

SHEEPFARMER

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Timely call for food security – and hope



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

I never imagined I would write an editorial for Sheep Farmer with a war raging in Europe.

I assumed the sacrifices made by our parents and grandparents would secure peace for many generations to come. How wrong I was.

I hope with all my heart that by the time you read this the conflict will have subsided. But whatever happens I fear the world will remain on edge for some time to come.

There's no doubt the brutality of war puts the covid-19 pandemic in the shade, but it seems wherever and whenever you look around the world volatility and disruption are the order of the day. Conflict, climate change, pandemic, economics and trade – everything appears unstable or in a state of rapid and uncontrollable change.

It's wrong to try to capitalise on disaster but quite reasonable to add our voice to debates about the future security of the world. And I hope I'm not seen as being glib by continuing to raise the importance of national food and energy security. This cannot be at the expense of the environment. As sheep farmers we know only too well that you can feed sheep well but if they're kept in an unhealthy environment they won't thrive.

Balance

This is the time to try to get the balance right and to prepare ourselves for greater resilience and security as a nation – whatever disruption is thrown our way. That has to mean proper consideration of domestic food security. Food security should be based on sustainable domestic production and not on being wealthy enough to rely on others through trade relationships. The timing couldn't be better as Westminster considers a national food strategy and all UK nations consider future farming policy and schemes.

The importance of global warming won't go away and neither will that of healthy natural resources – air, water and soil. While nature may seem a luxury for some, we should remember that much of Britain's wildlife has its roots

living alongside, or as part of, farming, grazing and woodland practices. Farming in a truly sustainable and integrated manner is the best way to rebuild it.

The strong prices seen in 2021 have provided optimism for sheep farmers and been a real driver for refocusing minds on productivity. But there is now a realisation that input inflation will mean there is little extra room for improved margins, and we would all be well advised to keep investing in flock inputs while refocusing efforts on making sure all investments are well targeted and not overused or wasted.

Advice

Whether its feed, fertiliser or vet medicines, testing, analysing and monitoring performance make good sense. Advice may cost money but it should result in savings or increase margins beyond its cost.

It's also a fact that one of the reasons our costs of production for lamb are higher than Australia or New Zealand is due to higher capital costs – plant and machinery and buildings and infrastructure. Britain's climate and production standards are different, as are public expectations of how we farm. And this is a good reason for our high capital costs.

There are few farmers who would dispute that food has been too cheap in recent years. But now food inflation is creating nervousness and the world has become a more expensive place to live. Sadly for farmers, and consumers, prices are being driven up not by reductions in farm support but by market forces – input costs, shortages and supply chain problems. As life's essentials become more expensive there will be less to spend on non-essentials, and there will be many unpopular decisions for families to make. But, as a sign of the pressure to come, farming input costs have been rising by 18%, the value of outputs by 11%, and retailers are predicting food inflation of 5%. Something doesn't quite add up.

Lambing and the start of the grass growing season means spring, which is usually a time of hope and optimism. Let's save some of that hope for a peaceful world.



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Three NSA regions welcome new chairs

Several new officeholders were welcomed to the regional top roles at the recent series of Annual Regional Members' Meetings.

NSA Northern Ireland Region welcomes Alistair Armstrong and Dale Orr to the positions of Chair and Vice Chair respectively. The same positions in NSA South West Region are now held by Olly Matthews and Richard Rossiter, and by Viv Lewis and Ted Ogden in NSA Northern Region. You can read more about Viv and her Cumbria-based flock on page 20 of this magazine.

NSA extends its thanks to all outgoing officeholders who have given so much to help the successful running of NSA and its regional network.



Alistair Armstrong.



Viv Lewis.

Breed Society Forum stays online for 2022

The NSA Breed Society Forum will be online again this year – allowing attendees from all corners of the UK to attend on Thursday 5th May 2022.

The forum will provide updates from NSA on work specific to the country's pedigree sheep sector, including the latest on moving breeding stock within the UK and exporting genetics around the globe. Breed society representatives and NSA members with an interest are welcome to join.

Details and registration at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events.

Two new faces join NSA

NSA is pleased to welcome NSA Policy Manager Emma Bradbury and NSA Digital Communications Officer Rachel Rose to the team at NSA Head Office.

Emma joins in the new position of Policy Manager having previously worked in comparable roles in the sector. Her enthusiasm for agricultural policy will complement the work of the NSA team as it strives to continuously increase its impact in this important area.

Rachel joins the communications team at a busy time, as it prepares for NSA Sheep 2022, and continues to share more information about the organisation and the sheep sector. Find contact details for Emma and Rachel, and all other staff members, on page 1.



Emma Bradbury.



Rachel Rose.

Final Solway prize goes to South Wales

NSA member Eifion Thomas, from Convilston, Cardiff, is the winner of the final Solway Recycling prize for the 2021/22 NSA membership prize draw.

Eifion joined NSA to keep informed and updated on news and other handy tips that will help him run his small flock. He wins a set of lambing pens and a lamb-warming box.

NSA has given away four Solway Recycling prize packages this year to lucky winners in Cornwall, the Scottish Highlands, Cumbria and now South Wales. All were drawn from a list of individuals who joined NSA for the first time, as well as existing members who referred a new recruit.

NSA extends its thanks to prize draw sponsors Solway Recycling, and is already enjoying a completely different prize draw for 2022 – with one lucky sheep farmer set to win a Te Pari Racewell HD3 sheep handling system. The draw is open to all UK-based sheep farmers. See page 11 for details.



TE PARI



Upgrade membership ready for NSA summer events

Members are reminded that individual membership subscriptions will give one free entry to this summer's NSA Sheep Event and one discounted entry to NSA Scot Sheep. If you plan to attend an NSA event this year with someone else living at your address, why not upgrade to joint membership to secure double the benefit of free/discounted event entry for just an additional £10? Find out how to upgrade by calling NSA Head Office or visit the NSA website at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/upgrade.

Save the date for NSA AGM 2022

The NSA AGM will take place on Thursday 11th August. Details of the location and voting information will be shared with members in the next issue of Sheep Farmer magazine and via the NSA Weekly Email Update.

Sad loss of NSA VP

Late February saw the loss of David Prosser, an NSA Vice President, life member and great supporter of the organisation. Originally from the Welsh Borders, David became active in NSA South East Region when he relocated to Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire. He was a long-standing committee member and regional chairman, as well as an active volunteer at numerous NSA Sheep Events. As a keen YFC stockjudge in his youth, David's legacy to the sheep sector is the many people he trained in the skill, as well as helping to build up NSA South East Region. He passed away after a long illness and will be missed by many.



David Prosser.

A sheep farming voice

NSA continues to work hard, both in the spotlight and behind the scenes, to ensure the sheep sector's voice is not only heard but also heeded. This new page, a planned regular feature, offers a taster of policy areas NSA is taking the initiative in.

Fighting for future farm support

Reduction (and eventual removal) of BPS in England continues to move forward, with devolved nations also developing restructuring plans.

NSA is heavily involved in all parts of the UK, sitting on the main ELMS engagement group and a number of working groups. There is still a long way to go, but NSA has been influential in getting recognition that sustainable farming techniques are not only good for farming resilience but also good for the environment and ecology, resulting in the development of the Sustainable Farming Incentive.

Curbing predator releases

NSA continues to be very active in proposed and actual species reintroductions, focusing on Eurasian lynx and white-tailed sea eagles as two apex predators.

We continue to hear of numerous reports of sea eagles causing problems in Scotland, with NSA Scottish Region directly involved in the national stakeholder panel. In England, NSA's participation in the steering and monitoring groups overseeing the release on the Isle of Wight is valued. Despite rumours of renewed release applications from Lynx Trust UK, and rumblings of further consultations, NSA has managed to keep the lid on any reintroduction of lynx.

Tricky trade talks

NSA's focus remains on the resurrection of live breeding sheep trading.

Since our departure from the EU, no breeding sheep have moved across the English Channel from GB to the EU due to a lack of live animal border control posts. NSA remains optimistic for a facility just outside Calais, although current P&O problems will not encourage investors.

Stock can now move between GB and Northern Ireland, within the new scrapie controls and tagging requirements, but this is limited to farm-to-farm movements. Licensing marts as Export Assembly Centres could provide facilities for live auction sales - and while NSA is enthusiastic in leading a government-industry group on this, it anticipates a lengthy road to making it work at a practical level.

NSA sits on the Department of International Trade Agrifood Advisory Group and has provided advice on the new trade details being negotiated – albeit within the context of pre-set Government ambitions for trade development. While this work is mostly behind the scenes within non-disclosure agreements, NSA press and media activity regularly highlights opportunities and risks of trade deals. This is sensitive work but NSA continues to work constructively with other sheep producing nations, not least within the Global Sheep Producers Forum.



Reducing red tape

NSA is working hard behind the scenes to drive changes to legislation.

Progress is slow and it's frustrating that the agenda is more frequently about governmental priorities rather than NSA being able to focus on policy topics important to sheep farmers.

1. Carcase splitting has been actively discussed for many years, with plans to introduce a change delayed since 2019. More on page 25.
2. NSA is leading on skin on sheep (smokies), chairing a working group that has produced protocols and is constantly pushing for progress.
3. Members will remember consultations on livestock journey times and welfare in transport in late 2020/early 2021. The industry still needs clarification about what constitutes a journey, considering the role of collection centres and markets, and how time in lairage can count as rest. NSA will continue to support evidence gathering and this will remain central to discussions.
4. The Animal Welfare (Kept Animals) Bill and the Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill are two new pieces of legislation within the Animal Welfare Action Plan. The first could result in greater control for sheep worrying. The second, once a committee has been established, has ambitions for 'game changing' welfare measures that could significantly impact sheep farming. NSA is engaged with Defra, the devolved nations and relevant All Party Parliamentary Group on these and other welfare subjects.

NSA actively supports collaboration with farming unions and regularly meets as part of the Livestock Chain Advisory Group and the Farming Roundtable, discussing legislative challenges directly with government officials, and striving for positive outcomes. NSA continues to build on strong, useful partnerships and envisages future alliances as a powerful tool for change.

Find out more

Many of these topics are updated in more detail on pages 12-13. There are also updates from the devolved nations on pages 10-11. Regular information is posted at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/our-work/policy.

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For NSA Eastern Region (Rugby/Melton) and NSA South East Region (Thame) ram sales enquiries, please contact NSA Head Office using the details on page 1.

NSA regional reports

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

NSA Northern Ireland Region joined industry partners to hold the biennial Sheep Conference in February.

On two evenings, one week apart, the virtual event saw New Zealand-based vet and farm adviser Trevor Cook give a presentation alongside local speaker Jim McAdam, who is known for his work on sustainable management of upland and peatland ecosystems. Two NSA Northern Ireland Region committee members, Dale Orr and Clement Lynch, shared insights into their farms and management systems.

Watch a recording on the Ulster Farmers Union YouTube channel.

NSA Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator

With spring having arrived, thoughts now turn to NSA Scot Sheep on Wednesday 1st June.

We look forward to seeing members there, as well as at the Royal Highland Show. Look out for updates about both events on the NSA Scottish Region website and social media pages. Also keep an eye out for a new edition of NSA Scottish Region newsletter, which will be published in early May. See page 8 for a Scot Sheep preview, and find more at www.nscotland.org.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

The NSA Northern Region Annual Members' Meeting was a hybrid event in early February.

The option of members joining online if they preferred worked well, and we are now running all our committee meetings like this, to make them more accessible considering the size of our region.

Following the official business of the ARMM we welcomed speakers including NSA's Phil Stocker and Defra's Catherine Boyd, who helped alleviate some member's anxieties surrounding ELMS.

We are hoping to hold a farm walk in May and are also in talks with British Wool to organise a tour of the processing and scouring site at Bradford in the autumn. Both will be open to all NSA Northern Region members and information will be shared soon. Watch the ARMM on the NSA YouTube channel.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Secretary

The region had a busy start to the year with a committee meeting and Annual Regional Members' Meeting taking place in the same week in late January. Both were held virtually for the second year running.

Officeholders remained unchanged, bar John Britton standing down as Treasurer – a position he has held for four years. Afterwards, TimacAGRO UK's David Newton gave a presentation on soil health and its link to animal nutrition – available to view on the NSA website.

Looking ahead we are planning several seasonal activities, starting with a farm walk and social on Thursday 19th May at Hope Farm, Wittersham, Tenterden, Kent TN30 7NP, hosted by Gemma and Ed Lovejoy. Hope Farm is a pedigree and commercial sheep unit with a considerable hay and straw business.

