

SHEEP FARMER

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Industry must ensure Lord Plumb legacy



By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

By the time I left school Henry Plumb was already NFU President, had been awarded a knighthood, and was leading British farming into the EU.

His commitment to convergence with the EU enabled his election as a Member of the European Parliament in 1979, a responsibility he held for 20 years, with two of these serving as Britain's only President of the EU. He was made a life peer in 1987, becoming Lord Plumb of Coleshill, Warwickshire, where he fulfilled his other passions – family and farming.

For most of my working life he was someone I read about and listened to. For my generation he became one of the best-known people in British farming. It wasn't until I joined NSA in 2011 that we met. It was a privilege and, having previously been NSA President, he remained one of our Vice Presidents until his death in April this year.

He was incredibly enthusiastic, encouraging and passionate about supporting young people into farming, and had one of the most infectious smiles. To attend Henry Plumb's funeral memorial service was an honour and, quite rightly, felt far more of a celebration than one of sadness.

Brexit

After so much work taking Britain into, and representing our interests in the EU, it was no surprise that Henry wasn't in favour of Brexit. I've no intention of getting into a 'better in or out' debate but I know he raised his eyebrows that, to date, we have turned our farming policies upside down, exposed conflicting opinions on the subject of food security, lost our valuable breeding sheep export trade, and pushed Northern Ireland's farmers into a foggy vacuum with no obvious escape.

Our main concern when we approached Brexit was a no-deal scenario, resulting in heavy tariffs to export lamb to the EU. Talk now of new legislation to move on from the recently agreed NI protocol risks a trade war with the EU taking us right back to the spectre of tariffs.

We remain in hope this can be avoided and that negotiators are allowed to exercise diplomacy,

because we are still highly dependent on trading freely with the EU, our closest export market.

Despite all the disruption, lamb prices have remained strong throughout, giving a confidence that has now been tempered by high input inflation, in particular feed, fuel and fertiliser, but impacting on virtually every farm input.

The concern, as inflation bites, is that consumers will be pushed to reduce their spending and might look to spend less on red meat. Consumer spending on lamb is under pressure, but this is where we all need to be creative and communicate the values of lamb rather than the cost, talking about ways to save money through smaller portion sizes, cheaper cuts, and stretching roasting joints to feed the family for several days. There is no faster food than a few slices from an already-cooked joint.

Challenges

I'm reminded of the saying, 'Beware your dreams. They may come true'. For years we have complained food is too cheap. But with food inflation racing away, Andrew Bailey, the Bank of England Governor, is predicting 'apocalyptic' food price rises, and India has announced a prohibition on wheat exports. Wheat futures prices have risen by 25% over a six-week period and by 100% over the last 12 months. Edible oils are equally affected, and even milk and eggs have seen double digit inflation.

On one hand this couldn't have happened at a more appropriate time, just as the Government is producing a white paper on food security, and while future farming schemes develop. On the other, the context within which food inflation is happening, and the fallout in terms of hunger and food poverty, economic hardship and global disruption, are not to be welcomed.

Like other UK farming sectors, sheep farming will be affected. But we are well placed to address the food, climate change and nature challenges faced. If we accept and own the challenges and remain enthusiastic about what we can do, we stand a good chance of being a respected and valued part of the future, and Lord Henry Plumb will truly rest in peace.



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NSA and industry pay tribute to NSA stalwarts

NSA joined numerous farming organisations in remembering the tremendous contribution Lord Henry Plumb made over his many years as a farmer, politician, campaigner and advocate of UK agriculture, following his recent sad passing.

As a former NSA President and serving NSA Vice President, NSA benefitted from the passion and tenacity that Lord Plumb demonstrated throughout his glittering and impactful career.

NSA was also saddened to hear of the recent passing of another former NSA President, Joe Stoddart. Joe was incredibly active in NSA South East Region during this agricultural career, which also included a time as Bibby's Managing Director. NSA passes its condolences to both Henry's and Joe's family at this difficult time. [Read more of the NSA tributes at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/news).



Lord Henry Plumb.

