onto a new challenge and two new posts recently created, NSA is part-way through a staff recruitment drive.

A new NSA Policy Manager should be in position imminently, while applications are just about to close for an NSA Digital Communications Officer to run the NSA websites, social media and online membership recruitment work.

A third position – NSA Outreach Officer – will be advertised next month. This is a position to liaise between NSA Head Office and the regional network, as well as take on organisation of the NSA Next Generation programme. [Contact NSA Operations Director Joanne Briggs](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk) about the two roles to be filled. [Contact details on facing page.](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk)

NSA regional reports

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

In recent months several NSA Northern Ireland Region committee members have been involved in opening their farms to politicians in an effort to convince them of the work farmers are doing to reduce the effects of climate change, as well as the difficulties created by imposing strict regulations.

The NSA Northern Ireland Region Annual Members' Meeting (ARMM) was set to take place via Zoom as this magazine was being printed. We look forward to introducing a new chairman in the next edition, as Jonny Farmer reaches the end of his term. Attendees would also have enjoyed an update from NSA Head Office and an excellent presentation from Cammy Wilson, well known for his popular 'Sheep Game' content on social media. Cammy was set to share his story and belief that we all have a role to promote the sheep sector.



Cammy Wilson.

Also in early February, the region was involved in organising two webinars in conjunction with other Northern Irish farming organisations. The webinars focused on 'bringing resilience and productivity together' and, due to covid-19 restrictions, were prevented from being a face-to-face event.

We sincerely hope this summer will see a return to some sort of normality, including a more typical Balmoral Show in May. NSA Northern Ireland Region is now accepting applications for stands in the NSA Sheep Centre marquee at the show. Space is filling up fast so exhibitors are being urged to apply immediately.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

Due to a change of date, the NSA Scottish Region ARMM will now be held within the Conference Suite at Stirling Agricultural Centre, Stirling, FK9 4RN, on Friday 25th February at 3pm.

This will be in the form of a hybrid meeting, with the option for people to join online if they are unable to join us in Stirling. Formal business will be followed by Dr Chris Cousens of the Moredun Research Institute speaking about OPA.

This date replaces the meeting originally planned for January, which also included an industry dinner. Uncertainty about Covid-19 restrictions for large hospitality events means no new date has been set for the dinner as yet, but the intention is to hold it later this year. NSA Scottish Region will keep members updated. Keep an eye out for the next edition of the new NSA Scottish Region newsletter, which will be published in early March. [View the January newsletter and find ARMM details at www.nscotland.org.](#)

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

NSA Cymru/Wales Region will hold its ARMM on Tuesday 22nd February at 2pm in the International Pavilion on the Royal Welsh Showground.

The formalities of the meeting will be followed by speakers focusing on the topic of 'sheep farming in a changing world'.

Following a welcome and introduction from NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman Kate Hovers, speakers will include HCC Industry Development and Relations Manager John Richards, and NSA member and Carmarthenshire sheep farmer Carys Jones. They will look at the many options to survive and thrive into the future.

NSA's Sean Richards and Chris Adamson will also join the discussion, explaining what NSA is doing to defend, protect and lead the sheep industry in these changing times, and highlighting the importance of NSA membership. Please get in contact if you plan to attend in person. Either call/email me or register at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

I'm sure I speak on behalf of all regions when I thank all those who applied for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme this year. The applications were truly outstanding. NSA Cymru/Wales Region welcomes all new Ambassadors, including Mike Burley from the Rhondda. [Meet all the Ambassadors on page 14.](#)

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Secretary

As we move swiftly into 2022 and, fingers crossed, covid-19 restrictions continue to fall away, NSA South West Region is looking to organise more events where we can get together.

The region would like to welcome members to its ARMM at 7pm on Thursday 24th February in the Stockman's restaurant at Exeter Market. As usual there will be a short formal meeting followed by presentations and a roundtable discussion on where the sheep trade may go in the near future. A buffet supper will be provided. We look forward to seeing you there.

In early May the region also plans to hold its postponed visit to Richard Webber's farm at Wheddon Cross, Exmoor, as well as the NSA Next Generation Shepherd event. Please keep an eye on the NSA Weekly Email Update for exact dates for this and other events in the region.

NSA Central Region

By Alice Heliwell, Secretary

By the time you read this we will have held the NSA Central Region Annual Members' Meeting.

With attendance anticipated to be similar to recent committee meeting held in person, we plan to build on this and organise future meetings in varied locations around the region – to encourage new faces to join.

NSA Central Region already has two events in the pipeline for this year – a farm walk and an industry visit – to take place during spring/summer. The region also welcomes any further ideas members may have for events. Please do not hesitate to get in touch.



Visitors viewed a range of grazing and cover crops.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

Clear blue skies and sunshine welcomed members from across NSA South East Region to its farm walk on the Isle of Wight back in November.

The visit allowed attendees to view a range of grazing and cover crops, including an excellent aftermath sward of grass/red clover that had provided late summer and early autumn grazing for weaned lambs, prior to catch crops being available.

As well as other forage crops, the group also toured a range of catch crops grown for both the overwintering of late April and May lambing ewes and for finishing lambs and hogs.

It was interesting to see the innovative approach of Les and Angus Baird to evolving crop production systems on farm around then, using them to their advantage to benefit their all-forage sheep production systems.

[Visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/reports) for a full report.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

With the NSA Marches Region Annual Members' Meeting planned so early in January, a time with heightened concerns about the risk from the omicron covid-19 variant, the decision was taken to move the meeting once again online.

Formal business of the election of officeholders saw Richard Vines move into the role of NSA Marches Region Chairman, as Ant Spencer stepped down after six years in the role. During this time, Ant has been a key part of many regional and national meetings and events, and all in the region thank him for this dedicated service to NSA and the wider sheep sector. Andrew Powers is the new NSA Marches Region Vice Chairman. All other positions remain unchanged.



Richard Vines.

Before moving online, the region had planned to welcome several interesting speakers to the ARMM. It is now looking forward to holding an on-farm face-to-face event in the spring instead, where discussions about the mutual benefits for sheep and arable farmers from the addition of sheep into arable rotations will take place. [Read about Richard Vines' Herefordshire-based flock in the centre pages of this magazine.](#)

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Long-awaited return of NSA events

NSA Sheep Event 2022

NSA is excited for the return of its flagship NSA Sheep Event, set to be held on Wednesday 27th July 2022 at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

Having greatly missed the event in 2020, the organising committee is now bringing together plans to provide an event that will offer members an enjoyable and informative day out with all the usual seminars, demonstrations and competitions, as well as some new exciting additions.

The theme of this year's event, 'UK sheep farming: a positive future', means seminars and workshops will look to provide constructive discussion and advice to attendees wanting to move their sheep farming businesses forward. The popular seminar pavilion will once again play host to several key names from the UK sheep industry to update visitors on issues such as sheep farming's role in future environmental protection, the UK's diverse market opportunities and the importance of the sheep farmers to rural communities.

Entry to NSA Sheep 2022 is free for members, which means it's a good opportunity to meet with industry experts and view up-to-date equipment from a large number of sheep focused companies. For many this could be their first opportunity to visit an agricultural business-to-business event for several years and will also be a good excuse to meet up with old friends, as many well-known faces from the UK sheep sector gather together to celebrate the day.

As in previous years Field Farm Tours will be leading visits to two forward-thinking local farms as part of the build up to the event itself. And a celebration of sheep farming will be had at the NSA Sheep Event dinner, which is held on the evening before the main event. The popular sheepdog sale will also take place on the day.

Trade stand bookings and sponsorship packages for exhibitors and breed societies are at www.sheepevent.org.uk. Also see the website for visitor information.

NSA www.sheepevent.org.uk

SHEEP EVENT

UK Sheep Farming: A positive future

Wednesday 27th July 2022

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FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE WEBSITE OR ORGANISER:
HELEN ROBERTS; T: 01691 654712 M: 07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

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NSA Scot Sheep 2022

After two cancelled events and almost three years of planning, the countdown is on again for NSA Scot Sheep, due to take place on Wednesday 1st June 2022, at Over Finlurg, Tealing, Dundee.

Organised by NSA Scottish Region, the event will give farmers and enthusiasts the chance to see first-hand how hosts Robert and Hazel McNee, together with their young family, have built up a profitable business on their 740-acre (300ha) unit.

The organising committee, chaired by neighbouring farmer Willy Millar, has put together a full programme of events for the day including informative seminars and new additions such as a fencing, shearing and sheep-dressing demonstrations.

Since moving to the farm in 2011, Robert and Hazel have made huge improvements and changes to Over Finlurg, while producing top-quality breeding livestock sold at many auction marts across the country. Pedigree and crossbred sheep from the flock of 1,100 breeding females are sold at sales throughout the year, as well as pedigree Limousin and Luing bulls from the 180-cow herd.

The couple aim to be as self-sufficient as possible, breeding replacement females and growing 100 acres (40ha) of cereals and turnips for home use.

Entries are now open for the show and sale of ewe hogs, which will be held at the closing of the event.

Event information at www.scotsheep.org.uk or via Event Organiser Euan Emslie.



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Wednesday 1st June 2022

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Schemes are intended to encourage enterprise profitability.

All eyes on England's Local Nature Recovery scheme

By Sean Riches, NSA

Across much of the developed world, nature recovery has arguably become second only in priority to climate change – and the two are closely related.

The argument has moved on from nature being 'nice to have' to being essential to ecosystems, human health and economic prosperity.

Many plant, mammal, bird and insect species and populations have declined, and some are threatened with extinction. Although inconsistent across species, the UK's biodiversity levels have been relatively stable during the past few years. But this stability is at a fairly low level. The reasons

are complex and multifactorial, but it would also be wrong to suggest land-use change and agriculture haven't played their part during the past century.

Progress

More recently, certainly during the past 30 years of agri-environment schemes in the UK, progress has been made. Farmer attitudes towards the environment have undoubtedly changed and some great practical work has been done. After years of farm policy and support that paid farmers to remove hedges, these losses have been halted during the past 20 years and the net length of hedges now appears stable or is possibly increasing.

Also following the loss of a reported 90% of wildflower meadows, these are being recreated. And so are habitats that comprise nectar and wild bird mixtures, conservation headlands, beetle banks and wildflower strips. Significant areas of land have been converted to organic management and regenerative farming practices, and huge strides have been made in the responsible use of pesticides, chemicals and animal-health products, in part to reduce their impact on nature.

EU and government schemes across all UK nations have succeeded in engaging farmers, from the first entry level agri-environment schemes to 'deeper and broader' schemes that target particular habitats and areas of sensitivity. Sheep farmers have engaged with this particularly well and, in many situations, farm businesses have highly integrated environmental schemes that work alongside productive sheep farming. There are tensions and it would be wrong not to highlight this, particularly in upland and commonland regions where some schemes are simplistically and directly linked to stocking reductions that conflict environmental management with productive farming.

Interest

The UK's exit from the EU has committed all administrations to plan for new farming and land management schemes and policies and, with the heightened interest in nature, this is leading to a new generation of environmental schemes related closely to a principle of payment for public goods. England is leading this charge with



Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales planning their own later direction along a similar theme.

England is proving to be a test bed for new scheme development in a wide range of areas, from environmental schemes to animal health and welfare, capital investment, productivity, innovation and research. There is little specifically targeted at food production although the productivity related schemes are intended to encourage enterprise profitability, and negate the need for government support.

In England, following the launch of the plans for Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot and early roll out in 2022, more detail is emerging about the plans and design principles for the second-tier of ELMS – the recently-announced Local Nature Recovery scheme. The Nature Recovery Action Plan for Wales, the establishment of the Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board in Scotland, and the Future Agricultural Policy Framework Portfolio in Northern Ireland all target similar objectives.

Scheme

With Local Nature Recovery in England due for piloting during the next few years, farmers are being encouraged to continue to apply for the Simplified Countryside Stewardship Schemes (SCSS) as being the bridge between the original scheme and future Local Nature Recovery opportunities. Changes have been made to the scheme in early 2022 to broaden the options available and make it easier to apply and comply.

By entering an agreement now, Defra says farmers will be best placed to benefit from the new schemes. Local Nature Recovery, due for phased roll-out from 2023, will contribute to targets for habitat restoration and creation, peatland restoration, trees, and natural flood management.