The rescheduled regional heats for the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition are taking place in conjunction with the Southern Shears UK annual event on Sunday 22nd May, hosted by Ed Gingell at Copford Sawmill, Dern Lane, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN22 0PN. Please spread the word.

Finally, the long-awaited and twice-postponed field days are scheduled for June. See page 7 for more.



Next Generation Shepherd heats will go ahead.



Farm walks are now beginning again.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Secretary

The demands of lambing will soon begin to ease and NSA Marches Region is looking forward to some interesting on-farm events and meetings.

With the Annual Regional Members' Meeting early in 2022 sadly moved online, the planned speakers for this event, who were set to talk about the increasingly relevant role of sheep within arable systems, will come together to enjoy a farm walk and interesting discussion. The confirmed date and location will be shared via the NSA Weekly Email Update and online.

NSA Central Region

By Alice Helliwell, Secretary

NSA Central Region welcomed a good turn out to its Annual Members' Meeting back in February, with a few new faces attending.

We had various speakers from British Wool, LLM Vets and AHDB, with brilliant feedback from those that attended. The next NSA Central Region committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 3rd May at The Travellers Rest, Brough, at 7.30pm and we welcome all members to join us. We also hope to enjoy a farm walk in Lincolnshire in early June. The dates and location for this will be confirmed soon.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

'Change can bring opportunity' was the take home message from NSA Cymru/Wales Region Annual Members' Meeting this year.

Members were told the future is bright for those willing to adapt and attendees were informed of NSA's mission to support sheep farmers through rapidly changing times, including climate change and trade deals with Australia and New Zealand. Regional Chair Kate Hovers, who was re-elected at the meeting, said one of NSA's priorities was to stress the sheep sector's importance to all.

The formal meeting was followed by talks from HCC's John Richards and NSA member Carys Jones, who farms 350 acres near Llandeilo with her parents and grandparents.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has launched a members newsletter. This is circulated via email. Please contact Helen Roberts if you did not receive it to ensure you are on the mailing list.



NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Secretary

Many thanks to those who were able to join NSA South West Region for a lively discussion on prospects for the lamb trade during the coming year, following the recent Annual Regional Members' Meeting.

We'd also like to thank speakers including NSA's Katie James, meat processing representative Mike Gooding, AHDB's Rebecca Wright, and Kivells Auctioneer Russell Steer.

This year's meeting saw a change of chairmanship. Howard Tratt stepped back after two years in the role, with Olly Matthews now taking his place. Richard Rossiter was elected as the new Vice Chair. Many thanks to Howard for his leadership during what has proved to be a strange two years. Thanks also to Peter Derryman who has stepped down from his role on the English Committee after six years.

As we move into spring we hope to welcome members to a farm walk and a NSA Next Generation Shepherd event at Gupworthy Farm, Weddon Cross, Somerset, on Saturday 21st May, with kind permission of the Webber family. Please contact Ian May for more information.



Olly Matthews.

See page 2 for details of other new regional chairs, and pages 10 and 11 for policy work by regions representing devolved nations.

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Field Days to offer practical advice



NSA South East Region is looking forward to welcoming members, friends and neighbours to a series of interactive Field Days this June, which will provide advice and plentiful opportunities for discussion about flock health and wellbeing.

The idea to run a series of Field Days, incorporating interactive demonstrations, came from the increasing challenge of running a major event in NSA South East Region. By offering a series of three identical training days on host farms across the logistically challenging region, it is hoped all regional members will easily be able to access an event close to their farm.

Each event, with support from major industry sponsors, will address and demonstrate best practice on areas of management, including flock health and welfare, efficient stock handling and data collection, parasite management and disease prevention.

Taking place on host farms, attendees will be able to watch real-time demonstrations with the

farm's flocks and take part in discussions on the most effective use of the sponsors' respective equipment and products.

Involved

"The objective of NSA South East Region Field Days is for every person attending to get actively involved, allowing them to take home at least one piece of knowledge to act upon to improve their margins on farm," says NSA South East Region Chair Yann Le Du.

"Farming profitably is a matter of fine margins and depends on planning ahead, making decisions based on good information, and then following up with effective actions. All make their own individual contribution to productivity. Cumulatively the effect of a number of these actions is frequently larger than the sum of the individual parts.

"We hope the events will inspire visitors to effectively exploit the tools they have available to them and to make several of these small potential advances work together to this same end."

Thanks to Field Day sponsors Bimeda, British Wool, Datamars Livestock, Elanco, MSD and Rappa.

Join an NSA South East Region Field Day

- **Tuesday 14th June**
Model Farm, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire, OX7 4EZ by kind permission of M.D. Hamilton Farms Ltd.
- **Wednesday 15th June**
Rothercombe Farm, Stroud, Petersfield, Hampshire, GU32 3PQ by kind permission of R.C. Snow & Son.
- **Thursday 16th June**
Springfield Farm, Waltham, Canterbury, Kent, CT4 5QB by kind permission of R.J., J.B. & I.J. Lockwood.

Find out more at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events and register to attend to claim a free lunch. Alternatively register with NSA South East Region Secretary Sarah Blake. Contact details on page 4.

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Some stock is sold as part of official breed society sales, with additional catalogue information available.

More than 7,000 head are offered at NSA sales collectively.

NSA Ram Sales 2022

NSA Wales & Border Early Ram Sale Monday 1st August – Builth Wells

NSA South West Ram Sale Wednesday 17th August – Exeter Livestock Centre

NSA Eastern Region Rugby Sale Friday 26th August – Rugby Farmers Mart

Thame Farmers Market breeding ewe sale incorporating the inaugural NSA South East Region Ram Sale Friday 2nd September – Thame Market

Melton Midlands Sheep Fair incorporating the NSA Eastern Region Ram Sale Friday 16th September – Melton Mowbray Market

NSA Wales & Border Main Ram Sale Monday 19th September – Builth Wells

See page 4 of this magazine for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.





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NSA Scot Sheep – a day out to look forward to

With spring and lambing in full swing, farmers can look forward to a well-deserved day out on Wednesday 1st June at NSA Scot Sheep 2022.

The event, due to take place at Over Finlurg, Tealing, Dundee, DD4 0GE, by kind permission of Robert and Hazel McNee, is shaping up to be a terrific event, with plenty to see and learn throughout the day.

Robert and Hazel moved to the 740-acre unit in 2011 and have built up a well-known farming enterprise, producing top pedigree and commercial cattle and sheep, while also making huge improvements to the steading and farmland.

Full programme

The prestigious event, which will be officially opened at 10am by United Auctions' former Executive Chair David Leggat MBE, includes a packed programme featuring a farm tour, seminars, demonstrations, competitions and the show and sale of ewe hogs, with a few new additions introduced by the organising committee.

More than 200 commercial, educational, sheep breed society and individual sheep breeders' trade stand entries have been accepted to provide visitors with plenty to see and do.

Special features of the day include an invitational sheepdog trial, fencing competition, sheep dressing, wool and ram MOT demonstrations, and crook making. A range of workshops and seminars will take place within three separate areas of the farm buildings, with the show and sale of ewe hogs held at the end of the day and conducted by United Auctions.

Hogg sale

There will be classes for Bluefaced Leicester, Mules, North Country Cheviot, Blackface, Suffolk and Texel, as well as any other breed sections for native, continental and crossbred ewe hogs, with both MV-accredited and non-accredited sheep eligible for entry and sale.

So why not book your ticket today? Visitor tickets are now on sale priced at £10 per person for NSA members and £20 per person for non-members. Tickets are available from the website www.scotsheep.org.uk.

For enquiries and entry forms for the various event competitions, please contact Event Organiser Euan Emslie on 07729 346135 or euanemslie053@gmail.com.

NSA Scot Sheep thanks the major event sponsor Virgin Money.

There will be plenty for visitors to see and do at NSA Scot Sheep 2022.



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Further information from the Website or Organiser
Euan Emslie - Tel: 07729 346135 Email: euanemslie053@gmail.com
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NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition

Being held the day before the main event, the younger generation are being invited to test their skills and knowledge of sheep in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition. A total prize fund of £1,015 will be on offer from the regional heat of the competition being held at Huntingfaulds Farm, Tealing, Dundee, on Tuesday 31st May.

Competitors will be expected to have the ability to carry out five of six designated tasks: prime lamb selection, sheep shearing, ATV handling, demonstrating knowledge of correct husbandry, and sheepdog handling.



NSA Sheep Event seminars set to stimulate valuable discussion

NSA seminars offer thought-provoking discussion.

Among many other features, visitors to NSA Sheep 2022 this summer will have the opportunity of joining lively and thought-provoking discussion in the event's popular seminar pavilion.

Taking place throughout the day, seminars will look at what lies ahead for the country's sheep farmers and their flocks, in line with the event's theme 'UK sheep farming: A positive future'. NSA is looking forward to welcoming an impressive line-up of industry experts and farmer-speakers to the event on Wednesday 27th July, at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "NSA is proud to attract some of the top names from British agriculture to our national event. We are confident the seminar line up will appeal to many visitors and be a focal point of the day."

As well as seminars, NSA Sheep Event 2022 will provide a platform for more than 200 trade and breed society exhibitors, plus numerous attractions including a sheepdog sale, competitions, interactive workshops and demonstrations, with the latest information available throughout the event.

Entries are open for several competitions, including a new and exciting inventions contest. Have you created a piece of equipment on farm that has eased an element of sheep husbandry, or do you have a tip to share with fellow sheep farmers that will make a job easier or more efficient? Go online to find out how to get involved.

Event entry is free for members – one entry for individual members and two for joint members. Upgrade to a joint membership online, or buy an early bird ticket for a non-member at a 20% discount.

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NSA promotes sheep farming within Welsh net-zero targets

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region has fed into the re-established Wales Agriculture Industry Climate Change Forum, which is the group charged with supporting the transition to net-zero carbon emission by 2050.

Within the forum's work to assist climate change adaptations, NSA was keen to highlight the importance of sheep and grassland management within our diverse agricultural systems. NSA will continue to be an active player, promoting the value of sheep in the environment.

As part of the Welsh Government Land Use stakeholder group, NSA Cymru/Wales Region recently gathered with other organisations to discuss the proposed Sustainable Farming Scheme, in particular the requirement for farms to undertake a sustainability review to be eligible. With soil quality

predicted to be a major factor, NSA will emphasise the importance of grassland management within the scheme.

In a recent meeting with Welsh Government, myself, NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and Regional Chair Kate Hovers focused discussions on land use change linked to climate change targets, stressing the importance of our sector continuing to produce food alongside landscape management. Farmers need to be allowed to continue managing land in a multi-functional way – delivering environmental and public goods.

Credit concern

Carbon credits and selling credits remains an area for concern, particularly where multinational companies are buying up farms aiming to offset their carbon emissions. NSA Cymru/Wales Region is pleased to hear Welsh Government is just as concerned by these actions and hopes improved methods for offsetting, such as tree planting, can be adopted.

It's encouraging to hear Welsh Government is keen to engage more around the integration of trees within the farmed landscape – something NSA has been advocating for years. As was discussed in the meeting, if every farm in Wales planted 0.5ha of trees, Welsh Government would meet its tree planting targets. This is a very different message to the ones being heard and NSA feels it should be communicated more in this way.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region encourages members to respond to the Welsh Government's search for case studies of farmers actively reducing carbon emissions. Such case studies will provide inspiration to other farmers and demonstrate positive examples for informing climate-led stakeholder groups and the public. Farms will also feature on the Carbon Copy website – a charity dedicated to highlighting best practice across the UK.

Register your interest in providing a case study by emailing hello@freshwater.co.uk.



Trees can be integrated within the farmed landscape.

More sensible climate targets set in NI

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



After high-profile work by all agricultural sectors in Northern Ireland to support a robust scientific approach to climate change, it was disappointing when the majority of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) seemingly succumbed to the green lobby and voted in favour of a Climate Change Bill to achieve net zero by 2050.

NSA Northern Ireland Region and others continued reasoning and emphasising the disastrous outcomes likely to occur if the Bill was progressed, with a turning point coming in an open meeting with Myles Allen of Oxford University's Climate Dynamics Group. Professor Allen highlighted that including livestock methane emissions was an over-compensatory action that was not required in its totality. As a result, at the second reading of the bill, a lower target (46%) for methane was included. This is still a challenge to industry, but scientists say it could be achieved.

NSA has been invited to join an industry advisory group for a DAERA-funded project looking at behavioural changes in hill and upland farmers

(BeCHUF). The project will consider drivers and cultural barriers to behaviour change to meet key environmental challenges, including land and animal management, air and water quality, targets for net-zero carbon emissions, ammonia emissions and maintaining or enhancing biodiversity. As you read this, we will already have held the first meeting to start gathering evidence to design post-Brexit policy and the role of farmer-adviser networks.