Meet the NSA AGM hosts

NSA invites all sheep farmers and supporters to its AGM and farm walk on Thursday 11th August. The short, formal meeting is being kindly hosted by Alun and Helen Bennett in mid-Wales, so it can be followed by what promises to be an excellent tour around the family farm.

Alun and Helen established their Plasucha Lleyrn flock in 1996, growing it to 600 breeding ewes. Their eldest son Robert complemented it with the Plasucha Texel flock, created 10 years later and now numbering 30 breeding ewes. The flock has had great success, winning at the Royal Welsh and Great Yorkshire shows.

Alun and Helen now run a 250-head flock of North Country Cheviots on another holding. In 2021, the family won champion Hill-Type flock in the Wales and Borders Cheviot Society competition. [See below for times and location.](#)



AGM Hosts Alun & Helen Bennet of Doladron Farm.

Official NSA AGM notification

Notice is hereby given that the 129th Annual General Meeting of the National Sheep Association will be held at Doladron Farm, Pont Robert, Meifod, SY22 6JR, on Thursday 11th August 2022 at 11am.

NSA intends to provide an online joining option but this depends on the internet connection on the day.

The AGM will transact the following business:

- To approve the minutes of the 128th Annual General Meeting.
- To receive and adopt the Trustees Report and Statement of Accounts to year ended 31st December 2021.
- To elect officers for the ensuing year (President and Honorary Treasurer), Vice President(s) and auditors.

By order of the Board. Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or to appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by 11am on 10th August 2022. Attendance is open to all, but only NSA members can vote at the AGM. If you would like a hot lamb sandwich after the farm walk, please register in advance. [Registration form, event details and proxy forms at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/NSA-AGM](http://go.nationalsheep.org.uk/NSA-AGM).

NSA Breed Society Forum takes place online

The NSA Breed Society Forum took place online in May, discussing current policy topics and providing a platform for interesting debate around the Northern Ireland Protocol and live breeding animal exports.

NSA shared information with attendees on how it continues communication with Defra and DAERA to highlight just how important this trade is for the UK sheep sector. Breed societies also heard more about the NSA Next Generation programme, with reminders given that NSA is open to work with societies to aid with promotion and their own support for younger sheep breeders. The session was brought to an end with an update on the rationalisation of the Ovine Semen Archive and future plans for a livestock gene bank. Another online forum will run in the autumn.



NSA and Moredun will discuss sheep scab at a summer webinar.

NSA and Moredun to host summer webinars

As the NSA Breakfast Club webinars take a summer break, NSA and Moredun will come together to share the latest sheep news and advice on flock health.

The first of two evening webinars will discuss ticks and tick borne disease on Thursday 7th July, followed by a webinar on the testing, control and quarantine procedures for sheep scab on Thursday 16th August. [Full details, including the line-up of expert speakers, at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars).

Upgrade your NSA membership

As NSA Sheep 2022 approaches, members are reminded they can receive free entry to the event for two people living in the same house if they upgrade their subscription to a joint membership. Joint membership is just £10 per year more than an individual subscription. As well as additional event entry, both members also receive the NSA Weekly Email Update.

To more generally support the work of NSA, it is also possible to upgrade your subscription to include an annual donation to the association. Please consider this if you feel you can further contribute to NSA's work.

[To upgrade your membership, contact NSA Head Office or visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-community/membership-administration](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-community/membership-administration).

Don't forget NSA and Te Pari prize draw

Have you entered NSA's fantastic prize draw this year to win an amazing prize of a Te Pari Racewell HD3 sheep handling system worth £20,000? As a joint initiative between NSA and Te Pari, any UK based sheep farmer is eligible to enter the competition that will run to the end of 2022. A single winner will be selected early next year. [Enter now at go.nationalsheep.org.uk/tepari](http://go.nationalsheep.org.uk/tepari).

A sheep farming voice

Get the headlines here on current NSA policy activities.

Food security versus sustainability

NSA is engaging closely with the UK Agriculture Partnership, an open forum to share technical information on key elements of sustainable agriculture and land use.

Water quality has been discussed with soil and food security as subsequent topics. This is also helping inform work by NSA to encourage the Secretary of State to engage in food security talks in light of the current global turmoil. NSA believes it is possible to strike the right balance between providing food security through domestic production while also providing environmental, health and societal benefits. [More on pages 18-19.](#)

Carcase splitting frustration

NSA continues to pressure Defra and the Food Standards Agency to revive this dialogue.