David Morley of H&H Land & Estates provides his view: "To encourage more applications to a scheme that has been undersubscribed since its launch in 2015, and reflect the increased cost of delivering environmental benefits, the Government

has increased SCSS payment rates by 30%. This seems to be a positive step and means it's likely more farmers will look at countryside stewardship as an option. As always, however, it is critical to seek the correct advice for your farm business."

Details of the transition from countryside stewardship to Local Nature Recovery are in development, and while Local Nature Recovery undergoes a pilot for co-design through 2022 into 2023, perhaps now is the time to consider what has been achieved so far and where future opportunities may lie. It's possible this could shape future initiatives and make the case for adequate funding to enable livestock farming to work effectively in harmony with nature. NSA will continue to input into discussions about scheme design through its active involvement in the ELMS engagement group, and by working closely with members who are involved in these schemes.

Environmental

Mr Morely adds: "Land management plans will be key in designing agreements that can deliver meaningful environmental gains – but there is no detail on what form these plans will take or who will undertake them. Defra has indicated that the scheme will be more flexible than SCSS in that it will allow more land or options to be added to an agreement over time.

"The Government is particularly keen to encourage farmers to work together to deliver environmental benefits at a landscape level. We expect Local Nature Recovery will provide incentives for collaborative working and payments for local facilitators to bring groups of farmers together."

While there is still a lack of detail, or clarity on how much farmers will receive under the scheme, it could be beneficial to be proactive in advance by considering the SCSS, establishing a baseline for your farm, and identifying possibilities and local priorities.

Start by identifying, and ideally mapping, areas containing wild plants, as well as listing

birds and signs of wildlife, and then think about how Local Nature Recovery might support you in further improving or expanding habitats, or linking habitats together. Consider the effect that could be had on natural resources such as streams and rivers, as water is likely to be a key component. There are many resources available to support these thought-processes from local wildlife and environmental organisations through to local authorities and universities. These, along with a growing number of online mapping and identification resources, can offer substantial help in getting things going.

NSA's position is for Local Nature Recovery plans to be locally relevant and achievable, to provide adequate reward (to ensure good take-up), and be compatible with productive sheep farming. NSA will also work to connect the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) with Local Nature Recovery development, so advisers are well placed to support sheep farmers where appropriate.

Providing a voice for UK sheep farmers

The volume and pace of agricultural policy work since the UK left the European Union means NSA is working harder now than ever before to provide a voice for UK sheep farmers.

The proposed Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) in England, including the Local Nature Recovery element discussed on these pages, and the equivalents likely to follow in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are just one example. And with virtually every other piece of legislation up for discussion too, the breadth of topics is greater than ever before. This is reflected in the NSA Weekly Email Update every Friday and the news stories regularly added to the NSA website.

Your membership subscription helps fund this work. And members who choose to get involved in regional committees and groups also contribute by sharing their views and helping determine key policy positions.

Want to help more? Check your friends and neighbours are NSA members and, if not, ask them to consider joining. Also think about getting in touch with your regional manager or secretary to join or input into a committee. Having had to move meetings online during the pandemic, many are continuing to have a virtual option if you're unable to travel.



Welsh workshops and wool manifesto

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region had a busy start to the year attending workshops. One was to discuss a new project for wool and input into a 'wool manifesto for Wales', to be published by the end of May.

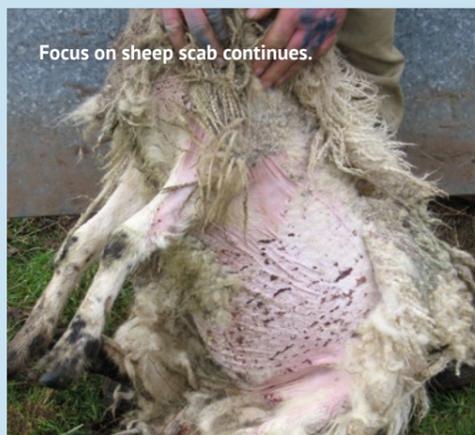
Another looked at how it would be for Welsh farmers to produce more plant foods. Changing consumer diets and pressure to reduce the environmental impact of livestock production both present challenges for Welsh agriculture. But they also present opportunities. It was an unusual topic to become involved in, as it's not sheep related, but it was interesting to see how farmers could diversify and add another income stream alongside sheep.

Diversification may bring communities together in some instances and help maintain Welsh agriculture and the family-run mixed farming enterprises that are often the bedrock of Welsh communities.

Disposal

After a member contacted us in autumn 2021 about issues regarding disposal of sheep dip, we have been instrumental in setting up an industry stakeholder group to discuss all issues around sheep scab control, dip disposal and regulation. We will keep you posted on the progress the group makes.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is pleased to see sheep scab remains a priority in the Animal Health and Welfare Plan, launched in early January. This will be in the final implementation plan published under the current framework, which covers 2022-2024.



Focus on sheep scab continues.

NSA also reminds farmers that APHA currently has free testing available to help detect sheep scab.

Enhancing standards in a way that safeguards trade and builds a more sustainable farming sector are key to this new plan within the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework. The wider framework is a 10-year plan (2014-24) for lasting improvements for the health and welfare of kept animals, while also contributing to the protection of public health, the economy and environment.

Challenges

The plan is published in the face of the combined challenges posed by covid-19, leaving the EU and the climate crisis. The ambition to maintain the highest standards in Wales is captured in the plan's headline aspirations 'One health, one welfare and biosecurity'. It embraces all aspects of animal health and welfare, as well as the complex interactions with human health and well-being, and the environment.

It also complements the five-year animal welfare plan for Wales, which was published in November 2021. The strategies and actions contained in each are integrated and interdependent, demonstrating a determination to work in a coordinated way. The proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme will also have animal health and welfare as a key component, drawing on a collective ambition to further enhance Wales' reputation as a nation that loves, cares for and respects its animals.

Find the Wales Animal Health and Welfare Framework Implementation Plan at www.gov.wales/animal-health-and-welfare-framework-implementation-plan-2022-2024.

Future agricultural policy proposals for Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



As we entered 2022, our Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) released a raft of consultations.

NSA Northern Ireland Region has replied to the consultation on the possible introduction of mandatory sheep carcase classification and price reporting by processors. We thought we had a good system of classification and price reporting already in place, but on reading the consultation it became clear that, at present, it is a voluntary system. So although happy with what was in place, the region responded with support for reporting to become mandatory, to avoid any withdrawal taking place.

We are now focusing our attention on the consultation on future agricultural policy proposals for Northern Ireland, and attending webinars and meetings that explain the implications as DAERA see them.

Proposals

We are looking carefully at the proposals to reintroduce a headage payment for suckler cows, which could be worth up to £160 per cow, as we are extremely disappointed that no proposals are included to support sheep farmers. We are thinking of options for a sensible system to support, and not distort, the sheep sector, and also increase efficiency. As representatives of the sheep sector, we will be putting a strong case forward that all sectors need to be treated fairly and equally.



Reporting is set to become mandatory.

Scotland focuses on outdoor access, sheep scab and climate change

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



At the end of January, myself and NSA Scottish Region Chairman Jen Craig met, virtually, with Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands Mairi Gougeon.

This was meant to be an on-farm meeting but, due to covid-19, was moved online. Nevertheless, it was an opportunity to raise several concerns, including the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC), sheep scab, the iceberg disease OPA, future farm support, climate change, and persistent predation.

While there are no current plans to review SOAC, Ms Gougeon was pleased to see strengthened powers surrounding livestock worrying and would like to be kept up to date on occurrences and outcomes. Jen Craig reminded all present that there are still ongoing issues related to both sheep worrying and SOAC. Much of the documentation is orientated towards those accessing the countryside and not the landowner or manager. A change in perspective is sorely needed for future publicity and education campaigns.

Support

The Cabinet Secretary also assured us she was happy to support our proposals of an industry-led working group to tackle the prevalence of OPA. Currently there are no treatments available for OPA, and ultrasound scanning is labour intensive and requires a suitably-qualified vet. OPA is not specific to one breed of sheep and an increase in prevalence has been seen

across the national flock. The Moredun Research Institute has spent several years investigating the virus, which infects the lung cells resulting in OPA tumours, and advancing research on early diagnosis. NSA Scottish Region is committed to keeping in touch on the issue and help, wherever possible, to ensure action can be taken.

Separate to this issue, a second sheep scab working group meeting is planned for late February to further discuss the options to implement a pilot scheme in Scotland similar to those found in the other areas of the UK.

Welfare

There has been no further update on the 2021 consultation submissions on animal welfare during transit, or castration and tail docking of lambs. But Ms Gougeon was keen to remind us that no legislation would be implemented that would be detrimental to farmers and crofters, particularly in the islands, when it came to transport.

We are still none the wiser of policy changes in relation to climate change mitigation and halting a decline in biodiversity. But, NSA Scottish Region is stressing that production of quality lamb, which is traceable and reared to high animal welfare standards, is key to any future endeavours.



Transit consultation is ongoing.



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Launch imminent for next generation livestock traceability service

Livestock movement reporting and recording is set to change in England this spring, as the latest evolution to ensure traceability systems throughout Great Britain are modern and effective.

Simon Hall, Livestock Information Managing Director, says this is fundamental to disease control and food safety, which are vital for consumer confidence in meat and livestock products, and to assure UK trade.

He says: "As a direct consequence of 2001's foot-and-mouth disease outbreak, sheep farmers in England have been notifying Defra of animal movements first by paper to Trading Standards and then through the Animal Reporting and Movement Service (ARAMS) with the introduction of individual ID and the benefit of EID tags.

"Markets and abattoirs are required to read EID tags electronically, and report movements digitally to ARAMS. Farmers can also choose to do this although, at this stage, far more still report by paper. More than 75% of movements are now tracked digitally and individually."

Modernisation

But ARAMS, along with systems for other species, needs modernisation and Defra is investing in a multi-species approach for England. Recognising that many disease threats are relevant across species, a single dataset is needed for swift and effective response. Governments in Scotland and Wales are doing the same in their administrations.

"Traceability data is not only valuable for disease control but could be a powerful foundation to underpin industry improvements in productivity,

sustainability, and trade development," adds Mr Hall. "Current systems are not designed for wider use of data, so these opportunities are largely left untapped."

Given this opportunity, the new multi-species service in England, called the Livestock Information Service (LIS) is being developed through a government/industry collaboration, sponsored by a powerful alliance of government and industry stakeholders through the Traceability Design User Group (TDUG).

LIS is now nearing completion for sheep, deer and goats and will be the first implementation of the new multi-species data platform.

When live, LIS will continue to support paper reports of movements from sheep farmers, along with a new website and through approved third-party software used by markets, abattoirs and some farmers.

Changes

Mr Hall says initial changes for English sheep farmers will be minor:

- Farmers will still need to provide the same information to LIS as they do to ARAMS and paper movement documents will still accompany animal movements. The law and guidance around sheep ID, record-keeping and movement reporting is unchanged.
- Farmers who currently report using paper movement documents will be able to continue to do so.
- Farmers who report through farm management software will need to register for an account with LIS and then continue using their software.
- Farmers who currently use the ARAMS website will need to register for the new LIS website.

There will be a one-week window as the sector moves from ARAMS to LIS. All farmers reporting sheep movements in that specific week will need to report on paper movement documents, as LIS goes online in a staged way starting with markets, then abattoirs and finally farmers.

Going forward, more farmers will be encouraged to report digitally either through the new LIS website or through farm management software. LIS will work with NSA and other organisations to figure out the best way to do this.

"LIS will share more details soon about the service, including what is changing, what farmers need to do differently, how, and when they need to do it," adds Mr Hall.

Keeping NSA members informed

NSA members have heard discussions on livestock traceability services in all GB nations, and those in England will have heard about Livestock Information and the many hours NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker has spent in Traceability Design User Group (TDUG) meetings. After almost five years of careful and rigorous investment, the sector is close to seeing the launch of the new service, which is planned for the end of March.

Mr Stocker says: "We can't announce the definite date of this launch at the time of writing but, barring any setbacks between now and then, it is planned for Thursday 24th March with the move from ARAMS to LIS complete by Friday 1st April. NSA will keep members informed as these dates approach. The launch of the new service will just be the beginning and LI is focusing energy on getting the basics right before more data-use functions can be offered.

"This service is really important. Not only for the industry in England but also for devolved nations, because the programme will work as the repository for movements across the UK. Similar discussions are happening in devolved nations with the aim of devolved traceability services being reviewed and compatibility between databases checked. This is essential if the sector is to protect itself in ways that were impossible during 2001's foot-and-mouth disease outbreak."

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More than 75% of movements are now tracked digitally.