Scab

In light of the success of the Moredun-led and NSA-supported sheep-scab project in England, NSA Northern Ireland Region is pleased that the Northern Ireland Scab Working Group, under the chairmanship of vet Paul Crawford, has put in an application for funding. If successful it would work in parallel with the other devolved regions.



NI has plans for sheep scab project.

Sheep are a good fit for Scottish vision for agriculture

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



No doubt figures are on everyone's mind at this time of year. Usually in terms of what's happening in the lambing shed, and trying to figure out why there are five lambs but only one obvious mother.

But this time we are also juggling the need to take a (more) serious look at our inputs – fuel, fertiliser and feed. We all rely on at least one of them. Soaring costs never come at a good time but, after covid-19 and Brexit have taken the shine off things, many of us will have been caught off guard by this imminent threat. The nation's diminishing ability to be sustainable in food production, coupled with brand new foreign trade deals and a new era of Scottish agricultural policy, also need to be addressed.

Support

In early March, Scottish Government published its Vision for Agriculture. It set out the principles and values at the heart of frameworks set to pave the way for Scotland's agriculture support regime from 2025. Given the correct policies and support, Scottish agriculture can ensure domestic food

security is sustainable both in terms of supply and benefit to the environment.

As farmers, we can no longer think of climate change, nature recovery or food production in isolation. We can however consider the protection of rural economies, natural resources, heritage, the health and wellbeing of people, and the sustainability of local food production and consumption. Luckily for us, sheep are already part of the solution.

Pilot

That said, we still need to continue to improve the overall health and welfare of our flock. NSA Scottish Region is pleased a pilot sheep scab project has had ministerial approval, in principle. Funding is being sought by the working group, chaired by NSA Scottish Region, to implement a similar approach to that in England and Wales. NSA Scottish Region is also chairing

the Scottish Government OPA working group, which will have met for the first time by the time you read this. It aims to establish what can be done in Scotland to, at the least, curb this debilitating disease and the effects it has on the sheep industry.



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Some detail known – but most still to come on future support schemes

With Brexit, followed by the pandemic and now the Ukraine crisis, it's not surprising the Government's attention is elsewhere, side-lining key areas within the sheep sector.

But the lack of detail on future farm support, for all of agriculture, means planning for the future is difficult. England is furthest forward with sharing details with farmers of what to expect.

Sustainable Farming Incentive pilots were launched in 2021 with more than 900 participants, predominantly grassland farmers. These pilots aim for two-way learning and explore future SFI options. Farmer feedback is mixed. Participating NSA officeholders are meeting regularly with Defra and RPA, both of which are keen to listen.

Sustainable Farming Incentive schemes are due to launch later this year, focusing on soil and grassland cover and working alongside the Simplified Countryside Stewardship Scheme (SCSS) as a transitional measure.

Local Nature Recovery (LNR) is due to be piloted later in 2022, aiming for SCSS to transition across to LNR from 2025. Boundaries between SFI and LNR are not clearly determined, but they are likely to be the main schemes that will work alongside farming. Landscape Recovery, seeking to work on a larger scale and with significantly less farming involvement, is open now for a limited number of pilot applications.

The Animal Health and Welfare Pathway, aimed at raising health and welfare outcomes on livestock farms, will start this summer. This will offer basic financial incentives to encourage increased farmer-vet engagement and, initially, put the focus on exploring anthelmintic use through drench-efficacy testing. From 2023 onwards it will allow farmers to explore endemic diseases and key health issues affecting welfare and farm productivity, and it should also include incentives for higher welfare approaches. Capital grants will be available for equipment or investment focused on improving health and welfare.

NSA is heavily involved, with NSA Trustee and member of the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England Charles Sercombe taking an overall lead for sheep within the Pathway development, and NSA Chief Executive

By Nicola Noble, NSA

Phil Stocker chairing an endemic diseases working group, investigating effective approaches for the future phases of the Pathway.

Overall, this is a huge area of work NSA is intimately involved in, representing the diversity of UK sheep enterprises. One area NSA will be focusing on is the initial proposed equal budget split between SFI/LNR and LR. NSA believes more will be gained from a greater share of the budget going into SFI to support sustainable farming, and this should begin to recognise the importance of food production and food security.

Northern Ireland

Due to a lack of political stability, transitional plans have been delayed. Through NSA NI Regional Devolved Officer Edward Adamson, NSA is closely connected with all policy developments. NI Ministers are, however, talking openly about the need to support productive farming, while also recognising climate commitments and the protection of natural resources.

Scotland

Scottish Government has made it clear it intends to continue with some form of Basic Payment Scheme for the foreseeable future. As with NI, this seems to be in recognition of the importance of farming, although we can expect it will dovetail with strong climate change and environmental ambitions, with tree planting high on the agenda. NSA has a strong team working on policy in Scotland, led by NSA Regional Chair Jen Craig and supported by NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid.

Wales

Wales is due to launch a further consultation on its Agriculture Bill and Sustainable Farming Scheme later this spring and is already working with stakeholder groups for development. In common with other devolved nations, there is recognition of the value of farming, but within the boundaries of good environmental management, climate change and nature recovery. Tree planting is a key focus in Wales. NSA is, again, heavily involved in many policy topics around land management and sheep health and welfare in Wales. This work is led by NSA Cymru Devolved Officer Helen Roberts.

Environmental practices and high sheep health/welfare will attract future payments.

Priority legislative topics for NSA

Industry is still waiting for a judgement from FSA on the legal production of skin-on sheep products (smokies).

Legislative changes are required to inspect carcasses with the skin on and NSA is continuing to push on this, given that FSA was presented with a robust set of collaboratively-produced protocols in February 2020.

The consultation on journey times and welfare in transport was encompassed within the Conservative Party manifesto commitment to end live exports – something that stopped post-Brexit anyway, due to the absence of live animal border control points. Defra confirmed it intended to press forward with this commitment, even though it realised many of the other consultation proposals (journey times, temperature at point of loading, and headroom) were aspirational and not evidenced. Work is set to recommence, intending to legislate in 2023. Initial proposals for maximum and minimum temperature at loading, and headroom, are practical challenges that will seriously disrupt transport and supply chains. NSA will continue to watch these carefully.

The Kept Animals Bill is making its way through the parliamentary stages, proposing increased police powers to seize and hold dogs, collect samples for evidence, enter and search for evidence and have increased control over conviction, disqualification and destruction of dogs.

The Animal Welfare (Sentience) Bill is proposing changes to welfare measures including the banning of remote controlled electronic dog training collars, ending live exports for finishing and slaughter, new measures to improve welfare in transport and at slaughter, giving police greater powers to protect farm animals from uncontrolled dogs, and providing incentives for farmers to improve farm welfare.



Imports and exports

In addition to a large number of continuation deals, the new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Australia is signed but needs to go through Parliament and the Trade and Agriculture Commission.

The New Zealand FTA is currently at the agreement-in-principle stage. In advance of a possible FTA with the USA, access for lamb has been secured and, pending checks, NSA anticipates British lamb heading that way by summer. Inward missions from China, Japan and Korea are expected, with China long being in NSA's sights for significant opportunities.

Our domestic market remains at 65-70% of UK production, offering the most stable and reliable market outlet. NSA will continue to keep a focus on maintaining it. In contrast with many others, NSA has been making the case for UK farming diversity to be an asset rather than something to be swept away in the name of efficiency. UK mainstream domestic and export supply chains, and standard lamb, are the mainstay of our trade – but NSA also sees the value of niche markets.

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Positive start for NSA Next Generation Ambassadors

The 2022 cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors came together for the first time in February, enthusiastically visiting progressive sheep farms in Gloucestershire over three days.

Travelling from all corners of the UK, the group quickly bonded over their mutual interest and ambition for the future of the sheep industry. The visits included the sheep and arable enterprise at Cheltenham-based Guiting Manor Farms, and the mix of commercial sheep farming with rare breed conservation at Cotswold Farm Park, as well as talks from industry experts.

With the first session focusing on flock health, the group welcomed Flock Health vet Philippa Page. She joined the group on several farm visits, offering pointers for a successful lambing. Researchers from Moredun also spoke with the group via a

Zoom call, discussing the growing relevance of iceberg diseases.

Enthusiastic

"We enjoyed a great few days with our new group of ambassadors during their first delivery session," says NSA Communications Manager Katie James. "As in previous years, the programme has brought together some fantastic, enthusiastic young farmers who are already demonstrating their passion.

"Thank you to all the speakers and farmers who kindly hosted us during the three days, including Adam Henson at the Cotswold Farm Park, who did a great job sharing his optimism for the future of the industry and spoke openly with the group about how the next generation can positively promote the fantastic work of the UK sheep sector."

NSA Next Generation is funded by NSA regions and ram sales, with support from industry delivery partners.



Ambassador updates

Elsa Amiss Cornwall

"Farming on the most southerly point of mainland Britain has been busy during March, with the start of lambing and visitors starting to return to Cornwall. The arrival of lambs has created enormous excitement among the public who walk along the coast path to Lizard Point next to our farm. While bad press can get all farmers down sometimes, the joy of the public when they see lambs in the field reminds me of the genuine happiness people feel at the sight of new life in the countryside and the trust that many do indeed put in us."

Karyn McArthur Aberdeenshire

"Returning home from the first NSA Next Generation Ambassador session with a head full of brilliant new ideas and inspiration, I was greeted with waggy tails, full lambing pens and heavy snow. I was recently asked to write a blog relating to International Women's Day 2022, the theme being sex equality for a sustainable tomorrow – something that's relevant within agriculture right now. This theme encouraged many women working in the sector to get involved and it was lovely to see so many being celebrated for their hard work within the industry."

Ed Brant Lincolnshire

"There have been many ups and downs for our flock as we moved into spring and look ahead to lambing. I was disappointed by our recent scanning results. The main driver of this was a high number of empties. After discussion with our vet, this is likely to be either a disease issue or nutrition. We are going to investigate further to avoid the same problem next year. Fertility is such a key driver for flock output and profitability, and it's something I need to focus on to improve. We are now on the countdown to lambing and I am looking forward to it, but with some caution."

Find out more about what the whole group of Ambassadors are doing each month on the NSA Next Generation website www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors gathered in Gloucestershire.



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Competition offers next generation access to expert mentoring advice



Three lucky young sheep farmers will receive valuable mentoring from industry experts for free this summer, thanks to a competition launched by NSA Next Generation and the Register of Sheep advisers (RoSA).

RoSA is a network of professional advisers working within the UK sheep industry. By using the register, sheep farmers can access appropriate advice from recognised professionals who can support them to develop sustainable farming systems.

Advice

To celebrate RoSA's first anniversary in June, advisers already on the register have agreed to give each of the three lucky winners up to three hours of professional advice each.

Applications are open to anyone aged under 35 working with their own sheep, on a family farm,

employed as a shepherd or in a share farming agreement. The three winners will be personally matched with a RoSA adviser best suited to their individual circumstances, who will help encourage and direct them towards their flock aims.

The advice will be given face-to-face or via telephone or Zoom call, depending on the location and type of mentoring required.

Enter now

Application is via a simple online form asking for farm enterprise details and future flock aspirations. Winners will be advised in time to access advice this summer.

Liz Genever, independent adviser and RoSA Board member, says: "The rapid changes in input costs during the past few months are encouraging farmers to evaluate their current systems. Sheep advisers have an important role to play in helping farmers to make decisions about appropriate changes to their businesses. This opportunity will allow some young sheep farmers to access the

best advisers in the UK to help them push their businesses forward."

Enter online at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/RoSAcompetition, before 5pm on Friday 6th May.

RoSA membership

If you work in the sheep sector in any role providing advice or support to farmers, please consider RoSA membership. It provides an industry recognised professional qualification, supported with annual continual professional development, and promotes your services to producers via the RoSA website. NSA works with BASIS to support RoSA, in order to ensure sheep farmers can access the best and most appropriate advice for their businesses. *More at www.sheepadvisers.co.uk.*

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Marketing round up

Here NSA invites the levy and marketing boards to update members on efforts to sell sheep meat and wool.

Food production – sharing the facts



Across Northern Ireland, facts about farming and food production are being shared with consumers thanks to the relaunch of the LMC advertising campaign 'Good honest food'.

The campaign, which aims to address consumer concerns surrounding the environment, health, nutrition and provenance of red meat, spans TV, radio, outdoor and social media.