At this time of year some lamb finishers report tooth eruption being as high as 10%, despite lambs being weighed and checked regularly. Moving to an agreed calendar date would remove all uncertainty, providing a clear time point after which lamb carcasses must be split.

Multiple barriers to live movements

Following the disruption to transport of live breeding sheep to the EU, NSA is working collaboratively to re-establish the P&O services.

Access to a limited service demonstrates progress, but NSA fears this won't last. NSA, the National Beef Association and Livestock Auctioneers Association are contacting other ferry companies as alternatives to P&O.

Border control posts (BCP) for receiving UK live animal exports remain an issue. The proposed BCP at Coquelles, Calais, now requires risk assessment checks of the local area, which may delay opening by 18 months. It is unlikely Qualivia will continue to progress the BCP without financial commitment from UK companies, which looks increasingly unlikely if there's a further 18-month delay.

New options appear to be emerging within the Calais port curtilage. Authorities have confirmed available space for a BCP within the port, subject to further investigation. It is unlikely anything will come to fruition in the next 12 months.

Continued NZ concern

NSA continues to raise concern over the New Zealand free trade agreement (FTA), giving evidence to numerous government advisory groups, outlining the risks to UK producers.

The NSA position is that trade is fundamental to the sheep sector, with a large proportion of UK sheep meat being exported to global markets. The UK is committed to high health, welfare and environmental standards, often surpassing those of our competitors. NSA seeks a trade outcome that supports equal standards on imports to the standards seen in UK sheep farming.



Rubber rings under scrutiny

There is an increasing spotlight on castration and tailing of lambs, with authorities taking an active interest in reports of rubber rings being used on lambs over seven days old.

NSA is working with APHA to address current legislation preventing the use and uptake of tools like Clipfitter and NumbNuts to improve welfare at castration and tailing.



NSA is pushing Defra on the recognition of improved grasslands.

Schemes progress slowly

With England continuing to be further ahead than the devolved nations on development of future farming scheme, Defra test-and-trial work is now underway.

This gives NSA and farmers opportunity to shape schemes to work in the sheep sector's favour. NSA continues to work hard to ensure Defra focuses more on improved grasslands, specifically the recognition of upland and moorland grazed pastures for biodiversity and the environment.

The Animal Health & Welfare Pathway will begin pilots early this summer, with full rollout at the end of the year. The Pathway will drive gradual improvements and provide additional support for continued change. Its design has been a partnership approach between Defra and farmers, developing it further through stakeholder advice. As a valued stakeholder from inception, NSA encourages sheep farmers to explore the possible benefit of this funded service as a useful tool to address specific on-farm disease concerns.

Another new funding strand has just been announced called the Farming Innovation Programme, which will provide research and development funding to farmers who want to develop and use new, innovative methods and technologies. The aim is to support farmers to become more productive, environmentally sustainable and resilient to current and future global food security challenges.

There is also the lump sum exit payment scheme providing payment to anyone wishing to leave the industry without the capital to do so. Applications are open until September 2022.

Defra is providing provision for the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund which aims to support the purchase of new equipment, technology and infrastructure designed to improve productivity in a sustainable way. NSA has submitted a consultation response aiming to shape the next round of eligible items. [See pages 16-17 for updates on schemes in the devolved nations.](#)

Find out more

NSA provides regular policy updates via the Weekly Email Update. If you don't already receive this, please contact NSA Head Office.

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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 Scottish Region

By Grace Reid, Coordinator

After the frustration and heartache of delaying NSA Scot Sheep twice over, it was a joy to see a busy and successful event go ahead.

NSA Scottish Region extends its thanks to everyone who attended, exhibited, competed, helped and supported – and a particular thanks to hosts Robert and Hazel McNee. It was a brilliant day.

For the first time, the NSA Scottish Region Next Generation Shepherd competition was held separately to the event. It was fantastic to see such great competitors the day before. Huge congratulations to Ewan Runciman of Lauder, Scottish Borders, pictured with Ailish Ross of the Texel Sheep Society, which generously sponsored the competition. *Full NSA Scot Sheep report on pages 6-7.*



NSA Next Generation Shepherd winner, Ewan Runciman.