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors – ready to relaunch

The difficult task of selecting the next group of bright and young sheep enthusiasts to join NSA's successful Next Generation Ambassador programme provided a new year challenge for the experienced interview panel in January.

Having received a record breaking number of applications to join the programme from some exceptional young sheep farmers, the shortlisted candidates were put through their paces by interviewers: Kevin Harrison, NSA English Committee Chairman and long-term supporter of NSA Next Generation; Eileen McCloskey, NSA Northern Ireland Region Committee member, CAFRE advisor and lecturer at Greenmount College; Caryl Hughes, NSA Cymru/Wales Region Vice Chairman and NSA Next Generation Ambassador (2017 intake); and Grace Reid, NSA Scottish Region Coordinator.

Deserving

"The standard of applicants to join the ambassador programme increases with each new cohort to join the scheme," says NSA Communications Manager Katie James, who coordinates NSA Next Generation activity and led the application process. "This year's task was exceptionally difficult with so many deserving young sheep farmers wanting to join the programme. In fact

so challenging was the task that it was decided to accept 13, instead of the usual 12, young people to join the programme this year. We are now looking forward to getting the delivery sessions up and running, and hope a successful year can be enjoyed with no disruption due to covid-19."

Details of each of the group's delivery sessions, providing personal and technical development, will be shared with NSA members via regular updates online at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk and in Sheep Farmer magazine.

NSA Next Generation is funded by NSA Head Office, regions and ram sales, with the Ambassador programme additionally supported by various delivery partners and sponsors.



The Ambassador programme has thrived since the first intake in 2014.



NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme – the new recruits

Sophie Wernham (28) Berkshire



Working as a shepherd on a farm in Berkshire, Sophie's enthusiasm for implementing ideas to continually improve the flock has seen the system grow from 600 to 1,600 North Country Mules during her employment. This interest in learning more, both for her own and the sheep enterprise's benefit, is what led Sophie to apply for the programme.

In addition to the responsibility she has with the farm's sheep flock, Sophie runs her own small flock of pedigree Hampshire Down ewes, which she aims to start showing in the near future.

As an NSA Next Generation Ambassador Sophie says she is hoping to meet like-minded people who are keen to share experiences and ideas, while also sharing her own knowledge with the group. "It will be a great experience to meet people who are as passionate about sheep farming as I am, as well as learning more about different aspects of the industry," she says.

George Ellis (26) Gloucestershire



A new entrant to the sector, George is keen to embrace the opportunities the NSA Next Generation programme will deliver and to soak in all of the new information.

His enthusiasm for sheep farming sees him spend much of his free time visiting other forward-thinking farms, looking for ideas he can implement on his growing flock of 100 Romney cross ewes and 200 Romney cross ewe lambs. He has also recently started a social media sheep discussion group for ex Harper Adams University students to share information, concerns and ideas from their flocks.

He has plans to increase sheep numbers at home but is focused on doing this gradually while, at the same time, improving his grassland and performance recording his current stock to select only the best replacements.

"I applied because I want to see other sheep systems and to pick up some innovative ideas to take back to the farm," says George. "I'm privileged to be selected because NSA invests a lot into the Next Generation programme and its ambassadors. I am looking forward to getting started."

Clover Crosse (24) Wiltshire



The NSA Next Generation Ambassador interview panel was pleased to welcome Clover to the group again this year, after she was part of the group so adversely affected by covid-19 in 2020 and 2021.

Clover's enthusiasm for continually developing her own skills and experience in the sector were clear during the interview process.

Since joining the programme in 2020, Clover has achieved her aim of integrating sheep onto the arable farm where she works. She now manages 350 Romney shearling ewes that graze the system's cover crops, alongside the arable work, and completes lambing for a neighbouring farm.

Explaining her reason for applying again, she says: "I have already gained so much from the programme, but reapplied as I feel I have so much more to gain from, and also give back to, NSA."

Perry Parkinson (27) Dumfriesshire



As an employed shepherd at SRUC's Barony campus in Dumfries and Galloway, Perry revels in the opportunity to run 500 North of England and Scotch Mules in an environment that is open to trialling different ideas for the benefit of the system's sheep flock and the sector as a whole, while educating the next generation of sheep farmers.

Perry says he applied to become an ambassador as he wanted to challenge himself, learn more and put himself in a position where he could hopefully help more young people to get into farming.

"I'm looking forward to travelling across the UK to view other systems and, as a new entrant, hopefully showing other young people that you don't have to be from a farm to have a successful career in sheep farming," he says.

Harriet Tibbs (28) Somerset



Contract lambing across South West England and further afield, Harriet was encouraged to apply for the programme by several previous ambassadors she has met who recommended it for its learning and networking opportunities.

As well as lambing work, Harriet has her own flock of pedigree Beltex and is also a registered SQP with a keen interest in the responsible use of anthelmintics and sheep health and welfare.

Harriet says she is excited to have been selected as an ambassador and, as a female new entrant to the sector, she hopes the scheme, as well as helping her expand her knowledge, will also give her chance to promote women's role in agriculture. "We are already seeing a shift in the way female farmers are viewed and there are some great role models in the sector now. This is something I am keen to support and see grow," she says.

Continued overleaf.

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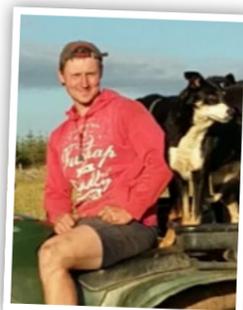
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Beth Phalp (22) North Yorkshire

Beth's enthusiasm for the UK sheep industry bubbled over in her interview to join the ambassador programme this year, explaining that her passion for sheep started from a young age.

Beth farms on the border of the North Yorkshire moors with her parents, running a mixed farm that's primarily tenanted. She is responsible for the farm's 500 breeding ewe flock and has ambition to expand the enterprise further during the next five years. She hopes involvement with NSA and the Next Generation programme will help her to do this. "I hope involvement with the scheme will help me improve my knowledge, but also allow me to be involved in the future of sheep farming and the work the sector faces to promote and protect our country's fantastic sheep farmers," she says.

"I believe if you want to do something enough, and are extremely passionate, you will always find the time to do it and succeed. I am looking forward to meeting the other ambassadors and getting started on the programme."

**Michael Burley (26) Rhondda**

Another new entrant joining the programme this year, Michael has high ambitions. He currently works as an employed head shepherd running 800 ewes, including 140 of his own, on an upland sheep and beef farm in the Rhondda valleys of South Wales. He's keen

to secure a medium-to-long-term farm business tenancy one day and to become a first generation, full-time farmer in his own right.

Michael has implemented several new approaches to running the sheep flock and hopes the ambassador programme will help him build on his knowledge and experience to continue moving forward.

"I applied to be a part of the group because, after graduating from university, I have found the opportunity for further learning from industry experts to be less easy to access. I want to continue to develop my knowledge and skills and become more involved within the sheep sector to help those from non-farming backgrounds progress within the industry," he says.

Katie Evans (25) Wiltshire

Sheep farming is most definitely a family affair for Katie, who works alongside her parents and siblings on their farm's three separate sheep flocks. Katie herself manages a flock of 600 performance recorded pedigree Lleyns, producing finished and breeding stock for sale. The farm also runs 800 crossbred ewes and 700 Hebrideans, which graze heathland as part of a native breed scheme.

In addition to work at home, Katie's ambition has seen her recently begin to offer a contract shepherding service in her local area – something she hopes will grow during the next five years.

Katie is already an active member of various sheep groups, recognising their importance for learning and networking opportunities, so she is excited to now join the Next Generation programme. "I'm looking forward to seeing what we can achieve as a group," she says. "In order to combat future challenges, it is important the next generation work together."

Karyn McArthur (28) Aberdeenshire

Karyn says varied interests and involvement within the sheep sector makes her very open minded and means she recognises there is not a 'one size fits all' way of farming. With this in mind she applied to join the ambassador programme to allow her to challenge herself to dive deeper into learning more about the wider sheep industry.

She currently splits her time between working for a sheep breeding company, assisting with her family's flock of 800 Scottish Blackface and Scotch Mule ewes, and looking after her own small flock of pedigree Bluefaced Leicesters. She also enjoys spending time training her team of sheepdogs.

"I can't wait to learn from the great network of sheep farmers I hope to meet as part of the programme. The knowledge gained will push me in the right direction to further improve the success of my sheep enterprise," she says.

Cameron Farnan (25) Suffolk

Working as a full-time shepherd for a previous NSA Next Generation Ambassador, Cameron is already well versed on the many benefits and networking opportunities the programme can deliver. He describes the chance to join the scheme as a way to 'broaden his horizons'.

Shepherding 1,000 organic breeding ewes on a contract agreement, running 500 NZ Romney ewes and finishing 1,500 winter store lambs should definitely be enough to keep Cameron busy. But he also shears around 3,000 sheep each year and has his own mixed flock of pedigree Charollais, Border Leicester and Ryeland ewes. He sells lamb at local farmers' markets.

His ambition to continue to improve all aspects of his work impressed the interview panel. "I hope the programme will provide networking opportunities to help progress my career, as well as developing new friendships with like-minded individuals," he says.

Continued overleaf.

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Ed Brant (26) Lincolnshire

Having spent time working in the industry as a sheep breeding consultant, Ed's desire to see his own family farm's sheep enterprise move forward has driven his return to full-time work at home.

Ed now runs 400 ewes plus replacements, a mixture of maternal Lleyn ewes and a terminal flock of Hampshire Downs. His background means he is part of performance recording projects that provide him with comparative results from which he can make decisions and improvements to the family's system.

But Ed is insistent there is still a lot for him to learn about the sheep sector. He recognises his strength lies in his genetics knowledge, but says he is looking forward to learning more through the ambassador programme.

"I am looking forward to meeting and learning from the sessions, and beginning a more active relationship with NSA. I think it is important to get off farm to meet and learn from others in the industry, and this programme offers a unique opportunity to do this."

**Alexander Boyd (22)**
County Antrim

Alexander already appreciates the support and knowledge to be gained by involvement in a programme such as NSA Next Generation. He is an active participant of his local sheep business development group and an active young farmer, having previously won YFC's Northern Ireland Young Farmer of the Year. He has also competed in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition.

Working on his family's sheep and beef farm in Northern Ireland, Alexander runs 380 Scotch Blackface Mules, Texel Mules and Easy Care ewes. The family also finish 400-500 store lambs each winter. He would like to increase ewe numbers, but recognises tight land availability in Northern Ireland could limit this.

"I applied for this programme to hopefully have the chance to travel and see how other farming systems operate. I want to bring new ideas home to the family farm and I am looking forward to meeting other like-minded people and learning more about the UK sheep industry. I'm really looking forward to getting started," he says.

Elsa Amiss (23)
Cornwall

Along with her family, Elsa is a National Trust tenant farmer on the most southerly farm in mainland Britain – at Lizard Point, Cornwall. Living and farming in a popular tourist area, she is happy to try and educate the many visitors who pass the farm on a daily basis.

She has also recently taken on a role with Farmlink, a charity delivering farm education to schoolchildren in South West England.

Elsa is keen to develop her farm's flock of 150 crossbred ewes and is establish her own flock of rare and heritage breed sheep, exploring their use within the farm's own set of unique challenges. "I'm interested in the use of different breeds and the difference in the taste of the finished product," she says. "We sell lamb direct to local consumers who would be interested in this. People buy beef by breed, why not lamb and mutton?"

"I can't wait for the opportunity to connect with other young people from a range of backgrounds, interests and experiences, but all with the same enthusiasm for the sheep industry."

NSA Next Generation – more than just the Ambassadors

As the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme returns for 2022, so too does a host of other NSA activities and opportunities for the nation's young sheep farmers.

NSA is committed to working with the Company of the Merchants of the Staple of England again, to offer two £2,750 travel bursaries as part of the NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation. Details to follow in late spring.

And there will be several competitions offering the chance to win mentoring or stock / equipment that will support the growth of a young

person's flock. Closer to home, NSA will award the title of NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year at the finals of the competition at NSA Sheep 2022. And ending the year, NSA Next Generation will bring young sheep farmers together at its annual winter conferences.

And that's not the mention the long-standing offer of matchmaking employment, joint venture and work experience opportunities, or generally providing support and advice to young members who reach out.

More at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk or please email any specific requests to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.

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RoSA provides 'match making' service for farmers and advisers



Recognising and understanding the benefits a farm adviser can offer and then, subsequently, knowing where to look for one who is credible and reliable can be a challenge.