"The campaign is founded on independently reviewed and scientific research and has enabled us to be proactive in leading conversations with impartial facts to ensure consumers are correctly informed about lamb production in Northern Ireland," says LMC's Lauren Patterson

"Independent research has confirmed there is an extremely high level of awareness where Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assured (NIFQA) beef and lamb is concerned. Of those surveyed, 60% said they consume or purchase lamb at least once a week and there is a significant annual increase in the percentage of consumers always trying to buy NIFQA lamb. This is a reassuring display of support for local farmers, who work tirelessly to ensure world leading standards for quality and animal welfare are met."

LMC has recorded another successful round of its education programme. "Demand for LMC's cookery demonstrations surges each year," says Ms Patterson. "It is reassuring that teachers and pupils are keen to learn about the nutritional and environmental benefits that lamb and beef have to offer."

It is almost 25 years since LMC's education programme was launched and, following an exciting pilot project in primary schools at the beginning of this year, there are plans to broaden its scope.

"We know health, wellbeing and care for the environment are key drivers within the curriculum followed in all primary schools. LMC demonstrations support this and give pupils an opportunity to learn about how farm assured producers operate," she says.



There are plans to broaden the education programme.



The 'Eat balanced' TV advert promoted the goodness in red meat products.

Campaign shines spotlight on red meat



AHDB's innovative marketing campaign 'We Eat Balanced' shone a spotlight on the positive work UK farmers do as guardians of the countryside and how the red meat and dairy they produce can be part of a nutritious and sustainable diet.

The campaign, which first launched in January 2021, saw for the first time the pork, beef and lamb and dairy sectors join forces in order to tackle myths and common misconceptions about food and farming from the UK. There was a particular focus on the nutritional qualities and sustainable nature of red meat, including lamb.

The campaign was underpinned by extensive consumer research, understanding how consumers feel about red meat, and what their reasons and concerns were that was leading to them consuming less.

The £3.5 million pound campaign ran again from September 2021 to February 2022. It featured a TV advertisement set on a farm, with a grandfather explaining to his granddaughter how the UK weather helps the 'goodness' get into our food. The campaign was also supported by video-on-demand and social media advertising, full-page print adverts in national newspapers, and was supported by major supermarkets who featured on-pack stickers and on-shelf advertising.

AHDB wanted to measure how consumers felt about the farming industry and, if by following the campaign, shoppers felt differently about the red meat and dairy they consume. Early evaluation has shown the campaign has been successful in shifting consumer perceptions. More people now believe pork, beef and lamb provide a range of vitamins and minerals, can form part of a balanced diet, are naturally produced and have high production standards.

More at www.ahdb.org.uk/WeEatBalanced.

Carving out a market by keeping sight of consumers



January, called 'Veganuary' by some, is always a tough start to the year, but it was another successful one for the sector, with red meat sales up 2% year on year in the week ending 23rd January 2022.

This is, in part, as a result of QMS aligning the product with the values and beliefs of a younger target audience, 18 to 38-year-olds, with the launch of 'Make it with field cred'.

But what does 'field cred' actually mean? For the target market it means credibility, sustainability, local, high animal welfare, and trust in Scotch brands.

Much of the highly-targeted digital marketing and communications campaign has been on TikTok, another digital platform transforming brands and gaining loyalty, particularly among people aged under 30. TikTok has proved to be an exciting new platform for QMS to maximise its marketing spend – farmers' levy – to deliver a better return on investment.

There have also been challenges. At the end of 2021 retail audits picked up that Tesco had reduced its range of Scotch brands. QMS contacted the retailer to find out what the issue was and how it could be rectified.



Going forward, education, not only in schools but direct to the consumer, on the benefits of eating red meat as part of a healthy balanced diet is a priority. And QMS will also be working with the whole supply chain to ensure Scotch Lamb has strong sustainability credentials that can be communicated to the next generation.

Putting the consumer at the heart of what QMS does, from field to plate, has never been so important and this will keep red meat on the weekly shopping list.

Marketing British wool to consumers



Since its launch in July 2021, sales through the British Wool shop have been encouraging.

The website showcases an array of British wool products including knitwear, duvets, pillows, knitting yarn, insulation and even luxury dog beds.

In the run up to Christmas, the website was flooded with orders as consumers looked to buy sustainable and unique gifts for people of every age.

The site is key to British Wool's activities going forward because customers across the country are asking where they can buy British wool products that support British sheep farmers.

Since its launch the most popular items include Woolyknit's British wool sheep throw, West Yorkshire Spinners' ColourLab knitting yarn, and Peregrine's Hudson Aran Unisex Jumper.

The website is growing each month with new brands and products being gradually added. Recently added brands include Mars Knitwear, McIntosh Yarns and Romney Tweed.

"We are pleased with how the site is performing and will be working hard during 2022 to drive more traffic and sales to the site through increased consumer-targeted publicity, social media and search engine optimisation," says British Wool's Graham Clark. "The shop is an integral part of our marketing strategy and our ultimate aim is for the site to be the number-one destination for genuine British wool products in the UK."

Visit www.shop.britishwool.org.uk to find out more.

Rebuilding after covid-19



As soon as covid-19 restrictions eased, HCC resumed face-to-face promotional events, as well as partnering with retailers and foodservice providers to promote PGI Welsh Lamb.

Retail data from Kantar for 2021 showed lamb sales in Britain were still significantly up on 2019. Both supermarket chains and independent butchers have been keen to collaborate on promotions.

Among the excellent results seen was a GB-wide seasonal promotion of Welsh Lamb with a leading premium retailer. A 12-week campaign led to increased lamb sales of 12%, which equates to a return on investment for the industry of £19 for every £1 of levy spent.

This promotion and others helped to ensure a good end to 2021 for lamb, with Christmas sales up on the already strong year of 2020.

Heading into 2022, the outlook for retail is less certain. Consumers are returning to pre-covid-19 shopping patterns, and the increasing cost of living could see them turning to cheaper proteins.

HCC's strategy has been to target social media content – including new recipes by influencers with large followings – at groups who have rediscovered a love of cooking from scratch during lockdown, such as families with children.



HCC's show stand.

Alongside this, support has been provided to the recovering foodservice sector to promote Welsh Lamb in hotels and restaurants through a new toolkit with information on lamb's sustainability and provenance, as well as a presence at trade events.

As in-person events resume, HCC has activity planned at many more shows and food festivals during the spring and early summer.



New brands are being added to website.

Feeding quality forage is a priority.

Successful small flock an important part of local community

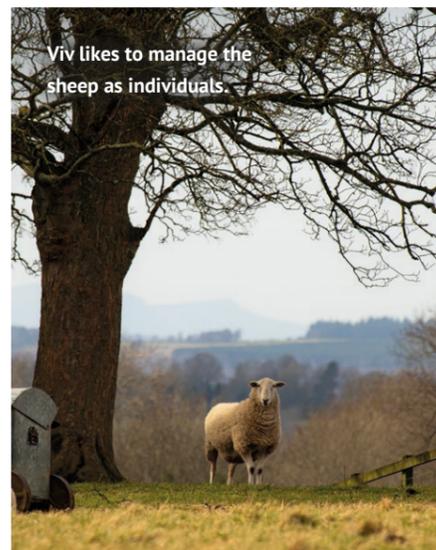
By Katie James, NSA

Approaching the management of her small flock in the same way she would a large commercial enterprise is ensuring new NSA Northern Region Chair Viv Lewis is producing stock that many would be proud of on her small Eden Valley-based farm.

With help from her partner Richard, Viv juggles full-time work with running their 25-ewe breeding flock at Ashbank Farm, Unthank, Cumbria.

"I'd call myself a part-time sheep farmer, but we have the same desire as many larger producers to run the flock successfully and profitably," says Viv.

With a varied background including dairy farming and 20 years of development work overseas, Viv began to focus on sheep farming several years



Viv likes to manage the sheep as individuals.

ago when she took on the role of Secretary of the Federation of Cumbria Commoners. Her own small flock was set up about six years ago with a foundation of North Country Mules, run on the farm's 12 acres (5ha) and an additional six acres (2.5ha) of rented ground.

Using a Suffolk tup on Viv's original Mule flock produced a cross ewe as a good base for efficient meat production. But Viv is now making some breeding changes to move the flock in a direction more suited to the land and her regenerative farming aims.

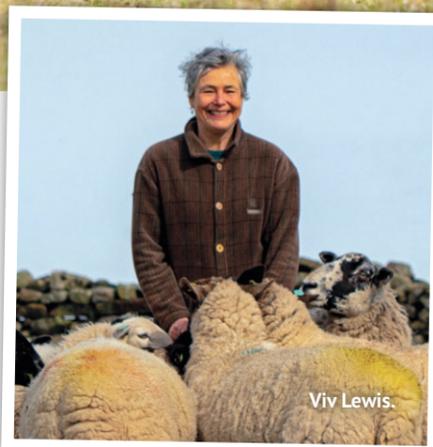
Foundation

Viv explains: "The Mules and Mule Suffolk crosses gave us a good starting point. We have also used an Easycare previously. But this year we have tried a Lleyt tup, which we are sharing with a neighbouring farmer. I'm interested in producing a slightly lighter ewe that will have improved milk production from grazed grass alone.

"One of our main focuses is to run a completely grass-based, low-input system. So we are aiming to breed replacement stock that will help us to achieve that."

Alongside the Mules, Viv runs a small number of pure Hebridean ewes. The combination of smaller sheep numbers and Viv's dairy background means she likes to approach the sheep as individuals when making decision on issues such as breeding and health treatments. She also strictly follows two principles to improve performance.

Viv says: "I have two maxims I base our sheep production on. The first is 'test, don't guess'. We are lucky to have good local vets who we work with through a sheep flock health group. We carry out faecal egg sampling and post mortems,



Viv Lewis.

if needed, and have completed screening blood tests before for MV.

"Although we have a small sheep flock, we want to do the best we can by the sheep. Being a smallholder shouldn't mean you don't approach flock management in the same way a commercial farmer would."

Her second maxim is to record as much data as possible. As Viv says, 'you can't manage what you don't measure'.

"As a dairy farmer I was used to recording data, so documenting our key performance indicators, such as lamb birth weight and growth rates – we aim for an minimum average of 250g/day – is second nature to me," she says.

Outdoors

Lambing at Ashbank Farm starts outdoors in April, coinciding with grass growth and extended day length, which means more opportunity to work with the flock while also fulfilling other work commitments.

Ewes are fed a little concentrate feed and fodder beet at lambing, but feeding quality forage and managing grassland carefully is Viv's priority, to ensure they are kept in good condition and milking well.

"We cut our hay as early as possible to capture the best digestibility and energy values. All forage is also analysed before feeding," she adds.

Grazing at the farm is all permanent pasture but, through managing this with mob grazing, Viv aims to increase the number of grass and herb species available to the sheep. She explains: "We divide our fields into one-acre paddocks with electric fencing and then move stock every two to three days. This is followed by a rest period of 30 to 40 days before the sheep return. But the length of time left ungrazed is influenced by grass growth, so it varies from season to season."

Network

Viv is part of a farmer network called the Innovative Farmers group, which runs different field labs and complete a variety of trials.

"In our area we are looking at diverse sward establishment," she says. "For the trial we have set up transects in our fields, completed soil sampling, recorded what treatments have been put on the land, and we have learnt how to identify the different species. Through this we are aiming to increase species diversity in the sward, creating a herbal ley, but through grazing management and not by reseeding.

"We are seeing the results, particularly on fields that were previously quite species poor. It's great to have clover returning, as well as yarrow and plantain. It's a slow process, but the changes for the better can be seen."

As well as grassland regeneration, Viv is keen to improve hedgerows on the farm. She says:

"Four years ago we started establishing new hedges. Everywhere we have a wire fence I would ultimately like to see a hedge. Hedges will, of course, help with biodiversity but will also offer our sheep more protection from a cold easterly wind

that can affect us in this area during the spring called the 'helm'. It can affect the grass dramatically, so we hope to be able to protect against this."

Viv feels confident these improvements to the farming environment will fit with future ELMS requirements, partly through knowledge acquired through managing a Defra Test & Trial with the Foundation for Common Land. She is also part of the co-design group for the Moorland and Rough Grazing Sustainable farming Incentive (SFI) – the only scheme currently likely to be accessible for farmers in the uplands.

"Sitting on this group can be frustrating," says Viv. "Much of the framework is seemingly decided before our industry meetings take place, but it's important we have a presence at these to try and make practical tweaks to the plans that will hopefully benefit farmers in some way.

"The move towards more environmentally-based support schemes is, I believe, right. But not at the expense of production. I am all for the idea of 'land sharing'. We farm alongside nature and should be supported to do so in the future."