NSA Eastern Region

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

NSA Eastern Region shall be holding a farm walk on Thursday 23rd June at Sandringham in Norfolk.

It is great that we are able to visit during the Queen's Jubilee year. Please contact me to reserve a place, as numbers are restricted. Prior to the farm walk will be a short committee meeting.

Two NSA Eastern Region ram sales will go ahead as usual. Firstly at Rugby Farmers Mart on Friday 26th August and then at Melton Mowbray Market on Friday 16th September. If you are interested and willing to help with either event, let me know. Entry forms for both sales will be available shortly on our website.

Finally, I would like to express my sadness at the passing of Lord Plumb. I knew Henry from his time as NFU President. I always admired him. We shall all miss him greatly.

NSA South West Region

By Ian May, Manager

The region had a fantastic NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition and farm walk at Gupworthy Farm, Wheddon Cross in May.

On behalf of the NSA South West Region committee, I would like to thank Richard and Carolyn Webber, and their family and staff, for all the efforts they put into making this a successful event. Many thanks also to those who helped run the various sections of the competition.

Congratulations go to Martin Harris of Liskard, Cornwall, Owen Pengelly of Bodmin, Cornwall, and William Land of Wheddon Cross, Somerset, who won first, second and third place respectively. We look forward to seeing Martin and Owen fly the South West flag at the NSA Sheep Event in July.

As we move into summer, we will look to lay on other farm walks. Please keep an eye on the weekly newsletter for dates.



Martin Harris and Ian May.



NSA SE Chair Yann Le Du and Next Generation Shepherd winner Clover Crosse.

NSA South East Region

By Sarah Blake, Manager

In May, 20 regional members enjoyed a farm walk hosted by Ed and Gemma Lovejoy of Hope Farm, Kent, viewing their flock of 1,000 Romney, Dorset and crossbred ewes.

Shepherd Will Edmonds described the farm's sheep system, emphasising the importance of its closed flock, vertically integrated policy to all aspect of the flock's health and profitability. A proportion of the lamb crop is finished, with some retained to supply Gemma's meat business and others sold as store.

NSA South East Region held its Next Generation Shepherd competition in conjunction with Southern Shears UK, a major shearing contest in May.

A keenly fought contest saw young shepherds compete across a range of tasks essential to their trade. Overall winner was Clover Crosse, one of this year's NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, with Tom Evcı in second place, also scooping the prize for best placed under 21 contestant. These two will go on to represent the region at the national final. Dylan Vetara took third and was also the only contestant to grade the finished lambs in the same order as the judge.

We would like to thank all those involved in making this contest a success – contestants, judges, sponsors, stewards – and a particular thanks to the Southern Shears team for inviting us to be part of their event.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

As the covid-19 pandemic subsides we are reaching a position where a return to normality is getting nearer.

A sign of this was the welcome return of the Royal Ulster Agricultural Society's Balmoral Show in May, when all bar the poultry sector was back to normal. The NSA Sheep Marquee was present once again, manned by NSA Northern Ireland Region committee members as well as Chris Adamson from NSA HQ throughout the week.



NSA Northern Ireland Region was glad to return to Balmoral Show.

NSA Marches Region

By Katie James, Manager

NSA Marches Region had a strong presence at the Royal Three Counties Show, Worcestershire, in mid-June.

Committee members enjoyed meeting members and others over the three days. The region, alongside NSA Sheep Event, sponsored the show's young handlers competitions. It was great to see them compete and make the most of the return of this fantastic show.

NSA Northern Region

By Chris Adamson, Manager

It is great to hear positive reports coming back from the NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme that is now in full swing.

Beth Phalp, who farms with her father on the edge of the North York Moors, is representing our region as an Ambassador. Beth's passion for the industry is inspiring to see and the committee looks forward to her future involvement.

Plans are now in fully swing for the return of the NSA tent at the Great Yorkshire Show that will run for four days this July. We are pleased to continue the close relationship with Drydales, which will supply the food and drink in the tent throughout the show. We look forward to seeing you there.