But with an increasing number of advisers signing up to the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) that challenge is set to become a thing of the past for sheep farmers in 2022.

The register now offers a network of more than 70 consultants across the UK, allowing sheep farmers seeking information or guidance on an aspect of their business to find an adviser best suited to support their system. And, once sourced, a sheep adviser can soon become a valued member of any farming team, as sheep farmer John Johnston, from Blairmullouch Farm in Ayrshire, explains.



John Johnston.



Daniel Stout.

Photo credit: Craig Stephen.

Support

"I was open to getting help and taking advice about my flock and business from someone who was understanding, knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the sheep industry, and decided to look for someone who could offer that support," he says. "My research took me to Daniel Stout, a farm adviser

with SAC Consulting, based in Stirling. It's still early days but, with Daniel's help, I now have a clear vision of where I want my sheep system to be and a plan for how to get there."

Daniel is just one of the advisers who has joined RoSA since its launch in summer 2021. Being part of a group of likeminded advisers, who are passionate about sheep production, and learning from a wider network of experts are just two of the reasons he decided to join. Daniel also sees the opportunity to meet and work with sheep farmers across the country, who are striving to move their systems forward, as a key benefit of joining.

His work as a consultant meant becoming a RoSA member was an obvious choice. "I grew up on a sheep farm in Shetland and have spent time working in various roles within the sector, which gave me the chance to meet and talk with a lot of forward-thinking sheep farmers across the UK," he says.

Resilient

"I now work with farmers to develop more resilient and profitable flocks with a strong focus on a whole-system approach, which includes benchmarking, grazing strategies and breeding. It's working with enthusiastic farmers like John Johnston that make the job what it is and I hope my RoSA membership allows me to meet more farmers and that I am also able to help drive their businesses forward."

Daniel considers the many recent changes the sector has experienced, and continues to face, as good reasons for farmers and advisers to work together. "Changes in support payments, rising input costs and pressures on carbon emissions all mean the industry needs to become more efficient, less reliant on inputs and have a better handle on where the sector is at – and where it wants and needs to go. To do this we need farmers and advisers to be able to meet the right people to help us move forward," he says.

"Providing a portal for farmers to easily find advisers, RoSA will allow both to increasingly work together, reviewing flocks and identifying new opportunities to achieve these common goals."

John Johnston agrees: "The knowledge, expertise and contacts advisers have made them invaluable members to have on your team. RoSA is a good service for both farmers and advisers to allow this useful working relationship to be formed."

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.

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Crossbred lambs graze cover crops from early December, followed by ewes in the lead up to lambing.

Adapting system key to ensuring future of family farm

By Katie James, NSA

With an interest in trying new ideas and a personality that sees him keen to speak up and get involved, it's no surprise sheep farmer Richard Vines has stepped into the role of leading NSA activity in the Marches Region.

This same attitude has been employed on the family's Burton Farm, Ross on Wye, Herefordshire, since Richard took on its management from his parents more than 30 years ago.

Richard's father Edward moved to Herefordshire when he bought the farm in the 1960s. At the time the farm covered 450 acres (180ha), employing a number of staff to manage the arable crops and potatoes grown.

Richard, the recently appointed NSA Marches Region Chairman, joined the family business in 1991 having studied at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester, and then managed an arable enterprise in Oxfordshire. Potatoes continued as the main focus of the business for some years but, by the end of the 1990s, problems with contracts meant it was time for a significant change on farm. This led Richard to focus on the business' flourishing sheep enterprise.

Enthusiastic

The family had already been introduced to the Meatlinc breed and started to grow sheep numbers, ultimately leading to them becoming a franchised breeder for the composite terminal sire breed.

Sheep numbers have fluctuated since then but Richard now runs: 320 ewes, including a pure bred flock of Meatlinc ewes; a commercial flock of crossbred ewes, including Romneys; and a small pedigree flock of Hampshire Downs with daughter Alice.

The farm sells around 50 shearling rams from their Wye Valley Meatlinc flock each year and Richard is clearly enthusiastic about the benefits he believes they can offer. "The breed was developed primarily to create a ram that would retain condition during tugging and produce lambs with good vigour from a mix of Charollais, Berrichon, Suffolk, Ile de France and Dorset," he says.

"Our rams are all grown on forage, with no creep feed. We find their slightly slower growth promotes longevity and believe our rams are bred to last."



Richard Vines.

Hybrid vigour resulting from crossing is a well-known method of improving breeds, but Richard says this sometimes does not deliver all it promises. "The use of composite breeds has grown significantly since the first Meatlincs were bred, all promoting the hybrid vigour they offer. But if they have not come from generations of breeding, then there is a risk of a breed that is not 'stable'. Some extremes will be experienced and there won't be the uniformity in the offspring that the customer/farmer desires. Over recent years Meatlinc have been involved in a 'gene fishing' project which allowed us to see the merits of some of the best genetics from other breeds."

Recorded

All Meatlinc rams are fully performance recorded through Signet. The use of data interests Richard. He says: "I do like the opportunity to fully assess our sheep and our involvement with Signet allows us to do that. I find the information and data it provides interesting and I'm motivated to commercially produce sheep with genetics that will produce rams that will grow well on forage alone and produce thrifty lambs."

Using the EBVs produced from Signet, Richard can match rams, which are all sold direct, to individual customers' requirements. "Working alongside AHDB, we have been able to focus on the strengths of the breed, including fast growth, good muscling, and balanced levels of fat. Ultrasound and CT scanning has been a huge benefit," he says.

Performance recording has also led Richard to take part in the AHDB Ram Compare project. It was involvement in this that first drew Richard to the farm's newest sheep breed – the Hampshire Down. "I had been impressed by the strong figures Hampshires recorded in the project," he says. "With nobody local to us breeding them we thought it would be interesting to start a small flock of our own. Although this is really my daughter Alice's venture, I have tried a few on some of my crossbred ewes this year and I'm interested to see what they produce."

Lambing

Lambing on the farm is all completed inside from mid-March. "Having everything housed means data recording during the typical month's duration of lambing is easier," says Richard. "For many years we have taken on a vet student. This helps us and they seem to get a great deal from the experience."

Breeding stock will be vaccinated against abortion and clostridial diseases. Foot vaccines have been used before but are not part of the regular routine. He says: "Foot problems are minimal in the flock; we don't footbath. I interfere with their feet as little as possible."

Although Richard would rather use fewer health products, he is always ready for the next challenge that may come along. Selenium and iodine issues on farm means mineral drenches are given to rectify this, and chicory and plantain are added in herbal leys for their natural anthelmintic properties. "We do use some wormers, of course, but always faecal egg count before treating and only dose the animals that really need it," he adds.

Sheep graze herbal leys, permanent pasture, and cover crops. These include a mix of turnips, forage rye and oats, planted on arable ground that Richard rents out to neighbouring farms for dwarf beans and potato crops.

Richard favours the motto 'allow the sheep to grow with the grass'. His relatively low-input system, he admits, may not win him any prizes for the biggest sheep, but it is cost effective and doesn't push the sheep 'unnaturally' in a way that could affect their work and longevity in the future.

Grazing is rotated with some being fields held back for hay or silage, but there is no fixed pattern for how this is managed. "It depends how the fields are looking," Richard says. We will set some aside, stock won't go back into them, and



“There is a constant battle between those who enjoy the countryside and those who run and look after it.”
Richard Vines

TA teaser ram is used with the ewe lambs, to encourage conception rates.

we will mow. Fields do not necessarily always look tidy, but they will work for us."

Richard also runs a small herd of Dexter cattle on his farm, selling meat boxes with their sought-after meat to friends and family. He also purchases dairy cross beef calves, selling them as stores at the local market in Ross on Wye. Finished and store lambs are also sold through Ross, as well as Hereford and Raglan.

"I enjoy having the cattle around," he says. We make a lot of silage and hay, and bale a lot of straw. The cattle are happy to make the best of the lesser quality hay we have available. But I am interested in using the cattle further in rotation with the sheep and seeing the benefit they can have on our system as a whole."

Scheme

Richard's interest in working a little better with nature has seen him sign up to be part of the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) pilot. "It won't necessarily be something we, as a farm, can make a lot of income from, but it is a way for us and others to perhaps enhance our farm with the small offering of money to do so," he says.

"There is a constant battle between those who enjoy the countryside and those who run and look after it. As farmers, we aren't always the best at getting our message across and perhaps involvement in environmental schemes, such as ELMS, can help improve our reputation."

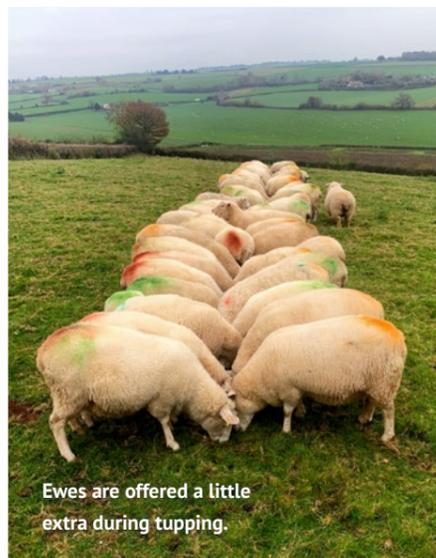
Richard says he is aware of some of the environmental shortcomings of farming, having experienced issues such as soil erosion on their own sloping ground and previous potato enterprise. Several watercourses on farm will be the focus of how Richard focuses the SFI Scheme. "I've been particularly interested in the SFI water buffer zone. Field margins, up to 10 metres wide,

close to some of the farms watercourses will be planted with grass and wildflower mixtures to also help prevent run off. Adding infrastructure, like fencing, to prevent livestock entering the water and providing alternative drinking points are also things we are considering.

Continued overleaf.

Farm facts

- Farming 380 acres (150ha) of owned ground, plus additional rented grazing, comprising a mixture of permanent pasture, herbal leys and cover crops.
- Flock of 320 ewes lambed indoors in March, with all stock being fully performance recorded.
- Operates as a breeder of Meatlinc rams selling shearling rams throughout central and southern England.
- Farm also home to a small flock of pedigree Hampshire Down ewes, Dexter cattle and growing cattle.
- Contracting business and also grows forage for livestock and equine customers.
- Some of the farm is entered into the ELMS SFI pilot.



Ewes are offered a little extra during tugging.

► "I can see problems with ELMS, but I have a genuine interest in the SFI scheme. By getting involved in the pilot I hope I can help, in a small way, to shape the scheme so it can be more relevant and work better for farmers."

Richard's motivation to be a part of the SFI development is matched by his enthusiasm to highlight the importance of the small family farm. Richard is supported on farm by wife Sally-Anne, daughter Alice, who takes a great interest in the sheep enterprise, and son Tom, whose focus is more on the cattle side of the business and contracting and forage production. Supported by their partners and some casual staff at busy times. Richard recognises the farm needs to have several different enterprises to be sustainable.

Connections

It was family connections that first brought Richard to NSA when he attended some meetings with his father in the early 1990s. Finding the discussion at the meeting of interest, he returned and increasingly became involved with the region. He valued not just the information available but also the chance to be part of a group of people with a common interest.

"A great thing about our industry is that you learn so much by meeting people," he says. "Farming can



Meatline rams destined for sale strip graze herbal leys from May until August.

be quite isolating so being part of something like NSA gives you chance to network, learn and view different systems and that's a very good thing."

Richard was elected as Regional Chairman in January, after serving as Vice Chairman. He is also an NSA English Committee member.

"I'm looking forward to my term as NSA

Marches Region Chairman, continuing the great work of previous Chairman Ant Spencer. The region is already very active and I hope to build on this by encouraging more younger members to join us and providing our members with a very good reason to join us at meetings – just as I did many years ago."

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Network supports farmers – and their businesses

A variety of reasons means farmers are not always renowned for looking after their physical or mental health.

Hence this new feature in Sheep Farmer magazine, through which NSA will profile support organisations and charities offering services that sheep farmers can access.

There is a growing network of support services available to those who might be experiencing difficulties with their mental health. One such charity is the DPJ Foundation.

Support

This foundation was set up by Emma Picton-Jones in July 2016 after the loss of her husband Daniel. He was an agricultural contractor whose death by suicide touched many in the farming community.

Mrs Picton-Jones felt there was a big gap in the system and a lack of support available for those suffering with poor mental health in rural communities. In her husband's name, the support organisation uses the experience of the Picton-Jones family to help and support others in the agricultural sector in Wales who are struggling with poor mental health.