Environment

Viv's enthusiasm for creating a nature-friendly farm is matched by her drive to shorten supply chains. As a way of doing this, she enjoys selling produce, both lamb and vegetables, another interest of hers, direct to local customers.

"Most lambs are sold as stores," she says. "For the last two years we sold them all to a private buyer and we hope we will be able to do the same this year. But we do finish the smaller lambs and Hebrideans to sell as hoggets. We believe hoggets have excellent flavour."

The lamb is sold to local people and to friends further afield. "We sell individual items and not just whole or half lambs. Our market demands

this and we would restrict it if we were to only sell in bigger quantities," she adds.

With the recent good lamb price some may argue direct sales are not currently profitable, but Viv believes it is still worth the effort. "We do enjoy the good feedback received and I don't want to let regular customers, who value local food, down by stopping. We are still making approximately an additional £30 per lamb compared to selling liveweight, so there is a small profit to be made."

Committee

In addition to being part of several other local groups, Viv became involved with NSA Northern Region about four years ago. "Having visited NSA North Sheep I was encouraged to go along to committee meetings, which I found really interesting. I never thought I would become Chair, but I'm honoured to be elected to the role," she says.

Viv jokes that as a small sheep farmer she is an 'imposter' among the many members who have farmed large sheep enterprises for generations. But she says everyone has been welcoming and encouraged her. "NSA really is for everyone with an interest in sheep, whether small or large scale. I have gained so much from my involvement with the region and would encourage more members to get involved, just as I have."

Farm facts

- Farming 12 acres (5ha) of owned ground, plus six acres (2.5ha) of rented grazing, comprising diverse-species permanent pasture.
- Flock of 25 breeding ewes lambed outdoors in April, to co-incide with grass growth.
- Takes a 'test, don't guess' approach to flock health, and aims to record as much data as possible – 'you can't manage what you don't measure'.
- Past experience in dairying and development work overseas, and Viv is now Chair of NSA Northern Region.
- Lambs sold direct to local customers. Viv is passionate about consumer engagement and raising the profile of sheep farming.

“Being a smallholder shouldn't mean you don't approach flock management in the same way a commercial farmer would.”
Viv Lewis

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Healthcare easier to access through local farming support charity

By Katie James, NSA

Local healthcare charities are increasingly becoming an important lifeline for rural communities, where access to more traditional methods of help and advice may be more difficult.

One such charity supporting farmers and others in the rural community is Field Nurse, set up in 2016 by a group of people in Lancashire to help reduce the identified risks of physical and mental health of those living in rural areas.

With several of the initial volunteers to Field Nurse working in the rural and sometimes isolated community themselves, the need to provide support for farmers in particular was easily recognised and understood.

"Farmers are well known for their stoicism," says Field Nurse Trustee Richard Schofield. "Many often feel that illness is something you just get on with, taking second place to running and keeping the farm going. Often a lack of time to go to visit a GP is the major stumbling block, meaning the importance of it is ignored."

Support

Field Nurse aims to provide support to the rural community, signposting people to appropriate services. Sessions are delivered at local auction marts, including Brock, Clitheroe, Craven, Skipton and Gisburn. "Farmers can be reluctant to access healthcare, but Field Nurse delivers sessions in a familiar surrounding and also means they don't have to take time away from the farm and their busy lives on a separate occasion," adds Mr Schofield.

The sessions are manned by registered nurses who promote physical health through checks such as blood pressure tests and weight management. If a problem is identified then people are signposted to the most appropriate service for help.

The charity has recently received grant funding from the Prince's Countryside Trust Fund to continue to expand its service from this spring.

One of the key issues Field Nurse aims to support is mental wellbeing among the rural community.

"Farming is a stressful business with long hours worked in isolated communities. This is exacerbated by falling incomes and the stress of change, such as the removal of BPS. A chat with the friendly face of the Field Nurse can be the first step in getting help. We also encourage farmers to make use of the excellent provision of support provided by charities such as RABI and FCN," says Mr Schofield.

The first conversation is often the hardest - but is the important first step in getting help. If you are struggling, speak to a friend, family member, field nurse or GP. Find services for all parts of the UK at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/farminghelp.



The charity offers health advice at convenient locations.

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FAR Advisers rely on consistent information from nutritional analysis of feed materials including silage throughout the feeding season.

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Tips for lambing time

- Healthy diet. Meals are often grabbed on the run during lambing, when it can be difficult to find time to sit down and eat. Try not to skip meals and carry some healthy snacks with you.
- Sleep. Although it can be difficult to achieve, as sheep rarely oblige by only lambing in daylight hours, the optimum sleep time to aim for is eight hours per night.
- Drinking. Ensure alcohol consumption is within the recommended limits. If you need support or advice it can be found at www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support.
- Avoid smoking. Stopping smoking can have a huge impact on improving your health. Support can be found at www.quitsquad.nhs.uk.

Splitting carcasses – is there a better way?

Dentition checks are time consuming.

By Rebecca Ironmonger & Hannah Leese, Roythornes 

Currently all carcasses from sheep more than 12 months old must be split in half and the spinal cord, which contains specified risk material, removed at the slaughterhouse or approved cutting plant.

A Food Standards Agency (FSA) official vet must confirm all spinal cord material has been removed prior to applying the health mark, and this must be via splitting rather than suction or other methods used overseas.

These regulations were introduced in response to the BSE crisis in cattle and as part of a package of measures in an attempt restore public confidence in British meat. But, despite more than 10 million tests, a naturally occurring case of BSE in sheep has never been identified anywhere in the world.

Gold plating

With the evidence suggesting there is no BSE risk to public health by sheep carcass spinal cords from animals of any age, we believe the requirement for splitting carcasses is a gold plating of European law by UK legislators.

In addition, a split carcass is far less saleable than a whole sheep carcass, so these national rules put UK producers to a commercial disadvantage.

Applying the rules to sheep more than 12 months old is challenging, as dates of individual sheep are unknown. An entire batch of new lambs

could be born during a two to three-month period, with the oldest lambs being up to three months old by the time the youngest in a flock is born.

For the regulations to work in practice, sheep need to be aged in a way that accurately determines whether a sheep is more than 12 months old. The method used is dentition checks. This is not fool-proof, with some sheep developing adult teeth earlier and others later. Mousing every individual sheep during the relevant period is a huge burden on the industry.

Dentition

It was understood there would be a cut-off date introduced – a date prior to which all lambs slaughtered would be assumed to be less than 12 months of age. This would avoid the need for dentition checks, and the splitting of some lamb carcasses. The Government has gone back on its promise to introduce this method of aging sheep, despite confirmation from the UK's trading partners that it was a suitable way forward.

The blockage appears to be the FSA applying a zero-risk approach. This is despite several years of talk of a risk-based approach to enforcement and regulation being highlighted as a key aim in its latest five-year plan. The entrenched position of UK regulators in enforcing unnecessary regulations is something many hoped would change as a result of Brexit.

We believe many government agencies, such as FSA, find it impossible to bring about such changes. Against a backdrop of zero risk to

public health, and a £24m price tag for industry, it is no wonder farmers are losing faith in the Government's ability to drive through a new regulatory approach.

NSA viewpoint

Working with farming unions, the meat processing sector and Livestock Auctioneers Association, NSA has been calling for a review of the TSE rules since 2014.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "After years battling to change an uncertain, time consuming and costly method of aging sheep prior to slaughter, it's frustrating we are spending a huge amount of time on policy topics that are a priority for Government yet we struggle to get the topics that are important to us addresses. Switching to a calendar cut-off date is NSA's preferred option."

"This would provide certainty, whereas tooth eruption can happen with little notice and would remove the time-consuming need to 'mouth' lambs. NSA believes this would still provide confidence in domestic and export supply chains, and we will continue to push for a review despite already having spent eight years negotiating this."



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Ukraine crisis focuses attention on meeting future challenges

The consequences of a European war in the historic breadbasket of Ukraine are likely to echo across the world for years.

Russia is intent on the destruction of democracy and civil society as it flattens European cities. The shelling of Zaporizhzhia's nuclear plant will reopen many sheep farmers' memories of Chernobyl.

With Ukraine's crops not yet and possibly not to be sown this year, railways broken, ports wrecked, shipping avoiding the Black Sea for both countries' stocks and world stocks tight, the consequences for grain and vegetable oil markets are stark. Grain prices reach unknown highs, unprecedented gas prices keep fertiliser both precious and scarce, and oil moves towards its previous peak, increasing political risk across the globe.

Fertiliser

The issue for many UK sheep farmers is how to ensure grass growth for winter feed when nitrogen fertiliser could be £700/t, if it's even obtainable. But arable farmers may now be more interested in sheep manuring their crops. How much can farmers achieve with less fertiliser, at least this year? What can taking more grass, sowing mixed pastures or managing grazing differently really achieve?

As with other crises, being forced to find solutions can produce changes that, with hindsight, look obvious. Answers may also provide the added bonus of tackling nutrient management challenges for water and air quality issues. Where relevant, England's slurry storage

grant scheme this autumn will be important for continuing businesses.

All this forces a focus on the farm as a business – and new schemes being introduced as BPS is removed/reshaped should be viewed on their merits as options, not as salvation.

England has begun phasing out BPS, with funding redeployed largely to buy environmental management agreements. Much of it is likely to be focused on habitat change, woodland creation and peatland restoration in relatively limited areas. The money also funds productivity grants and the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway. The sense of change may be accelerated by 2024's decoupling of BPS from land and entitlements will be useless after May 2023.

Wales will see legislation this summer for the replacement of BPS with the Sustainable Farming Scheme, starting from 2025.

Scotland plans to focus explicitly on climate change and biodiversity, in line with legislation due next year. At least half of BPS will be heavily conditional on environmental management, while other schemes will need funding from the same money.

Northern Ireland has just consulted on a range of potential policies with agri-environment agreements to become its central plank. That now waits on May's elections.

Time for transition to be sensibly managed is critical in all areas, but this is not time to be wasted. We've know that change has been on the cards for several years, and pressures from climate change continue to grow.

Future-focused businesses will see opportunities here, but others may be more conscious of threat.

By Jeremy Moody, CAAV 

Taking advice and getting an outside view will help gain perspective – one reason why CAAV applauds NSA on helping establish the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA). Ultimately, advice should be an investment and not a cost.

Benchmarking tools are one way to take a closer look at business, posing questions and setting challenges for review. Joining a discussion or business-support group, or taking advantage of the free Defra-sponsored Future Farm Resilience programme, can also help.

Efficiency

Key questions for some businesses may not only be about management efficiency and harnessing new technologies, but also range from whether they are producing what the market demands through to options for improved animal efficiency to increase profitability.

Some will choose to withdraw from farming, creating opportunities for others and prospects for rental income. England's Lump Sum Exit Scheme, opening in April, may prompt some discussion and change.

Farming needs innovation and resilience, and the ability to react proactively to challenges. This ensures businesses are better equipped to handle events and influences from abroad.

For domestic agriculture to be an anchor for food security, it has to be competitive, efficient and profitable. Food security is not a good argument for the status quo. Instead, we have to rise to meet future challenges with sound businesses that have strong environmental credentials and can answer the world's growing uncertainty.

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Options to help reduce ewe feeding costs at lambing



Producing high-protein silage and feeding it pre-lambing in combination with soya has helped one Flintshire-based flock to reduce feed costs significantly.

Father-and-son team David and Mathew Roberts have expanded their flock from 1,200 ewes in 2019 and now run 1,400 ewes at Llanasa. The pair sought technical advice through Farming Connect to improve business performance and efficiency. The approach, which included improving grassland and making changes to ewe nutrition, has led to some positive outcomes. Not least were the results of changes to the feeding regime during the lambing period.

Figures gathered to quantify the impact of technical advice show that during 2020's lambing period feed use decreased by 10.74kg/ewe compared to the previous year, saving £2.57/ewe. The savings on purchased feed were achieved through producing high quality silage from reseeded grassland, which incorporates high sugar grasses and red clover, as well as good nutritional advice. Big bale silage, which is fed ad lib, analysed at 11.2MJ/kgDM, 14.9% crude protein, 41.4% dry matter, with a fermentable energy of 9MJ/kgDM. Ewes had previously been fed concentrates pre-lambing, but the Roberts switched to a high-protein soya in 2020. In 2021 they made further changes and began feeding sugar beet pellets and protected rapeseed meal.

Analysis

Independent sheep consultant Kate Phillips says: "Making high quality silage has the potential to significantly reduce purchased feed costs for pregnant ewes, if care is taken to balance silage with supplements that complement its analysis. That could mean additional fermentable energy, rumen-degradable protein or digestible undegradable protein.