NSA Central Region

By Alice Heliwell, Manager

The last committee meeting in Brough, Derbyshire, was well attended.

Emma Steele, AHDB, kept the region updated on the work of the levy body, including running the We Eat Balanced campaign and facilitating Defra-funded farm business reviews.

The region has a farm walk planned for later in the summer, focusing on sheep in arable rotations. More details will be shared soon. The next NSA Central Region committee meeting will be held on Tuesday 20th September.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

The region held its first full face-to-face meeting in May, welcoming new committee member Rhodri Manon Owen from Glynllifon College.

We also discussed the updated NSA Strategy before Rob Taylor, Wales Rural & Wildlife Crime Coordinator, provided an interesting update on his work and discussed how police forces in Wales deal with rural crime. Although some committee members were sceptical of how the police can help, they were reassured once they heard from Rob.

Our next regional newsletter will be emailed out to members before the Royal Welsh Show. NSA will have the stand at the event and there will be a different mix of stands in the pavilion this year, so please come and see us.

Our next regional meeting will be on Tuesday 9th August. It is now less than a year to go to NSA Welsh Sheep so do make a note of the date, Tuesday 16th May 2023. With the Owen family hosting and plenty of stock on show, Red House, Aberhafesp will be the place to be.

Existing farm sheds and temporary marquees provided cover for trade stands.

Record breaking crowds flock to NSA Scot Sheep

A record-breaking crowd flocked to Over Finlarg for the long-awaited NSA Scot Sheep 2022 event, where thousands of farmers, industry enthusiasts and school children gathered for a well-deserved day out.

After being postponed on three previous occasions due to the pandemic, host farmers Robert and Hazel McNee were delighted to finally open their farm gates to visitors from across the UK and around the world.

The event featured 40 breed societies and individual breeders, 160 trade stands. Various competitions and seminars were held throughout the day, with the farm tour proving extremely popular.

David Leggat MBE, formerly of United Auctions, officially opened the event and congratulated the McNee family on how well the farm was looking

and the high-quality pedigree and commercial livestock they produce each year.

He also praised Scottish agriculture, in particular Scottish lamb and beef, but urgently called for more government support to help develop the farming industry beyond 2024.

Mr Leggat said: "The main responsibilities of government include food security, food supply and food safety. We cannot ignore farmers' roles as providers of food for the nation.

"Significant support must be given to production and infrastructure, as it is essential to maintain the critical mass of both Scottish lamb and beef."

Carbon

With focus on carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, a full farm carbon audit on Over Finlarg was conducted by main sponsors Virgin Money, in a bid to encourage more farmers to make use of new technology to improve efficiency.

Simon Haley of Carbon Metrics said: "Over Finlarg was very efficient and total emissions for both the sheep and beef enterprises were well below agricultural averages."

The sale of ewe hogs at the closing of the event attracted its usual crowd of spectators, which saw a new NSA Scot Sheep record of £2,000 a piece paid for a pair of Badgerface Texels from Stuart and Wendy Hunter, West Cairnhill, Inch, Aberdeen.

Sired by Cleenagh Biggy and bred from their foundation ewe, they were purchased by Lancashire breeders Caroline Brown and Sheila Mason.

The couple also topped the Blue Texels, selling a pair for £1,500 to Ayrshire breeder David Alexander, Millside, Galston. One was by Lyles Eagle, with the other being sired by Hunters Deerstalker.

Champion

Robbie Wilson's Milnbank flock from North Dornlie, Turriff, North East Scotland, produced the overall champion pair with two Texels by Castlecairn Doodlebro, which sold to David Pickford of Cheshire.

Kate McNee's black North Country Cheviots made £1,300 each to Dean Anderson, Smallburn Farms, Elgin, North East Scotland, with all proceeds being donated to Prostate Scotland.

A shepherd's crook made by John Fotheringham from Ardler, Meigle, Tayside, was sold prior to the sale of ewe hogs, raising £400 for Scotland's Charity Air Ambulance.

Jennifer Craig, NSA Scottish Region Chair, was awarded the NSA Scottish Region silver salver for outstanding contribution to the sheep industry.



The sale of ewe hogg pairs topped at £2,000.