The charity has three main objectives: to support people through specific local counselling, to raise awareness through social media discussing mental health, and to increase awareness by training others on the issue.

Since 2019, The DPJ Foundation has offered a 24-hour, seven days a week text and telephone

confidential service called 'share the load', which is specifically for those who work in Welsh agriculture, but also provides signposting if people from other parts of the UK use it.

The helpline and text service are run by Samaritans-trained volunteers who understand the farming community and the challenges farmers face. The service is completely confidential and can provide the first step to recovery from poor mental health.

Understanding the limited time some farmers have, the DPJ Foundation offers outreach counselling on farm, online counselling, and support by telephone or face-to-face at locations away from the farm. The intention is to provide the best option for the individual, with services provided in Welsh if preferred.

Training

The training sessions help attendees learn how to spot the signs of poor mental health, how to start conversations with those who may be struggling, and provide them with self-care tips to help themselves and others.

For those keen to help others, the organisation also offers mental health awareness training for people who work in agriculture or support the farming community.

"Poor mental health is a growing problem across the UK," says DPJ Foundation's Elen Gwen Williams. "It affects us all at some point in our lives and it's the leading cause of health problems in the UK. One in four people will have a mental illness, such as depression or anxiety, at some

point in their lives. Shockingly, this is a similar number to those who need to wear glasses for reading. We want to make conversations about mental health part of normal life, challenging the stigma that stops people from seeking help when they need it."

"We are here to listen and help – not to judge," adds Miss Williams. "If you're feeling low, or there is a specific worry that is getting you down, or you have considered suicide, please call our 24-hour helpline or give us a text. Our volunteers will listen and set you up with a counsellor if that's what you want."

"Alternatively, if you're worried about someone close to you, point them in our direction. Give them our contact details or even call us yourself – we can help you reach out to those who may be struggling. Your kindness really will make a difference to someone's life."

More at www.thedpjfoundation.co.uk. Or find services for other parts of the UK at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/farminghelp.

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Isolation can contribute to poor mental health in rural areas.



Farmers are continuing to improve flock efficiency and reduce costs of production.



Market and prices stay strong – but don't rely on them

The lamb deadweight price remained at around £6/kg at the beginning of 2022, but there is some uncertainty as to whether it can maintain this record high during the next couple of months until the seasonal increase in demand, around Easter, puts renewed impetus into the market.

With rising fuel prices, inflation and consumers naturally more cautious post-Christmas, some may avoid the premium product of lamb during the next few months.

With the expensive trade given to store lambs in autumn 2021 and rising feed costs, many store lamb finishers need the upward trajectory of prices to continue if they are to see positive margins.

More lambs have been carried forward into 2022 as compared with 2021 and this is likely to result in higher first-quarter slaughterings, so it may be Easter before prices firm up.

Demand

The import threat of New Zealand lamb remains low, with Chinese demand for meat still strong as their pig herd recovers from the African swine fever outbreak of 2018. The New Zealand sheep flock is also rebuilding after several years of drought, with an increased number of ewe lambs being retained for breeding reducing numbers available for slaughter. Higher freight

costs are also making imports more expensive, to the benefit of UK sheep farmers.

Anecdotal reports from New Zealand suggest an increasing number of beef and sheep units are being planted with trees for carbon sequestration, which may limit future levels of production there to the longer-term benefit of UK farmers.

The export market typical accounts for around 30% of the UK industry's output. But 2021 saw this dip due to fewer lambs being available and an increase in domestic consumption during lockdown. If current high prices are to be maintained during 2022 the export market is likely to become more important, because numbers may well increase due to better weather at lambing and some increase in the breeding flock. In addition, as the service sector reopens and more meals are eaten out of the home, lamb consumption may fall back to pre-pandemic levels.

On balance, we remain optimistic of 2022 prices remaining above the long-term average but perhaps below the record prices seen in 2021.

Moving on to the composition of the UK flock, the past decade has seen a noticeable shift in the popularity of certain sheep breeds. The Breed Survey, carried out in 2019, suggested a decrease in the traditional stratified sheep system of hill-bred ewes, typically Scottish Blackface and Swaledales, breeding crossbred lambs to use in low ground systems. Increasing numbers of white-faced sheep breeds such as Cheviots, which saw an increase of 4%, along with Lleyens

By David Siddle, Andersons

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and Easy Care, was noted.

This move away from the traditional stratified system is perhaps due to farmers looking to close their flocks and breed their own replacements. The main concern with buying in replacements is biosecurity and the increased risk to flock health.

Benchmarking

One explanation for the system switch is possibly some farmers seeing it as a route to improving efficiencies and lowering costs of production, by enabling more effective performance recording and maximising the benefits of using tools, such as estimated breeding values, when selecting rams.

In our experience the best performing flocks tend to better understand their costs of production, are involved in benchmarking and monitoring, and have often adopted forage-based systems involving pasture improvement and modern grazing techniques.

While the sheep sector is less exposed to the spiralling costs of fuel, feed and fertiliser than many other sectors in agriculture, costs of production are increasing. And many sheep farmers are reliant on BPS, which will be phased out by 2027, to cross subsidise their systems. Pressure is mounting on the sector to become more efficient – and for those with the enthusiasm we believe there is significant scope to do so. Simply relying on ever higher prices looks a risky strategy for most.

Live sales ring drives buoyant trade across all sectors

The live sales ring has played a key role in delivering strong market prices and driven the buoyant trade throughout 2021 and into 2022, says the Livestock Auctioneers Association.

The organisation believes good trade underlines the crucial role the live sales ring has in securing fair prices, and providing a transparent and traceable marketing system.

The end of the second year of the global covid-19 pandemic, does, on a brighter note, also mark two years of higher prices in the red meat sector, particularly for sheep meat.

"Now hopefully deemed 'the new normal', these prices are not only warmly received but also required, given the ever-rising prices for inputs," says Kivells' Russell Steer, from Exeter Livestock Centre, Devon.

"Prime lambs have hardly dipped below 250p/kg liveweight all summer and store lamb producers have, in turn, been well rewarded with strong demand. In fact the 10,500 lambs sold at our most recent five sales have averaged £101 overall.

"Early seasonality here on the English Riviera means we were also selling couples for the final two months of 2021, which saw 366 entirely Dorset-bred outfits level at £86 per head," he adds.

Levelling

Mr Steer says cull-ewe prices have also increased, often levelling at more than £100 even with large entries.

"It is the small and medium ewes that have seen the largest lift, with small hill ewes commanding £70-£80 per head. It's typical to sell a cull Mule ewe at £110-£125 – prices Mule farmers could only dream about a couple of years ago," he says.

It's a similar picture across the country. Harrison & Hetherington's Mark Richardson, based at Kirkby Stephen Mart, Cumbria, agrees trade has been buoyant throughout the year for all breeds and quality, with an increase in all sectors including the lamb trade.

"Supply and demand are key and there is a global shortage of sheep meat," he says. "So, going forward, prime trade looks set. We have seen more numbers coming through, but the trade has been sustained."

Tom Davies at Welshpool Livestock Sales, Powys, agrees: "The past two years have re-emphasised the importance of the live sales ring, providing a



Farmers are looking to find true market values within the live sales ring.

platform for farmers to present and sell their stock at a fair market price.

"This is certainly the case in the finished lamb market, where on numerous occasions the live prime lamb price has been superior to its deadweight equivalent. On several occasions deadweight firms have attempted, unsuccessfully, to reduce the farmgate price."

At Hexham Auction Mart, Northumberland, auctioneer Jack Walton reiterates the importance of the live sales system to drive trade, given the rising costs of production and additional pressure on margins faced by farmers. "All classes of sheep have been easy to sell through livestock markets across the country with prices as high as many have seen for several years," he says.

Trade

Back-end sales are always a highlight for the trade, and this was no exception for Hexham, with Mule ewe lambs selling to a top of £450, with ram sales also maintaining a healthy trade. "We have seen significant growth in our sheep sections," says Mr Walton. "For example, our cast ewe and ram ring on a Friday, which has seen an increase in numbers of 133% on the year and average prices up by more than £20/head across the season. Many farmers tell us their profit margins haven't increased in line with this, as costs of production have risen sharply, so we hope this trade continues in order to help sustain their businesses," he adds.



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Demand for British wool – and prices – continue to increase

British Wool is reporting continued demand and improving prices as it enters the second half of the selling season for 2021-produced wool.

It says there has been consistent competitive bidding across the full range of wool types with prices increasing as a result. The higher-value wools, including Mule, Cheviot, Romney and Cheviot cross, have been achieving in excess of 80p/kg at auction with some achieving more than 90p/kg. There's also continued interest in the Blackface and Welsh Mountain wools. And specialist types, such as Bluefaced Leicester and Herdwick, have once again achieved record prices.

During the past 12 months auction prices have increased by more than 50%, with the average sale price now around 80p/kg.

Optimistic

"We remain optimistic that the current strong demand will be sustained and the wool market recovery will continue throughout the year, which will result in further price improvement," says British Wool's Andrew Hogley. "With more than two million kg of wool being delivered this season from members who did not deliver in 2020, I'd encourage any members who still have wool on farm to get it to us to ensure they benefit from the current market recovery."

British Wool's mission is to drive sustainable demand, through promotional activity and the collective marketing of the clip, to maximise the value of British wool for its members. "With a

reduced cost base, recovering market and exciting new initiatives, such as the Wool Britannia carpet yarn launch by the Headlam Group and a Harrison Spinks traceable mattress range, we are driving new demand for British wool and increasing its value," says Mr Hogley.

Woolroom, a leading online retailer of wool products for the sleep environment, has recently joined the British Wool traceable wool scheme.

"As the largest supplier of British wool, British Wool was always the logical choice for us," says



Woolroom pays a premium for British Wool.

Woolroom's Chris Tattersall. "But what impressed us most was the level of detail it goes into when grading wool.

"We are committed to supporting the British sheep farmers and this partnership allows us to do just that. Not only are we connecting consumers with farmers through our wool ID branding and innovative QR codes on the finished products, but we are also helping to ensure farmers receive a premium payment for their wool."

Woolroom pays a premium above the British Wool auction price for the wool it procures and this is passed back to the farmers who supplied it.

Another brand making links with British Wool is Fred Perry, which has launched three styles of knitwear using British wool.

Triple Wimbledon champion Fred Perry founded the tennis brand in 1952 when he first designed a pique tennis shirt.

The company has added three knitwear pieces made using British wool to its collection: a Fair Isle jumper, a panelled jumper and a cable knit jumper.

"Our work with brands and companies, such as Woolroom, are significant step forward for British Wool's traceable wool scheme," says British Wool's Graham Clark.

Shearing

British Wool is also offering young farmers the opportunity to attend a two-day beginners' shearing course, at a discounted rate, allowing them to work towards a Blue Seal award.

This offer is open to YFC members who have not previously attended a British Wool shearing course. The course offer price is £87.50 + VAT, compared to the full price of £175 + VAT.

British Wool is also extending its training offer to YFC members for its wool handling courses. This one-day course will be delivered at a discounted price of £50 + VAT.

Interested YFC members should contact British Wool before Thursday 31st March. Telephone 01274 688666 or visit shearing@britishwool.org.uk.



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Romney ewes put to Shetland rams form the backbone of Andy and Jen's flock.



Flexible and creative approach opens door to prosperity

By Katie James, NSA

From vast upland sheep farms to smaller more intensively managed flocks, UK sheep farming enterprises can be as varied as the landscapes they inhabit.

There is no one set way to produce sheep and an openness to exploring all opportunities a sheep farming business can provide can be the best way to remain sustainable for the future.

Andy Wear and Jen Hunter from Fernhill Farm, Compton Martin, Somerset, have certainly embraced this approach since Andy acquired the 160 acres (65ha) and curtilage of derelict listed buildings in the late 1990s. Prior to that he spent many years shearing and contract shepherding vast numbers of sheep across South West England.

Having a home base has allowed sheep numbers to expand from 400 to 1,200 ewes,

thanks to electric fencing and mob grazing across local arable, ex-arable, dairy grassland, set-aside, solar parks and wildlife sites.

Andy and Jen have also added an enterprise alongside the sheep, creating the 'Fernhill Farm Experience' by converting ancient cowsheds into eco-venues with on-site accommodation and welcoming 15,000 visitors each year. Fernhill Farm now hosts parties, weddings, festivals, school camps and workshops, surrounded by multi-purpose livestock on a working farm that focuses on regenerative practices.