"High quality silage can take ewes up close to lambing with no supplements at all other



than minerals, with additional concentrates often only needed during the final three weeks of pregnancy."

Changes were also made to the number of weeks ewes received supplementary feed. It was previously seven weeks ahead of lambing, but in 2021 twin-bearing ewes were fed for three weeks and singles for just one week. This was possible as a result of improvements made to silage quality, notably producing a forage with high energy and protein content. To achieve this quality, a number of fields were reseeded during the past five years with five to six-year cutting and grazing seed mixes.

The Roberts were inspired to implement change after listening to an independent consultant giving advice on improving silage quality and feeding it with soya pre-lambing at a Farming Connect event.

Their business, which also produces beef, is now applying less fertiliser but growing more better-quality grass, for both silage and for grazing.

The leys are grazed hard and produce two cuts of silage. This lambing season silage is being fed ad lib and ewes are eating 3.5-6.5kg/day, depending on quality. Silage made in 2021 has analysed well, at 10.7-1.7MJ/kgDM proteins of up to 18% on the red clover samples.

To supplement it, ewes carrying twins are fed 0.15-0.35kg of a blend of sugar beet pellets and protected rape. Singles were housed three

weeks prior to lambing with ample bedding. Silage intakes were rationed to prevent lambing complications through overfeeding.

Protein

Next year's ration will include silage made from a September 2021-sown two to three-year cutting ley incorporating persistent red clover varieties for extra protein content. The aim is to improve quality, further reducing dependence on artificial fertiliser.

The Roberts also see fodder beet as a potential solution to further reduce their flock's winter-feed requirements. They grew exceptional crops in 2020 and 2021, but poor weather saw them purchase additional feed prior to lambing 2021 to compensate for being unable to graze the fodder beet.

It has been a period of continual improvement for the pair with management changes strengthened by input from Farming Connect services. Mathew is a part of a Farming Connect discussion group and has attended Farming Connect events. The farm has received funding through Farming Connect's advisory service and it is supported in its role as a focus site.

Farming Connect's Non Williams says: "The next steps will be to calculate the quantity of feed purchased in 2022, and to monitor the performance of September 2021's cutting ley – quantifying fertiliser use and actual savings made."



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Multi-species leys are a good option when reseeding.

Avoid neglecting grassland when input prices are high

Although high fertiliser and fuel prices may be scary to think about, all is not lost when it comes to managing grassland this spring.

Wynnstay's Colin Jones believes there are a range of options available when it comes to supplying grass with the right nutrition. He says: "Homegrown forage remains the cheapest feed available, and this must be kept front of mind when making decisions to see the full value of investment in grassland."

Knowing where to start may seem daunting, but there are a few steps to follow to simplify the process. The first is knowing your soils, he says.

Soil fertility is key to healthy grassland and its ability to utilise nutrients applied. "If you haven't already done so, soil test your grassland leys so you know what the current nutrient status is,"

says Mr Jones. "Look at nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus levels, along with micro-nutrients and pH. For sheep, deficiencies in micro-nutrients, such as magnesium and selenium, can result in metabolic issues in ewes and lambs."

While taking the soil sample, Mr Jones urges farmers to grab a spade and start digging to review the soil infrastructure, as this tells a lot about its productivity. "Does it look compacted? What does the current root network look like? Are you able to count the worm population?" he asks.

"This information will help inform decisions about the soil nutrition programme, including what needs to be applied to alleviate any nutrient deficiencies. Don't forget to include manure applications in your programmes – these will be invaluable this season."

Applications

He adds that farmers may find that applications can be reduced in the spring, as the soil already has enough N, P or K, but it's important to work with your agronomist on this.

The results also determine if wider soil management techniques are required, such as to deal with compaction issues, or if pH needs adjusting.

The second step is to consider clover options. Many sheep farmers are looking to clover as an additional source of nitrogen for grassland. Clover inclusion can help reduce fertiliser applications, with white and red clover capable of fixing 150-250kgN/ha/year.

"And there is still time to stitch-in clover-rich mixes. On grazing ground, I would recommend a white clover blend of small, medium and large-leaf clovers, which can be stitched in at a rate of 1.5-2kg/acre," says Mr Jones.

Red clover mixes are worth considering on silage ground and offer good aftermath grazing for ewes and lambs. But flocks should be introduced to red clover slowly and ewes should not be grazed on swards with moderate-to-high levels of red clover from six weeks either side of tugging.

Performance

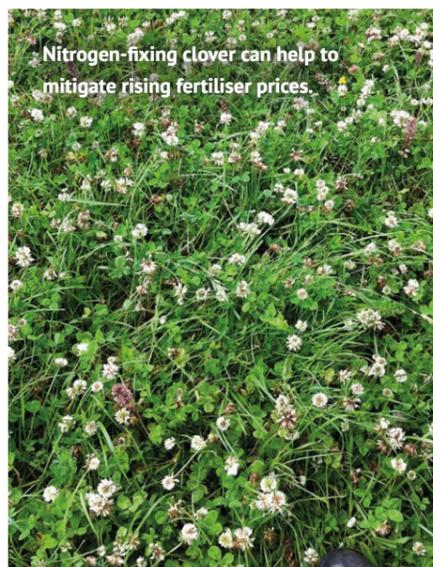
Mr Jones also urges farmers to avoid scrimping on inputs, where they're needed. "Cutting back on fertiliser applications to save money may be tempting but, unless managed correctly, this will impact grass quality and yield and, in turn, flock performance," he says.

"Modern perennial grasses require nitrogen, so not applying any artificial fertiliser should not be an option. Consider the bigger picture and look at what other sources you are using and the reserves available, as noted from the soil testing, and then calculate where some cut-backs may be possible."

He also argues in favour of reseeding - saying, despite cost increases, farmers will still see a return on investment. Reseeding rejuvenates less productive leys and ensures flocks have home-grown feed in front of them for weaning, finishing and flushing, looking ahead to next season.

"I would recommend reseeding 10-15% of grassland each year to keep leys productive," he says. "When a sward ages, production declines and the grass species are replaced with native weed grasses. If more than 40% of non-sown species are in the sward, it's time to review."

"There are plenty of options to consider, and the addition of chicory and plantain to the mixes create multi-species leys. The key is making decisions based on what best suits your system."



Nitrogen-fixing clover can help to mitigate rising fertiliser prices.

Drench efficacy tests – a useful indicator if used well

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



Defra recently announced it would fund an annual veterinary review for English flocks as part of the Animal Health and Welfare Pathway.

From April 2022 this will include funding for a drench efficacy test, which will allow sheep farmers to look at how effective the anthelmintic they use is at controlling worms in their flocks.

For farmers in England accessing the funding, or any producer wanting to explore this option, what is to be gained from testing? Effective anthelmintic treatments improve sheep performance. Tests carried out correctly provide an understanding of how an anthelmintic is performing, giving an early indication of falling efficacy. This allows farmers to stay in control and implement changes earlier.

For sheep farmers naive to testing, the Defra scheme provides a good entry point towards understanding their farm situation. For those already testing, it is a free additional test that expands knowledge of efficacy throughout the year.

Resistance

A drench-efficacy test does exactly what it says. It assesses how effective a drench has been in the treated sheep. At the time of treatment and then again a set number of days after treatment, faecal samples are taken for a faecal egg count (FEC). If the result shows the egg count has been reduced by less than 90%, it indicates the treatment was not fully effective and may suggest resistance. For example, where the pre-treatment count was 500 eggs per gram (epg) farmers should be looking

for a post treatment count of less than 50 epg to demonstrate effective treatment. But this test is not definitive for resistance. When carried out correctly it gives a good indication of whether a wormer group is working effectively at that time.

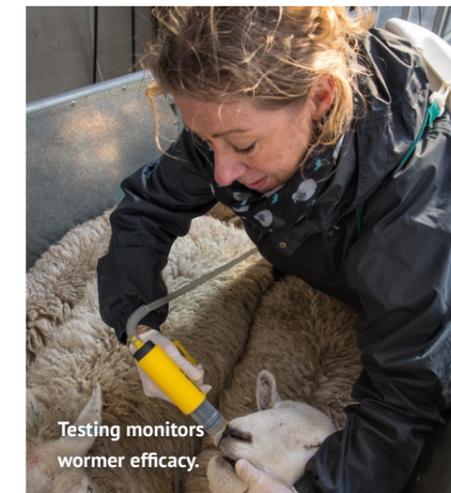
Interpreting results is critical and while this test is only a start, the outcome provides farmers with a valuable opportunity to talk about product choices, management options to reduce dependency, and/or target treatments with help of a vet or adviser.

If the result come back at less than 90% effective, and resistance is suspected, farmers need to consider how, or if, they are going to use that product in the future. There is no need to assume the wormer can no longer be used. For most farms a close look at the results, and testing at different times of year, will show the older three groups can still be used at specified times.

Snapshot

One test on one wormer will only give you information on that class of wormer and, because the main roundworm species affecting sheep change during the seasons, it is only a snapshot of efficacy for the predominant species at the time the test was done. For example, a white wormer may work effectively in the spring against nematodirus but, in summer, as the other roundworm species dominate, it may be less effective. Similarly a test carried out in early summer may have a different result to one carried out in autumn.

The single test as part of the Pathway is only an entry point on a journey towards understanding the efficacy of different anthelmintic groups



Testing monitors wormer efficacy.

at specific times. More testing is essential, but remember the benefits of detecting suspected resistance early. It will not only improve lamb performance by avoiding ineffective wormers, but farmers should be able to continue using some groups selectively, helping to future-proof worm control. This is beneficial to both flocks and wallets.

While wormers are important for worm control, they are only one of the tools available. Annual reviews should also look at how flocks can reduce their reliance on medicines. These include changes to grazing management, targeted rather than blanket treatments, looking at adopting improved genetics, and understanding the powerful effect of nutrition and body condition on the sheep's ability to withstand a worm challenge.

Find the 'Know your anthelmintics' guide at www.scops.org.uk.

Grazing management can also help to control parasites.



Promising results from multi-species swards project

By Jillian Hoy, AgriSearch **AgriSearch**
Driving Excellence & Innovation

After the first year of an AgriSearch-led European Innovation Partnership project, six Northern Ireland-based beef and sheep farms, all with previous participation in mixed-species sward research trials, share their experiences second time round.

The difference this time, they were able to choose the species mix and establishment technique relevant to their farming system.

Sheep farmers Roger and Hilary Bell, from Kells in County Antrim, chose a standard six-species mix, comprising perennial ryegrass, timothy, chicory, plantain, and red and white clover. The stale seed bed method ensured successful establishment, involving standard preparation of the seed bed, before leaving it to allow weed seed germination and removal before sowing the mixed-species sward mix. Given poor ground conditions and weather, work started in April 2021 with drilling at the end of July. It wasn't a quick process but critical for weed control because they cannot be sprayed out of an established multi-species sward.

Palatability

In contrast, Crosby Cleland runs 850 ewes on 183 acres (74ha) at Saintfield, County Down. He established by direct drilling and chose a species mix of ryegrass, timothy, chicory, plantain, white clover, red clover, tall fescue and cocksfoot. Soil type (clay), climate, sheep palatability, grass heading time and grazing versus silage were key decision factors. Spring grass availability is crucial and, with drought previously affecting establishment, drilling was left until August. The existing sward was tightly grazed with sheep before spraying off and the mix was direct drilled using criss-cross runs. The new ley was rolled twice before allowing subsequent sheep grazing.

Dale Orr, an organic sheep farmer based at Strangford in County Down, selected a different species mix, removing perennial ryegrass entirely. Aiming to combat the three dry spring/summers he's faced in the past four years, the mix was sown in April 2021. The more standard plough, harrow, roll, sow, roll establishment technique was used, but a hybrid brassica crop was grown to maintain soil moisture during the establishment period and to provide an extra feed source for the first grazers.



Project participants discuss the benefits of MSS.

Despite the differences in species mix and establishment technique across the farms, each sward established well. Decisions based on individual farm conditions and expectations were key to success.

Performance

With swards now well established the six farms shift their attention to monitoring sward management and animal performance. Fertiliser use and sward yield/composition will be recorded, as well as livestock performance indicators such as daily liveweight gain. Anthelmintic properties of grazing multi-species swards compared to ryegrass alone will also be investigated.

As part of the project, farmers took part in a

two-day study tour to Ireland in October 2021. A visit to the Heartland Project at Dowth, County Meath, highlighted promising preliminary data. Results have revealed reduced fertiliser use and production improvements such as lambs reared on multi-species swards exclusively from birth having fewer days to slaughter. These are two important areas that can help reduce carbon emissions.