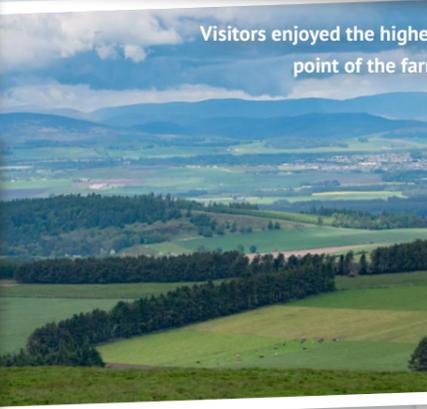
The farm was a perfect location, with the farm tour providing spectacular views towards the Firth of Tay.



Event Chair Willie Millar, host Hazel McNee and regional chair Jen Craig.



Hazel McNee presents Jen Craig with the Silver Salver award.



Visitors enjoyed the highest point of the farm.



Wednesday 1st June 2022
OVER FINLARG FARM, TEALING BY DUNDEE, DD4 0QE

Competition winners

NSA Next Generation Shepherd
Winner: Ewan Runciman, Lauder, Scottish Borders. Best under 21: Freddy Fulford, Fort William, Highlands.

Fencing
HVB Fencing, Staffordshire (Simon Gibbs & John Morgan).

Sheepdog trial
Elinore Nilsson, Tayside. with Kid.

Stockjudging
Open: Kevin Laing. YFC: John Graham.

Quickshear
Hamish Mitchell, Fife (29.6 seconds to shear one hogg).

Trade stands
Bluefaced Leicester Sheep Breeders' Association (breed society), Logie Burn Sheep (indoor) and GP Smart & Son (outdoor).

Guess the tag
Sarah Martin, Tayside.

Online ticket sales prize draw
(to win a Claas Axion 960 front loader toy tractor supplied by Sellars Agriculture)
Rhona Sharp, Tayside.

Full list of competition winners at www.scotsheep.org.uk.

Long awaited NSA Sheep Event returns

The four-year wait for the return of the NSA Sheep Event is almost over as the flagship event takes place this July at the Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

As well as the infamous attractions including seminars, interactive workshops, trade and breed society stands, demonstrations and competitions, there are several new event features to really ensure it is a day out not to be missed. NSA is also pleased to welcome Defra Minister Victoria Prentis to the event, who will speak with visitors on the latest issues affecting the sector.

NSA members enter the event for free on presentation of a current membership card. Tickets for anyone else are available to buy online, meaning less time at the gate and more time on the showground enjoying the event.

NSA Chair Dan Phipps comments: "I have witnessed firsthand the immense amount of work, thought and passion that has gone into putting the event together. Planning has been methodical. It has involved input from sheep farmers up and down the country via the event committee, making sure we are covering current concerns in our industry. There will be something for everyone, old and young, seasoned producers and those with a new interest in sheep."

Grassland trail

A welcome addition to the event will be the new grassland trail. NSA is excited to be joined by many companies and specialists ready to pass on the most up to date information as part of a knowledge exchange trail, highlighting benefits of on-farm grassland optimisation. It will also give visitors the opportunity to speak with industry experts on current concerns of the sector, such as the price and availability of fertilisers and environmental focused policy changes that may be alleviated by improved grassland management.

Mr Phipps concludes: "NSA Sheep Event is an opportunity to demonstrate all that's wholesome and great about our industry and will promote the positive impact that sheep farmers have on the environments and communities they farm within. I look forward to seeing you there."

MAJOR EVENT SPONSORS



With such a fabulous line up, who wouldn't flock to NSA's flagship event?



NSA www.sheepevent.org.uk

SHEEP EVENT

UK Sheep Farming: A positive future

Wednesday 27th July 2022

THE THREE COUNTIES SHOWGROUND
MALVERN, WORCESTERSHIRE, WR13 6NW

9:00AM - 5:00PM

- PRE EVENT DINNER
- PRE EVENT FARM TOUR
- SEMINARS & MARKETING
- SHEEP BREED SOCIETIES
- NEXT GENERATION SHEPHERD OF THE YEAR COMPETITION
- TORNADO FENCING COMPETITION AND OTHER COMPETITIONS
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Event highlights

Grassland trail – This new feature will help you make the most of your farm's grasslands.