Jen says: "We may have a several areas to our business, but sheep have been behind it all."

Development

One of the most rewarding areas of development for Andy and Jen has been the creation of Fernhill Fibre, maximising the return from wool from the farm's commercial flock of NZ Romney cross Shetlands and additional speciality lustre breeds.

Jen explains: "We are interested in a variety of long wool and lustre breeds based on their multipurpose traits. Shetland rams help maintain a medium sized, lighter animal, while NZ Romneys are easy to source locally and deliver hybrid vigour from a grass-fed system. The lustre flock produces mutton and amazing sheepskins, after years of offering copious amounts of top quality fleece.

"Whatever your thoughts about wool, there there is no denying it's still one of the world's most versatile natural fibres, found in abundance on every continent. We find it shameful that wool is almost the forgotten, misunderstood fibre. We



Andy and Jen.

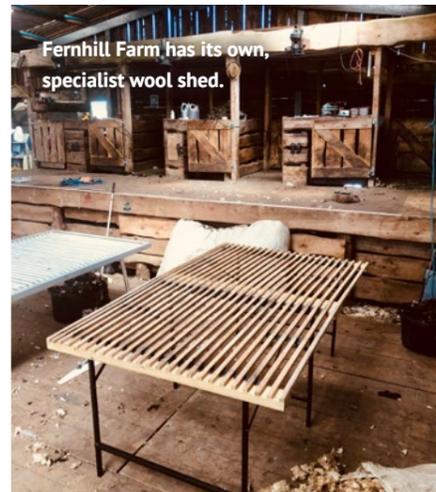
now sell direct to consumers and businesses looking for colourful, low-micron fleece with full traceability and transparency.

"All our enterprises are complementary and need to make a return on their investment. 'Plan, action, control and monitor' – that's our mantra. And we are never concerned with doing things different to the norm.

"Andy believes that as one door closes another opens, and when it does you have to be ready to be first to enter. It's all about taking opportunities when they are presented to you."

With that approach Andy and Jen are now busy organising their next new venture – Fibre Quest. This is an on-farm event designed to showcase wool harvesting techniques and ethical processing of all the natural fibre materials. It will run in collaboration with the farm's blade shearing tournament and build on the success of fleece workshops and other on-farm events.

Jen concludes: "We hope it will help share the message to the public that our multi-purpose flock increases biodiversity while sequestering carbon. And the event is also an opportunity to show other farmers what opportunities are also available to them."



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Three-year project highlights grass-growth potential

By Kathryn Huson, GrassCheckGB and AHDB



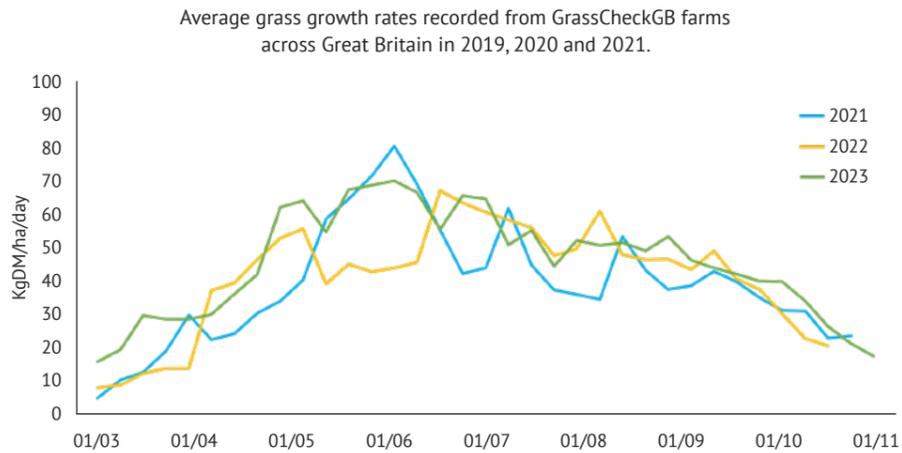
For the past three years the GrassCheckGB farm network has highlighted the ability of British grassland to produce high quality grass despite challenging weather conditions.

The network of sheep, beef and dairy farms provides information on grass growth and quality and weather conditions from 50 locations across Great Britain, to assist farmers in making grassland management decisions and improving both grass growth and utilisation.

Platform

The units forming the GrassCheckGB farm network measure their grassland on a weekly basis. During the past three grazing seasons, grass measurements were fed into an online management platform along with stock numbers, milk/meat sales and details of concentrates and silage fed. Each farm submitted regular grass samples for analysis and was equipped with an automatic weather station, provided through support from InnovateUK.

This data provided a valuable source of weekly, local and regional grass-growth updates with focused management tips for farmers. It highlighted, for example, the importance of back-fencing to help avoid poaching and allow for



better regrowth during cold and/or wet weather conditions, and the likely impact of soil moisture deficits during the dry spells, recorded during the past three seasons by on-farm sensors, on restricting grass growth.

Bulletin notes also provide key reminders including emphasising the importance of soil testing to support optimum grass production, particularly when planning reseeds, and suggesting short-term actions such as taking grass samples before cutting grass for silage, to ensure swards are at the optimum stage for making high quality silage.

The project has recorded unusual patterns in grass growth due to variable weather conditions. None of the grass growth curves recorded during the past three years could be described as 'typical', with periods of both exceptionally good and challenging grass growth and grazing conditions.

Potential

Despite this, the project has demonstrated the potential of British grassland to provide substantial quantities of high quality grass. Project farmers achieved average yields of 11.1t, 9.5t and 9.4tDM/ha/year of grazed grass in 2019, 2020 and 2021 respectively, and exceptional grass utilisation, averaging 80.1% in 2020.

Grassland and grazing accounts for more than 70% of the UK's farmed area, and with an ever-growing population, ensuring these areas are used efficiently to produce nutritious and sustainable food is vital.

It is vital farmers are involved with projects like GrassCheckGB. Farmers bring practical knowledge and real data, and researchers can interrogate and interpret this data to create useable tools.

As well as clear sustainability benefits, improving grass utilisation is a key driver for profitability on many farms. It's estimated the average sheep farm produces around 4.1tDM/ha of grass annually and, with precise grassland management, there is significant scope to increase this. This will allow farmers to make the most of this valuable forage source – the most cost-effective feed available for all ruminant livestock in the UK.

Margins

GrassCheckGB sheep farms have routinely recorded annual grass production in excess of 8tDM/ha during the past three years. By making the most of grass, farmers have the potential to cut concentrate feeding costs significantly, and in turn improve profit margins. In the livestock sector, where margins are tight and input costs continue to rise, this is significant.

Extreme and unpredictable weather is set to become the norm, so having evidence-based tools available to manage grass effectively in difficult conditions is increasingly important. The data from the project has been utilised in the development of predictive models. Using grass growth and weather forecast data, these models will provide seven and 14-day estimates of grass growth.

GrassCheckGB is a collaboration between the Centre for Innovation in Livestock, the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Rothamsted Research, AHDB, HCC, QMS and industry sponsors. More information and links to webinars at www.grasscheckgb.co.uk. And more grassland resources at www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/ahdb-grass.



British grassland produces substantial quantities of high-quality forage.

Working towards sustainable roundworm control

By Lynsey Melville, Moredun



Roundworms are a major cause of production loss in sheep. These parasites can lead to overt clinical disease, but in many cases they result in sub-clinical infection and impact on sheep performance.

Production losses are associated with reduction in liveweight gain, as well as both the quality and quantity of meat and wool. The cost to UK sheep farmers, in treatment and lost productivity, has been estimated at £84m/year.

Roundworm control is mainly achieved through therapeutic and prophylactic use of anthelmintic wormers. But the development of resistance by roundworms to anthelmintics used to control them is a growing problem on sheep farms. Recent data shows that on most farms at least one, and more typically two or three, wormer groups fail to have the expected impact on roundworms. This is a threat to sustainable sheep farming.

Control

There is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to effective roundworm control given the influence of environmental, management and host factors, and the variation between sheep farming enterprises. Sustainable control requires a combination of strategic anthelmintic treatments; non-chemical control practices, such as grazing management or selective breeding of sheep for greater roundworm tolerance; and effective testing and monitoring of infection.



Photo credit: CSIRO.



Sustainable worm control is an increasing challenge as multi-anthelmintic resistance increases.

Moredun has a long history of research in this area. Current projects are focusing on characterising roundworm infections; identifying risk periods, and understanding how these patterns change with climatic and management decisions; discovering the mechanisms roundworms use to survive anthelmintic treatment; developing tools to detect and monitor infection; and designing on-farm management strategies to maximise animal health, welfare and production.

Continued research is required, but there are several recommendations and findings that are ready to be used. Best-practice guidelines for roundworm control in the UK have been widely publicised, but uptake in some areas remains low.

We have conducted a series of questionnaires with farmers and experts in the UK to identify their current understanding of the topic of anthelmintic resistance in sheep roundworms and currently available control options. We asked farmers, as well as animal health advisers, vet and consultants, to rank the current best-practice recommendations set out by the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) group, based on importance and practicability. The results indicated good agreement between farmers and experts.

Effective administration of anthelmintics was ranked the most important and practical step by all groups (around 50% of respondents) with effective quarantine being considered as also important. Preserving susceptible worms on farm and reducing dependence on

anthelmintics were ranked the least important (23% and 19% respectively) or practical (13% and 9% respectively), with the main barrier for uptake being the complexity of these messages. Demonstration and face-to-face events were ranked more likely to result in a change in behaviour compared to online material or consumer pressure. Results highlight the topics that require further attention and reiterate regional variation in priorities, which will inform the design of effective knowledge exchange activities in the future.

Resistance

To build on these findings, Moredun has teamed up with Queen's University Belfast to gather information on current roundworm control methods being implemented on commercial farms, and what farmers think of anthelmintic resistance and how to deal with it.

We are asking farmers to share their experiences and opinions in a short questionnaire. It comprises 20 questions and takes just 10 minutes to complete. The results will be used to assess the state of play on anthelmintic resistance in the UK, as well as what farmers are doing well already to try to preserve anthelmintic effectiveness and where management could be improved. This research will guide future education materials and other support, for example through SCOPS.

To fill out the questionnaire visit www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/ShortSheepWorm2021.





Ewe nutrition is a key driver for colostrum quality.

Colostrum project reveals quality differences – and pointers

By Fiona Lovatt & Phillipa Page, Flock Health Ltd 

Colostrum is gold – but how gold is gold? When it comes to quality, what is good enough?

We set out to answer those questions in early 2021, working with 147 Welsh sheep farmers and Farming Connect, to measure ewe colostrum quality using Brix refractometers.

Participating farmers were asked to test colostrum from at least 10 ewes in the first week of lambing and at least 10 ewes in the final week of lambing. And they recorded the Brix reading, as well as ewe age, breed, body condition score, number of live and dead lambs born, a description of udder condition, and the colour of the colostrum.

Training

The study gathered data on 1,295 ewes from 64 different Welsh flocks, and began with a training video, offering farmers instruction on how to use the Brix refractometer. A level of more than 22% was set as a cut-off to indicate adequate colostrum quality – the same figure that's typically used to determine good quality colostrum in dairy cattle. However, by the time all the data had been collated, a further study from Switzerland had been published and this work suggested 26.5% was more appropriate to use as a cut-off for sheep colostrum.

Our study revealed that 76% of the Welsh colostrum samples exceeded a Brix reading of 26.5% and were considered of good quality. The participating

flocks varied in size from 60 to 2,720 lambing ewes, with an average of 23% first-time lambers in the flocks. Most of these ewes lambed in March 2021. The majority lambed indoors and there were 30 different breeds of ewe represented of which 468 were terminal-type, 473 were maternal-type, 294 were hill and six were considered rare breeds. Of the tested ewes 57% had twins, 32% had singles, 10% had triplets and 0.5% had quads.

Variation

With an average of 20 ewe colostrum samples returned per flock, the greatest variation was found to be at the flock level. The quality of ewe nutrition was considered to be the greatest driver of subsequent colostrum quality. More colostrum samples were of good quality when concentrate feed space was more than 45cm per ewe, when the silage crude protein was at least 12%, and when twin- and triplet-bearing ewes were supplemented with concentrate feed.

Most ewes (70.2%) had udders deemed normal or average, and only 4.2% of udders were described in terms that suggested potential mastitis infection. The 9.3% of ewes reported by farmers as 'hard to strip' (compared to either good or average) also produced colostrum significantly less likely to be of good quality when measured by the Brix refractometer.