Participating farmers have been impressed with sward performance on their farms in relation to research elsewhere in Ireland and are looking forward to the second year of this project.

The most recent farmer group webinar is available to view on AgriSearch's YouTube channel at youtube.com/channel/UCcj4v8CZR5sl_9uov-3wqRA.

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Lambs reared on Ewe-reka are clean from 'nose to tail'

An award-winning dairy sheep enterprise has recorded a mortality rate of just 2.22% after rearing its 900 lambs on a milk replacer made from ewes' milk.

Simon Stott, the 2011 Farmers Weekly Sheep Farmer of the Year, and his father, John, have been milking dairy sheep at Laund Farm in the Forest of Bowland, Lancashire, for 22 years. They run a flock of 600 Friesland, Lacaune and Friesland x Lacaune dairy sheep; they also produce lamb from 1,200 commercial ewes.

Liquid milk and home-produced cheeses are sold through their own online sale business, The Sheep Milk Company UK, and two varieties of their cheese is supplied to Morrisons and Sainsbury's.

The team at Laund Farm includes two full time workers and one part time member of staff.

High yielding dairy sheep replacements are tupped to a pure Friesland or Lacaune while low yielders are tupped to a Texel.

Scanning percentage runs at around 200%, resulting in 900 lambs reared.

The dairy flock lambs from January 1st to February 14th following three, 14-17 day tupping cycles.

Lambs are born indoors and remain with the ewe for 24 hours to receive colostrum to ensure adequate passive transfer of antibodies.

If it appears that lambs have not had colostrum they receive this through a stomach tube or teat bottle.

Lambs born to the dairy ewes weigh an average of 5kg.

They are scratched at birth for orf and are transferred to six training pens to ensure they have learnt to suckle from the teat before they are moved to larger pens of 80 lambs.

They are reared on Ewe-reka milk replacer supplied through Coars Ltd, Garstang, and Selina Field, Bonanza Calf Nutrition's UK Sales Manager.

It is fed via an Ad-Lib Forster Technic Eco Feeder machine, with eight lambs allocated to each teat.

The replacer is mixed to a concentration of 200g powder made up to 1 litre with water.

Once lambs have been on the feeder for around 7-10 days, milk temperature is reduced from 39°C to around 20°C; Simon has had this policy in place for several years to ensure lambs don't gorge on milk.

Lambs are also introduced to l'Anson's molassed flaked lamb ration, barley straw and ad-lib fresh water before they are transitioned fully to a 16% crude protein pellet by six weeks of age.

Simon reports that feeding Ewe-reka milk replacer has resulted in lambs consuming less compared to powders he previously used, and yet mortalities and morbidity are impressively low – of the 900 lambs reared mortality was just 2.22%.

Ewe-reka!



Total Ewe-reka milk replacer consumed to weaning was calculated at 12.5kg per lamb.

Lambs wean promptly too and their high level of performance is maintained.

Lambs are also treated with Ovivac for pneumonia at around four and a half weeks of age before they are weaned at five weeks of age, when they weigh around 16-17kg.

Males are fattened to 44kg liveweight and sold to Dunbia, achieving a kill out percentage of 50% at 13-14 weeks of age.

When Simon used other milk replacers, lambs had to be weaned at five weeks of age to limit lambs lost to bloat whereas this season, at five weeks, lambs were thriving and ready to be weaned.

There is little or no watery mouth in the flock.

Simon has used different milk replacers in the past but since switching to Ewe-reka he has noticed that there is no build-up of milk replacer residue on the machine feeder, making it much easier to clean and maintain the machine.

Selina says the absence of build-up keeps bacteria multiplication to a minimum, and this means less digestive upsets.

"We use a fixed formulation, meaning every batch of Ewe-reka produced is consistent," she says.

"Ewe-reka is fully instant and can be mixed easily, either warm or cold, meaning less build up on machines."

The health of the Stotts' lambs is evident from their shiny fleeces, a result of the inclusion of ewe milk at a minimum of 20% in Ewe-reka together with a blend of four fats.

"This makes it highly digestible for the lamb," says Selina.

Lambs are clean from nose to tail. "They don't have the dirty, crusty milk scab that you see on the noses of lambs in many replacement lamb feeding systems," Selina adds.

Incidence of scour or bloat is negligible, due to Ewe-reka's formulation and use of ewe's milk.



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Lush grazing can result in production diseases.

Keep a close look out for production diseases at grazing



By James Crilly, ECSRHM

There's nothing like lush pastures to help support lactating ewes with lambs at foot. But can there be too much of a good thing?

Grass staggers (hypomagnesaemia) is usually seen in lactating ewes grazing spring grass, although it can occur in ewes in late pregnancy, and those on other diets. Body stores of magnesium are limited, so when demand for it increases it must be balanced from dietary intake. Older ewes with high milk production are most at risk, with stressful events triggering onset.

Any disruption or provision of feeds with low magnesium levels or availability, such as lush spring grass, particularly if fertiliser has recently been applied, can result in low blood magnesium levels. Affected animals have a stiff and jerky gait and facial tremors, and are hyperresponsive. If untreated, this will progress to fitting and death.

Levels

Magnesium levels can be measured from blood samples (live animals) or the fluid inside the eye (post mortem). There is limited time to react, so if you are unsure it is advisable to treat. A solution containing magnesium, calcium

and dextrose, should be warmed and administered under the skin, across several sites, to encourage rapid absorption. Never inject magnesium solutions into the vein as it will cause heart failure.

Feeding small amounts of ewe nuts (200g/head/day) during high risk periods can maintain magnesium levels. Alternatively a rumen bolus can be administered, but the duration of action must be monitored. Supplementation with mineral and/or magnesium blocks can also help, but individual intakes varies. Salt licks can boost absorption, as magnesium is absorbed across the gut wall in conjunction with sodium. And providing hay for grazing ewes slows down gut transit, maximising magnesium absorption.

Rams should not be supplemented with magnesium as this predisposes them to bladder stones.

Balance

A separate issue, cerebrocortical necrosis, or polioencephalomalacia, is typically seen in weaned lambs, but can occur in older sheep. B vitamin thiamine (B1) is produced in the rumen by micro-organisms. If the rumen environment is disrupted by too much rapidly fermentable carbohydrate, such as lush spring grass or concentrate feed, then the balance of micro-

organisms shifts from producing thiamine to breaking it down. Without sufficient thiamine the brain swells and cerebrocortical results.

Affected animals are blind, although their pupils still respond to light, carry their head high and are hyperresponsive. Again, symptoms progress to fitting and paddling on their sides, with the eyes rotated in their sockets. Dark green diarrhoea may occur. Fitting worsens and death follows. Post mortem will show evidence of swelling and fluorescence of the brain under UV light.

Treatment

Affected animals should be given thiamine at a vet recommended dosage. The first dose should, ideally, be given into the vein. Some people advocate giving an injection of corticosteroid in conjunction with the first thiamine treatment. Animals should be housed in a dark, quiet pen and given hay and water. Recovery is usually rapid except for the blindness, which may linger.

Introducing ration changes gradually, and allowing the rumen to adapt, can help to prevent this condition.

Another condition that can occur in grazing sheep is photosensitisation. This may be 'primary', when sheep consume plants that sensitise the skin to sunlight, or 'secondary', when the

liver is damaged and is unable to handle the photosensitising agents that occur when chlorophyll (the green pigment in plants) is broken down.

Liver damage

Photosensitisation may be seen in animals turned out onto lush pasture in spring, particularly if they have been housed and fed a hay-based diet during the winter. This form of photosensitisation is sporadic, affecting only one or a few animals. If multiple animals are affected, then the presence of primary photosensitising plants, or of hepatotoxic (liver-damaging) plants in the diet, should be considered.

Symptoms include swelling of non-pigmented and thinly haired areas, such as ears, eyelids, muzzle and, more rarely, udders and limbs. There may also be dry and cracked skin, and clear yellowish serum may weep from affected areas. In severe cases tissue can become necrotic.

Treatment includes housing with a diet of hay and water until affected areas have healed. Corticosteroid and a penicillin-based antibiotic injection should be given to avoid bacterial infection to damaged skin. Topical ointments can be applied, but there is no evidence to suggest increased healing occurs.



Ewe affected by photosensitisation.



Lamb showing typical signs of cerebrocortical.



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Younger lambs can be overwhelmed by parasite challenges.

TECHNICAL



Manage pasture to promote gut health

vetPartners

Managing pasture to reduce the risk of coccidiosis and worm burdens is key to ensuring this year's lamb crop is as productive as possible, stresses vet Miranda Macinnes, from Cornwall-based Calweton Veterinary Group.

Most lambs become infected early in their lives with coccidia – microscopic parasites that live and reproduce in animal cells – with most species of the parasite proving harmless to sheep.

But two species, *Eimeria ovinoidalis* and *Eimeria crandalis*, can cause clinical disease in animals from three to around eight weeks old, and can result in long-term production losses.

"As coccidiosis is one of the most common diseases in UK flocks, identifying which coccidia

strain is present as early as possible is key to taking effective action and limiting the impact disease-causing types can have," says Ms Macinnes.

Coccidial eggs, or oocysts, are ingested by lambs. These go on to hatch in the gut and multiply, causing gut-lining damage. Millions of oocysts are then shed in faeces.

Diarrhoea

The damage caused in the gut can result in diarrhoea, which may contain mucus and blood, and is often accompanied by straining, pain, weight loss and even mortality. The damage in early life can affect the gut's ability to absorb nutrients, causing poor growth rates in older lambs.

A faecal egg count will help determine how many oocysts an animal is shedding, but that egg count could be of little significance if they are not the disease-causing species.

"If a problem is suspected, a speciation test carried out at a laboratory will help determine if they are pathogenic, and then farmer and vets can start planning a course of action," she says.

However, if the initial faecal counts indicate coccidiosis, a strategic and metaphylactic dose of a coccidiostat is recommended to ensure you avoid any severe losses. Then once you have the speciation results back, you can plan for the remainder of the season and future years with your vet, knowing what you're dealing with on your farm.

Timing of the dose is important once you know you're dealing with coccidiosis. Treatment should typically be administered when lambs are around six weeks old, so they have experienced some challenge and built some natural immunity, but

they haven't been overwhelmed – before any clinical symptoms really hit the lambs.

Coccidiosis is a disease of intensification and is typically seen on farms where there are high stocking rates, or where lambs are being creep fed and the troughs are not moved every day. It's transmitted through faeces that contaminates livestock feed, water sources and pasture, so heavy stocking rates increase the risk.

"Alongside working with your vet to faecal egg count regularly and monitor lamb growth rates, you need to ensure you're doing everything else you can to protect lambs from day one, starting with good colostrum management", she says.

Oocysts

Problems are also seen where there's a wide spread of lamb ages in batches. "Older lambs will shed millions of oocysts onto the pasture, which is fine for them because they have some immunity. But younger lambs can quickly become overwhelmed by the challenge," says Ms Macinnes.

"On systems where younger lambs follow older ones onto heavily contaminated grazing it's easy to see problems. And this is where pasture management becomes important. Think about moving younger lambs into a different field, or paddock graze the flock so you have tight age grouping of lambs in fields. This means an area of pasture can be grazed intensely but stock is moved on quickly. Grazing more extensively is another option, so the ratio of animals to pasture is much lower."

Continued on page 38.

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FECs help identify high numbers of coccidia present on pasture.



Coccidiosis is typically seen on farms with high stocking rates.

Managing land differently, alongside a metaphylactic dose once you know coccidiosis is present, can also help to avoid an overwhelming challenge.

Blame

Symptoms of gut roundworms in lambs can be similar to coccidiosis, so if scours, reduced daily liveweight gains, or simply poor-looking stock are seen, worms could be to blame.

Regular faecal egg counts (ideally fortnightly) can help guide treatment timings, and can also support targeted selective doses and part-group treatments – strategies that are increasingly recognised to be important in preserving wormer efficacy. Counts below 200 indicate there's unlikely to be a problem and only 10% of the flock may require treatment, whereas counts above 500 are likely to be problematic for most of the group.

"It's about using your shepherd's eye, in combination with the test results, to think about what proportion of the flock is really likely to benefit from the treatment, in order to preserve the efficacy of the wormers for the longer-term," adds Ms Macinnes.

Resilience

Unless they have access to good nutrition, growing lambs can often lack resilience to worm burdens because they are low in cobalt or selenium. In 2021 APHA reported considerable levels of parasitic gastroenteritis associated with low selenium.

"Identifying an underlying trace-element problem, through blood tests or forage samples, is essential when it comes to lamb performance, particularly with respect to worms.