Otherwise, due to the wide variety between flocks size and breed, it was difficult to tease out individual-level ewe factors that were important in determining the quality of colostrum produced.

There was an indication that colostrum quality was poorer in thinner ewes and also in single-bearing ewes compared to those producing twin or triplets. However, this difference may not be significant and could simply reflect differences in management between flocks.

Measure

As farmers prepare for lambing 2022 and continue to work to optimise colostrum management, and reduce levels of antibiotic given to neonatal lambs, this practical study has demonstrated how useful it is to measure colostrum quality.

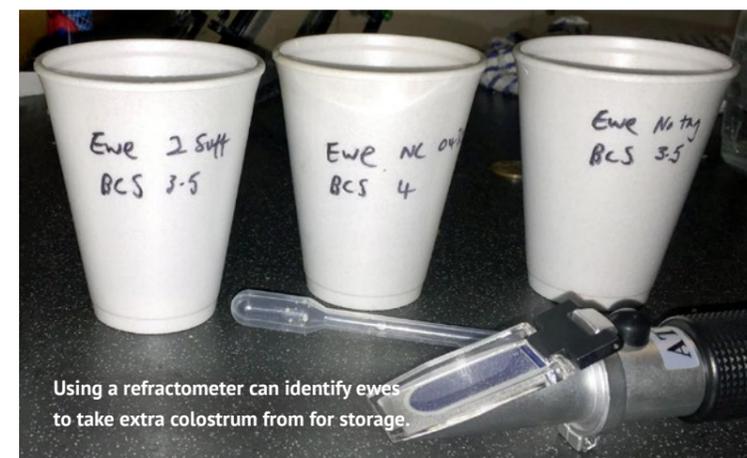
Whether farmers want to identify ewes to take and store back-up colostrum supplies from, or simply want to reassure themselves that the pre-lambing ration has ensured the production of high-quality colostrum, a Brix refractometer is a useful addition to lambing shed equipment.

With the Brix to measure quality, you are better able to focus your resources on ensuring that each lamb quickly receives enough quantity.

Farmers involved in the research said they actually enjoyed using the refractometers. They said they were easy to use and the results were instant. It also confirmed whether it was worth struggling to milk a ewe for her colostrum – if it has a good reading, they'll do it.

Other comments included: 'I started to guess which ewes may have poorer quality colostrum – like lame ones or skinny ones'; 'It gave me the confidence to stop using oral antibiotics, because I knew ewe colostrum quality was good enough'; and 'It helped encourage my kids to get out and help. And the students liked it.'

Read the full study by Page, Sherwin, Sampson, Philips and Lovatt in the Jan/Feb 2022 edition of the *Livestock veterinary journal*. View the refractometer training video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=xwWH7D9cP34.



Using a refractometer can identify ewes to take extra colostrum from for storage.



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Monitoring watery mouth is key to effective treatment

Watery mouth disease is an endotoxaemia and symptoms include drooling, dehydration, swollen stomach and retained meconium.

It is caused by the rapid multiplication and death of E. coli bacteria in the intestines. This organism is found in the environment and ingested by lambs. When large numbers of E. coli die within the intestines there is a massive release of toxins, and blood poisoning results.

The condition typically affects lambs within 72 hours of birth. There is usually no diarrhoea and often occurs secondary to hypogammaglobulinaemia – a lack of protective immunoglobulins provided by the ewe's colostrum.

Other diseases associated with E. coli infection in lambs include colisepticaemia and K99+ve colibacillosis. Colisepticaemia is a systemic (affecting all body systems) E. coli infection where bacteria enter the blood stream and kill the lamb. Again this can be due to poor colostrum quality failing to provide lambs with sufficient protection in early life. This condition is typically seen in lambs less than seven days old. E. coli is frequently isolated from the liver, lungs, spleen, or brain. Lambs pick up the E. coli via the navel or through the intestines.

Scour

K99+ve colibacillosis is a disease that causes scour due to specific strains of E. coli with K99 fimbriae. Fimbriae are structures on the surface of the bacterial cell and help it to attach to the surface of the intestines via specific receptors. The receptors are most numerous in the intestines of neonates, so it affects lambs up to 72 hours old. These E. coli strains produce a toxin that prevents the intestines absorbing water, cause electrolyte loss and results in profuse watery scour.

In March 2019, APHA offered free testing on a sample of small intestine content from lambs that had died of suspected watery mouth disease. A total of 39 submissions were received.

Each sample was cultivated and generated 36 isolates of E. coli for investigation. Sensitivity to antibiotics was tested, where the bacteria are grown on agar plates, which have antibiotic discs placed on them. The resistance or susceptibility can be determined by the diameter of the zone of growth around the antibiotic disc.

Each isolate was tested against 16 different antibiotics. From the 36 isolates the study found that resistance to one of the most-used antibiotics, tetracycline, was most common, followed by ampicillin, spectinomycin and streptomycin respectively. Multi-drug resistance (resistance to three or more antimicrobial classes) was detected in 18 isolates. One isolate was resistant to seven different antibiotics.

Colostrum

Of the farms involved in the trial work, an equal number of hill and lowland flocks participated. Just under half the farmers dagged ewes before lambing and all, except one outdoor lambing flock, individually penned lambs with the ewe for a minimum of 24 hours after birth.

The majority of farmers stomach tubed non-suckling or triplet lambs with colostrum, and there was a 50:50 split between ringing lambs within or after 24 hours of birth.

Individual and group lambing pens were bedded daily by 84% of farmers who took part in the study and individual lambing pens were cleaned and disinfected after use (on all but three farms) either using lime, antibacterial powder or a disinfectant.

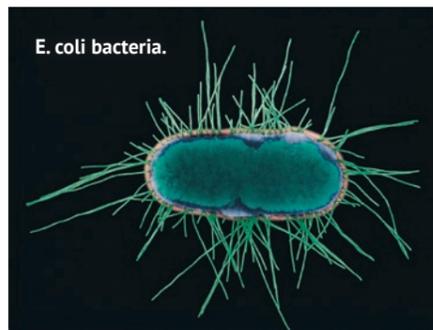
Most cases of watery mouth disease were identified by farmers during the middle or early part of the lambing period and the majority of cases occurred in twin or triplet lambs. The work also revealed that more than half the farmers did not use antibiotics routinely in neonatal lambs. And those that did used products comprising oral preparations, injections and tablets.

The Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance has targeted reducing blanket treatment of lambs against neonatal bacterial infections. The aim is to reduce the use of antibiotics and the development of antibiotic resistance.

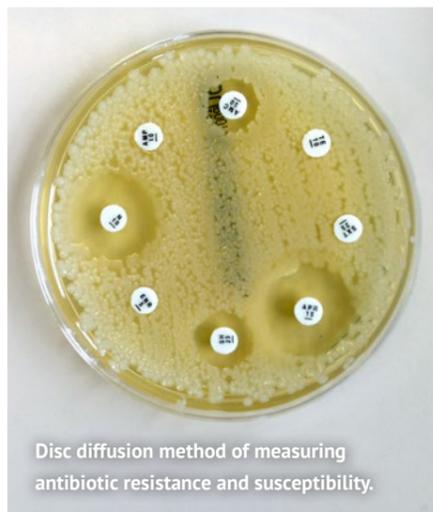
The resistance patterns of the E. coli isolates in this study reflect those antibiotics most used in sheep. And this highlights the importance of sensitivity testing to inform the choice of antimicrobial used on farm and demonstrates that antibiotic resistance is cause for concern.

Thanks to farmers' participation in this study we now have some interesting bacteria to study. We'll be doing whole genome sequencing to further understand why bacteria develop resistance and if resistance can spread through the swapping of genes between bacteria.

By Rachael Collins & Amanda Carson, APHA



E. coli bacteria.



Disc diffusion method of measuring antibiotic resistance and susceptibility.

Tips on preventing watery mouth and other neonatal lamb diseases

- Monitor ewe body condition score and nutritional management to ensure production of good quality colostrum.
- Maintaining strict hygiene at lambing, focusing on lambing pens, equipment, and hands.
- Take appropriate hygiene measures when administering injections.
- Dip lamb navels in strong iodine solution at birth and again four hours later.
- Ensure adequate colostrum intake by newborn lambs.
- Monitor all lambs for early signs of illness and investigate causes.

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Surplus lambs are more expensive to rear.

Maximise value of orphan and surplus lambs

Surplus, orphan or cade lambs can make up a significant percentage of total lamb sales, so Georgina Thomas of Trouw Nutrition says it's important to have a defined nutritional plan for these lambs before lambing starts.

"Around 5% of lambs born will be artificially reared, but it is not unusual for this to rise to up to 10% of all lambs," she explains. "Major contributors to the number of these lambs are orphans and lambs from ewes with poor milk supply, while a proportion will be from triplets."

"Managing successful artificial rearing must be a priority as achieving 5%-10% more lamb sales will have a significant impact on the bottom line."

Plan

Ms Thomas recommends taking the time to decide how these lambs will be managed before they hit peak lambing time. Any plan should include when the decision is taken to remove a lamb, as well as which lambs to remove.

"It may be having a plan, for example, to remove the strongest triplet so the remaining lambs face less competition for milk," says Ms Thomas. "Early intervention will usually ensure the lambs left on the ewe and any lambs removed will have the best chance of surviving and achieving good growth rates. Having a clear management system will also make sure they remain healthy and grow quickly. A successful rearing plan can also help manage workloads and simplify decision making and management."

As these lambs will be more expensive to rear, she stresses it's important to ensure they hit specification for carcase weight and grade. And this means maximising early-life feed conversion efficiency and making sure they grow rapidly from birth.

Ms Thomas says that, ideally, all lambs should have received sufficient colostrum before being taken off the ewe. If this is not possible then a high-quality colostrum replacer should be used.

"Choice of lamb milk replacer is key," she says. "Feeding a well formulated, highly digestible product will support good intakes and maximise growth rates, while reducing problems and the time associated with attending to lambs. A lamb milk replacer should be precisely formulated to fully optimise lamb performance and support health, while high digestibility of energy and protein sources aim to minimise the risk of digestive upsets."

Reserves

She adds that newborn lambs have limited energy reserves. So replacers must provide sufficient energy, in a highly digestible form, to support survivability and body temperature

maintenance, as well as a robust immune system, while promoting high liveweight gains.

To reduce digestive upsets Ms Thomas' advice is to choose a replacer formulated for controlled osmolality, making it closer to ewe's milk. Osmolality is the measure of the concentrations of sugars and minerals in the mixed solution of replacer. Lamb milk replacers with elevated osmolality, either in the actual formulation or as a result of being mixed in too concentrated a form, can damage gut integrity. This increases the risk of scour and bloat, and compromises potential future growth rates.

"By investing in a milk replacer formulated for high digestibility, farmers can ensure lambs get the nutrients they require for good health and performance and help them get as good a start in life as possible. This, in turn, will increase the number of lambs sold, as well as growth efficiency, to help boost margins," concludes Ms Thomas.

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Time to change minds about flock health plans

Lambing time is the point when months of hard work hopefully bear results, with lots of live lambs born.

Given the effort taken to this point, and then getting stock through to finishing weights, QMS is encouraging producers to think about the importance of planning to protect and improve flock health, and the key role professionals can play.

Health plans have always been a part of the QMS Cattle and Sheep standards, and annual vet visits and involvement in the health plan will be required when new standards are implemented in spring 2022.

But not all farmers are eager when asked for input from their vet to produce a flock health plan, says Andy Cant of Northvet Veterinary Group, Orkney, as they don't see the value or would rather not know.

Incentives

When there were financial incentives to engage in health planning under previous schemes, it encouraged a 'tick box' attitude that devalued the usefulness of plans for many people.

"There are many reasons why a health plan has negative connotations, which is why it's time for a change of mindset and a different approach," says Mr Cant.

He has many sheep farmer clients who fully engage in flock health planning and see great value in it. He says: "Just taking the time to sit down and discuss the previous year, good or bad, with your vet and what the future might bring can be invaluable. Different enterprises have varying levels and frequency of contact with their vets throughout the year. For sheep farmers an annual sit down with their vet may be one of the few chances to discuss flock health, welfare and productivity."

Mr Cant says he likes to call this an 'annual flock health consultation' where farmers think about why they want – not need – an annual chat with their vet.

Many farmers want to run a successful and profitable business, and control or eradication of disease means improved welfare and production that have economic benefits. Some want access to markets and to see a premium that recognises their flock's high health, welfare and production standards. "This is where recognised umbrella farm assurance schemes, such

as QMS and Red Tractor, help to market lamb and part of that assurance is a flock health consultations with your vet," says Mr Cant.

"It's also about keeping third parties who are looking over your shoulder happy. An annual flock health consultation can be helpful should farmers need to have something written down that proves they are looking after the health and welfare of the animals under their care.

"And some retailers may be looking at evidence of responsible antimicrobial use and parasite control. Consumers may assume such things are in place – so don't disappoint them. Far better to have already thought through and addressed challenging questions that may come up, rather than play catch-up later."

Consultation

Brexit's impact on market access, the transition to a new support payment system for agriculture in 2025 and climate change commitments should all be at the front of farmers' minds. "And success in accessing and attaining much of that will be down to having an annual health consultation in place," says Mr Cant.

"It's time to embrace the annual flock health review. Its production is a shared venture and effort between the farmer and their vet, as well as other key advisers. It should be seen as useful and valuable and an integral part of flock health and welfare management."



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PRODUCT AND BUSINESS NEWS

SVS provides guidance on Spectam alternatives following discontinuation

As many readers will be aware, it has now been confirmed that Spectam Scour Halt from Ceva Animal Health, the only authorised oral antibiotic product for the control of watery mouth, has been discontinued.

Although the use of oral antibiotics in the sheep sector reduced by 48% between 2016 and 2021, there were still 5.8 million doses of oral antibiotics used in 2021. And the Sheep Veterinary Society (SVS) and Sheep Antibiotic Guardian Group believe these were predominantly prescribed for the treatment and control of watery mouth in neonatal lambs. So the discontinuation of this product will be of concern to many farmers.

For those members yet to start lambing, NSA strongly recommends engaging with your vet and/or adviser to work together on good ewe nutrition and colostrum management. And to have a plan in place, focusing on provision of colostrum and good hygiene at lambing, to manage the risk of neonatal infections and improve lamb survival rates.

SVS has produced a guidance document on potential alternatives, while highlighting that in many flocks antibiotics are no longer used as the first line of defence for watery mouth.

Rebecca Mearns, SVS President, says: "It is anticipated that antibiotics will only be used in a targeted approach, once disease has been confirmed, and only for high risk lambs. This may include low birthweight lambs, triplets and use in the latter part of the lambing period if necessary. Vets will have to use the cascade principle when prescribing alternatives, guided by what antibiotic is likely to be effective and results of in vitro sensitivity testing where possible, as well as the formulation and route of administration, to make decisions."

NSA added the SVS document, and information about the #ColostrumIsGold campaign, to its website in late January. Find it at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/our-work/news.



Clean bedding can reduce lamb losses due to infection.

Accreditation received for sheep bedding product

Bedmax, the company that produces Stockmax pine shavings, has received accreditation status confirming its product does not contain any naturally occurring prohibited substances (NOPS).

The company says the NOPS badge certifies the bedding conforms to best practice in minimising contamination risk by NOPS, further strengthening claims that it can help reduce losses from E. coli infections including watery mouth and scour.

The BETA NOPS accreditation is an international industry standard of practice that ensures manufacturers meet high standards of production, marketing and advertising. Tim Smalley of Bedmax says: "Unlike feeds and supplements, you don't get a list of ingredients on a bag of bedding. So it's important to know the manufacturer has taken steps to ensure the product does not contain prohibited substances. Pine is naturally antibacterial and so is extremely hygienic, helping farmers to keep their lambing pens as clean as possible."

More at www.bedmaxshavings.com/stockmax.



Following the flock

This month we visit Powys, Warwickshire and County Antrim to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Region Chairman, Powys

The new year started with rain and mud in the South Wales hills.

Our fields are currently so wet that even the dogs running across them is cutting them up. But the sheep are keeping surprisingly well. We have more grass than usual and I have just started feeding some whole beet.

We sponged 50 ewes back in September and left the rams in for a second cycle. The rams then came out and the ewes ran with the main flock, which was tupped in November. The sponged ewes were scanned in early January and 45 will be lambing in February, the rest will lamb with the main flock in April. Some are older crossbred ewes. We sold a few couples for the first time in 2021 and were extremely happy with the price. Little did we know how well lambs would be selling, so hopefully the buyers did well and we will try again this year.

A large mature oak tree sadly came down in the storms before Christmas. Luckily no sheep were sheltering close by but it did make me wonder if non-rural people realise how much native woodland there is in farmland.

Listening to the news you could think farms are a barren wasteland with no trees or hedges. I find it ironic that a few years ago we had a small amount deducted from our BPS payment due to aerial photos calculating we had more tree cover – yes, penalised for having too many trees. And now we are all being told we must plant more.

Kate's sheep in woodland.



Jonathan Farmer

NSA Northern Ireland Region Chairman, County Antrim

It's been a busy few months getting ewes ready and grouped for tupping.

Most sheep are mated away on winter grazing. This adds to the workload a little, but sheep usually gain condition on the clean grazing. Lambs have been going away finished at roughly fortnightly intervals and have been achieving good slaughter weights. But chasing weight can sometimes encourage some fatter carcasses, which has been the case on a few occasions. After a little break at Christmas I've been busy fluke drenching ewes and housing the remaining lambs for finishing.

We scanned as Sheep Farmer when to press and I was braced for a lower percentage this season due to the much lower age profile of the flock. I culled all six-year-old and older ewes and brought a lot of homebred shearlings into the flock. It will be interesting to see if a lower scan rate results in a higher lamb survival rate.

If rains stays away most of the flock will remain outside until lambing. Heavy rain usually means having to leave winter tack earlier than desired, otherwise grass gets flattened and dirty on top.

I'm bringing on a few young sheepdogs so if I'm not busy with sheep or cattle I have no trouble filling my spare time. I get a huge buzz when young dogs are able to come to work and do some farm jobs. Hopefully I have a trial winner or two in the kennel, waiting for a chance to shine.



Jonny houses ewes for lambing.



Ant's remaining 2021 lambs are grazing on turnips.

Antony Spencer

NSA Marches Chairman*, Warwickshire

The main ewe flock has recently been scanned and I was pleased there were only 10 empty out of 475, with more than 70% carrying twins.

We work extremely hard in the run up to tupping, regularly condition scoring ewes and feeding the leaner groups in order to try and flush them a little. So it is extra rewarding when scanning goes well. It will be a few weeks yet before we find out what to expect from our ewe lambs but hopefully they won't disappoint.

All the ewes and the 500 remaining hogs to finish are grazing on turnips and, so far, winter has been a little kinder than the past few years. The crop is holding the stock well with not too much waste.

We will aim to start drawing lambs again in mid-February with the goal of getting as close to a 22kg carcass as possible. For the past few years we have been using high-index Suffolk rams. I definitely think it has made it easier to take lambs to higher weights without them getting too fat.

The ewes will be brought home three to four weeks before lambing and split into groups, before being housed with ad-lib silage and trough fed twice a day. Couples are then turned out at 48 hours old, onto fresh grass that has been rested for the winter. Hopefully the weather will remain kind into the spring and, fingers crossed, lambing goes well for us all.

**Ant has now finished his term as regional chairman. Meet his successor, Richard Vines, on page 22.*



Following the flock – further afield

The majority of sheep flocks in Denmark are small.

Although known for representing and acting as the voice of UK sheep farmers, NSA also has a loyal group of international members across the globe.

Long-standing NSA member David Wootton, farming on the Island of Lolland in Denmark, explains more about systems in a nation more famous for pig production than sheep farming.

He moved to the island, located south of Copenhagen, in the early 1990s. Originally from East Sussex, David moved to Denmark to manage the largest sheep farm in the country. But six years later made the move to self-employment and hasn't looked back since.

He runs a 850-head Texel cross flock and some Romney ewes, grazing across 220 acres (90ha) of marshland and 1,000 acres (400h) of land used for grass seed production. Denmark is a leading producer of grass and clover seeds, approximately 40% of total EU production.

Small flocks

His flock is one of the largest in the country with no other sheep farms within 20 miles. Most of Denmark's 60,000 ewes are kept by smallholders. The average flock size is just 14 head, with only 20 flocks running more than 500 ewes in the whole country.

Sheep production is focused on the grazing of grass seed land during the autumn because the use of sheep is kinder on the land than machinery, once the seeds have been harvested.

"Sheep farmers do not pay to rent grazing land and, in many cases, actually get paid to do it," says David. "I receive £30 per hectare for grazing grass seed land. Other grazing is predominantly

permanent pasture, known here as nature ground, which cannot be touched with sprays, fertiliser or reseeded."

Free grazing land offers a huge benefit but, as it's spread across his region in many different patches, David is required to travel up to 70 miles each day to check both his stock and the 11 miles of electric fencing he uses to form paddocks.

David also works in a local abattoir and shears 2,500 sheep per year. With no livestock auctions in Denmark all stock is sold deadweight with the main consumers of sheep meat being the Danish Muslim community and the domestic hospitality sector.

Health

With so few sheep numbers and no reason to travel due to the lack of markets, most flocks are closed with a high health status. "Our closed flocks have created a healthy sheep population. There is no reason for sheep to mix with those from other farms so we have low levels of disease," he says. "Of course, we do have to be vigilant for other issues, such as barber's pole worm. This is one major problem we do have and, with so few sheep anthelmintics licensed for use in Denmark, we have to be careful to avoid resistance. We carry out faecal egg counts before any treatment."

David believes some UK systems could learn from the biosecure nature of Danish farms. "When I return to the UK I am always surprised by the level of foot problems I see on sheep farms. The UK has great breeding stock, and knowledgeable and experienced sheep farmers, but I do think there is room for improvement. Many of the health issues surely come from moving and mixing sheep."

The UK also has more government support for sheep farmers compared to Denmark. "There are

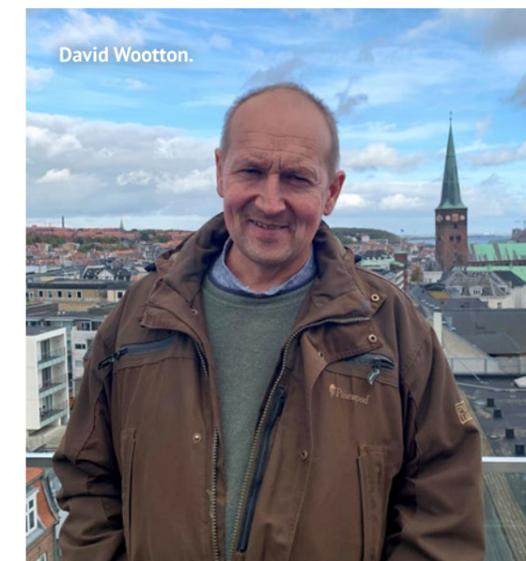
no support payments of any kind for commercial sheep production. This could be part of the reason there is little interest in growth of the sector," he says. "Grazing under solar panels could be the only future for sheep here and may keep a small number of people interested."

"We have the most sunlight hours in this part of the country, so solar power is increasing rapidly. If the rights to graze this can be gained, payments of £160/acre (£400/ha) can be offered. Surely this could be an incentive for young farmers to enter the industry."

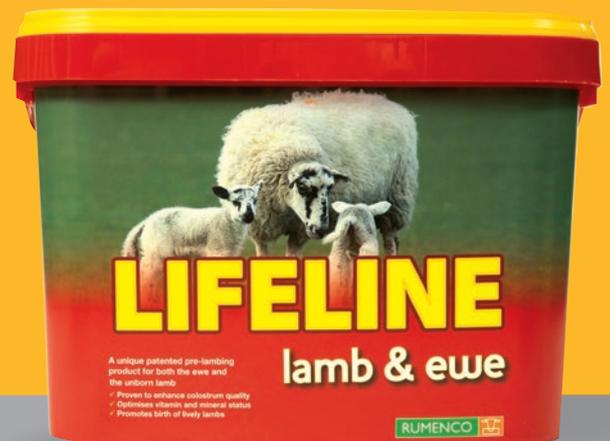
With so few commercial sheep farmers in the country, David values his NSA membership for the up-to-date information it provides him with via NSA Sheep Farmer magazine. He also enjoys making the biannual trip to the NSA Sheep Event.

"I am looking forward to visiting again this year. I will travel with some friends, visit other farms and take the trip as a holiday. I almost view it as a pilgrimage," he says.

David Wootton.



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