"It's important to remember that a wormer is one way to defeat a worm burden, but good nutritional status is also vital," she says. "A healthy adult ewe eating a good diet will actually tackle a worm problem on her own without a worming treatment, while lambs will also be better able to manage a worm burden if they aren't nutritionally deficient.

"Ultimately, it's about keeping an eye on stock so you're able to notice when any changes occur. If you act quickly before symptoms become too severe, you'll be better placed to reduce the impact worms and coccidiosis can have."

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Following the flock

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

Howard Tratt

NSA South West Region, Somerset

Following the flock? More like chasing the flock.

A handful of devious ewes have become quite creative with their escape planning this winter and, on a few occasions, have left me scratching my head and asking the dog, 'Can you work that one out?'

It was unusually mild earlier this winter and the grass continued to grow. But through February it was disappearing rapidly. The ewes were in reasonable condition but scanned disappointingly. I haven't quite worked out why, though I'm suspicious of dog worrying in one group of ewes that were tupped on land with active public footpaths. The ewes also got quite lean in the summer and took a while to pick up, which likely added to the poor scanning result. This raises questions about grazing 'free' poorer pasture and the hidden costs of it in ewe performance.

Most of my lambs achieved good prices through the store market in November, but I've kept a group to supply the local butcher and will finish the rest for market. I know we're told to get them off farm as soon as possible but, if there's somewhere they can graze and grow quietly with not a lot of cost, the later-sold lambs have returned quite well for the past few years and helped cashflow.



Howard had a lower-than-hoped scan rate.



Matt manages the Lincoln University flock.

Matt Bagley

NSA Central Region, Lincolnshire

Lincoln University's sheep flock comprises 260 ewes, with a mix of Texel-cross, Mule and Suffolk Mule ewes.

Rams used this year are Charollais cross Beltex. The ewes have been housed since the start of the year, after grazing a variety of cover crops including stubble turnips, a mixture of phacelia and vetch, a Westerwolds grass ley, and sugar beet tops after the harvester had lifted the beet.

The winter was kind and allowed for maximum use of cover crops without the ground becoming too wet. This is the first year sheep have been included in the rotation and it has worked well, making use of the land for as much of the year as possible and allowing permanent pasture to rest through the winter.

A small batch of ewes were sponged in autumn 2021 and they lambed at the end of January. These lambs have been housed and are growing well on creep feed. And the ewes have just recently gone to pasture, with the hope of some earlier finished lambs. The main lambing flock started on 23rd February and are lambing well so far with an average birth weight of 4.9kg.

Ewes and lambs will be turned out as soon as possible onto the rested permanent pasture parkland, with an aim to finish lambs from grass. The first draw of lambs took place at 14 weeks old in 2021, and we aim to do the same this year – if not before.



Winter has been kind to Thomas' flock.

Thomas Carrick

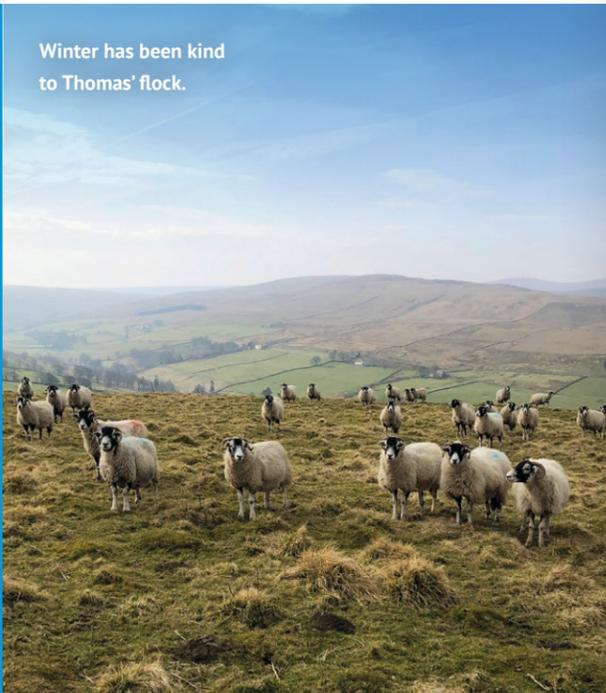
NSA Northern Region, Cumbria

Lambing is just around the corner and I'm looking forward to getting underway.

The months before lambing the season can feel like a bit of a drag, particularly when it's wet and windy like February was here. Largely, though, we have had a kind winter, apart from a handful of disruptive storms, and stock are in good condition and full of lambs. Winter fodder is good quality and that is playing its part. But now we're getting to the point where we're relying on purchased concentrates to boost energy, and protein expenditure is adding up quickly.

The challenge will be to give them everything they need now input prices have soared to almost unimaginable levels. Fuel, feed and fertiliser prices are going to have many people questioning the sustainability of their stocking levels, but the good news for the sheep sector is that, on upland farms at least, it will be the cattle that bear most scrutiny.

Uncertainty is the order of the decade and planning for the future is exceptionally difficult. Major investments in our businesses are all but impossible without high risk, but we will no doubt emerge from the other side with a greater appreciation of the viability of our enterprise.



Leading commercial sheep production in the Midwest

By Katie James, NSA

Among the vast corn and soya fields of South East Iowa, in the USA, sheep farming is an unusual choice of farming enterprise.

But for the past 40 years, Stan Potratz, an NSA overseas member, with his wife Jean, has strived to build an efficient system that is leading the way for serious commercial sheep production in the Midwest.

The Potratz's business, Premier Experimental Farms, runs approximately 1,000 ewes and focuses solely on producing lambs for meat and breeding, not wool, as some US sheep farms do. Stan began the farm after returning to the USA from England where he had managed a sheep farm in Hertfordshire. On his return he found that equipment so easily sourced in the UK was not available to support his sheep farming ambition in the States. So, as well as setting up the commercial sheep enterprise, he began importing and supplying products nationwide, founding Premier One Supplies – a business that now employs more than 65 staff. Stan's sheep farming enterprise, as well as producing lamb, also acts as a resource to test all equipment sold through the livestock equipment business.

Intensive

The farm itself, in contrast to most UK sheep farming systems, runs a system of 'accelerated lambing'. This means ewes lamb more than once a year, achieved by the use of Katahdin, Romanov and Dorper genetics within the flock. This system fits with the farm's more intensive approach to sheep production.

"Our system is not typical in this region or indeed this country," says Stan. "But we believe

it is the future for serious commercial sheep production in the Midwest."

Much of the system keeps the ewes and lambs housed. Ewes are brought indoors into a heated barn ahead of lambing and are penned individually.

"This has helped us protect the ewes against our extremely cold winter weather and mismothering," says Stan. "Ewe oestrus is synchronised using CIDRs to ensure ewes lamb during two lambing blocks, from January to May and September to November.

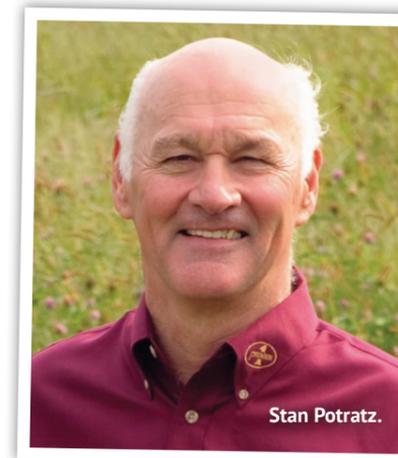


Lambing is all indoors.

"Ewes and lambs remain housed until weaning. This helps us to keep on top of parasite issues and also protect stock from predators, such as coyotes, although we do use guard dogs to protect turned-out stock."

Once lambs are weaned they are fed indoors, not grazed, for around two months on pelleted feed until they reach 40kg liveweight. Feed is inexpensive in Iowa, compared to other parts of US, due to the volume of soya and maize available in the region. Weaned lambs sold for breeding are put onto clean pasture until sale.

Unusually for the area, the farm has a livestock auction just 20 miles away where finished stock



Stan Potratz.

is sent for sale. Around 70% of finished lambs are sent for slaughter for the ethnic market – a growing area of demand for US sheep.

Stan believes the growing interest in US sheep meat from the ethnic community in the east of the country could help secure a future for the industry. "Until quite recently the local and wider US sheep sector was in decline, but this emerging market could attract new entrants and help to build production for the future," he says.

Contrast

The farm's intensive system is in contrast to the UK's extensively-grazed sector, but the efficiency of the Potratz's farm is essential in an area where no direct support is offered for sheep production. "Large sheep producers in the US's Western states can access low-cost grazing on government land, as well as to lower-cost labour with shepherds coming from South and Central America. For them more extensive farming can be profitable, but it would be difficult for us."

Stan has long appreciated the UK system of farming, however, and until covid-19 restricted travel, he frequently returned to the UK to keep up to date with new innovations. "I have enjoyed travelling to the NSA Sheep Event on almost all of the occasions it has been held at the Three Counties Showground, since 1980. Our business has organised two tours for US sheep farmers and we really hope to be able to do so again soon."



Feed is inexpensive in Iowa.



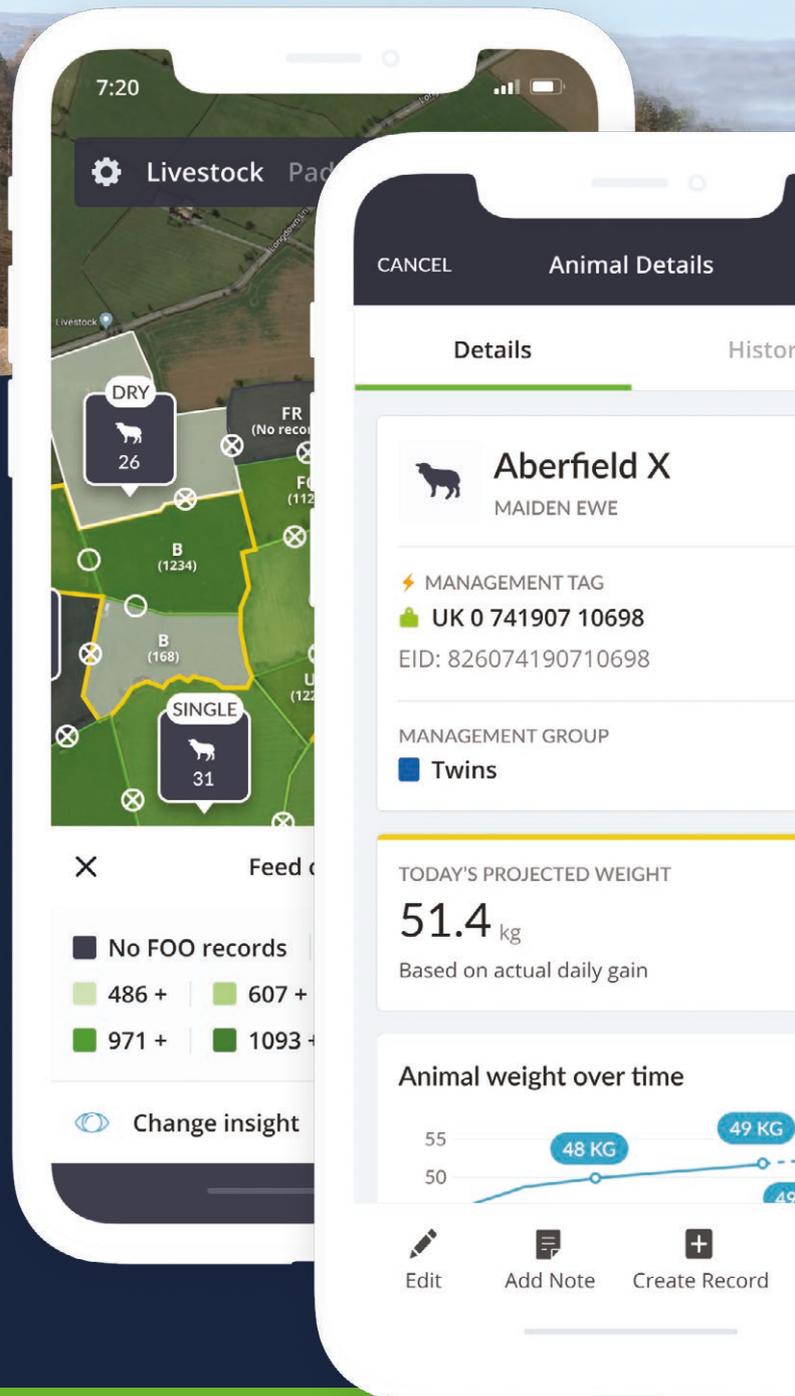
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