Cookery theatre – Chefs from Dunbia/Asda will be on stage to cook up a feast of delicious lamb recipes.

Strength, stamina and speed – Watch some of the country's finest fencing contractors compete in the Tornado Wire Fencing competition.

Buy the best – Top sheepdogs will be on sale in the main ring, with each lot put through its paces before bids are invited.

Be in it to win it – Visit the NSA stand for your chance to win. Whether it's our main 2022 prize of a Te Pari handling system or a selection of prizes from our event major sponsors, you won't walk away empty handed!

Industry partner demonstrations – Avon Hall will house a number of NSA partners, including AHDB, SCOPS and Moredun, all ready to share and demonstrate the latest practical industry information. Ram MOT demonstrations will also run through the day.



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Workshop and seminar line-up certain to spark debate

NSA Sheep Event is respected for attracting industry experts to speak with visitors in the popular seminar tent and workshop areas. Aiming to cover key topics, these sessions will discuss everything from the all-encompassing role of sheep farmers in the community to future market opportunities.



Workshop timetable

Workshop area A

Never waste a dead sheep!

9.45am-10.30am

(repeated at 12.35pm-1.20pm)

Ben Strugnell of Farm Vet Postmortems will join Elanco Animal Health to talk visitors through a sheep post mortem, highlighting issues found and preventative measures to ensure improved health and productivity for the flock.



Practical tips for getting the most from sheep vaccination

10.35am-11.20am (repeated at 1.25pm-2.10pm)

Join MSD Animal health to discuss vaccination best practice. This workshop will cover the correct use of vaccination guns. It will also cover the correct vaccination positioning and technique to reduce the risk of adverse reactions and best practice for handling, storage and administration of vaccines.



Importance of understanding forage, mineral and trace element levels on your farm

11.45am-12.30pm

The variability of minerals and trace element levels within forage, particularly grass, is often a key reason behind reduced animal performance and profitability. Forage, mineral and trace element reports are key to identifying on farm issues and allows opportunity to correct performance reducing deficiencies. Join this workshop with Agri-Lloyd to find out more.

Farming in a reduced antibiotic world

2.15pm-3.00pm

With antibiotic usage across the farming industry being reduced by more than 50% since 2014, where does this and further reductions leave livestock farmers going forward? This Agri-Lloyd workshop will investigate further.

Animal Health & Welfare Pathway

3.05pm-3.55pm

Join Defra to learn more about the new Animal Health & Welfare Pathway, which aims to raise health and welfare outcomes on livestock farms by offering basic financial incentives to encourage increased farmer-vet engagement. Anthelmintic efficacy and other specific topics will be included.

Workshop area B

Why multi species are right for your farm

9.45am-10.30am (repeated at 1.05pm-2.10pm)

Demands for climate-sensitive production and inflationary costs make the environmental and production benefits seen for herbal leys even more attractive. But knowing where individual species work best has remained elusive. Let Germinal's grass and forage production experts take away the mystery.

Sheep scab – Best practice treatment

10.35am-11.20am

(repeated at 1.55pm-2.40pm)

Join Bimeda and independent sheep adviser Lesley Stubbings for an update on sheep scab incidence and resilience to treatments, and hear advice on best practice treatment. Information will also be shared by sheep dipping contractor Aleks Shikov.



Breeding sheep for important traits and mitigating iceberg diseases

11.25am-12.10pm (repeated at 2.45pm-3.50pm)

Dr Janet Roden, Innovis geneticist, will discuss data collection and explain trait selection such as ewe efficiency, mothering ability, lamb survival and the importance of easy lambing and growth rate in terminal sires. Selection pressure in a commercial farm environment will be explained with reference to UK and NZ case studies. Vet Peers Davies will provide a practical guide to identifying iceberg diseases and what measures can currently be adopted to mitigate their impact.

Future farming schemes

12.15pm-1.00pm

Join Janet Hughes, Defra Programme Director for the Future Farming and Countryside Programme, to learn more about the future farming schemes being developed for England. Detail will be given and questions invited on the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Local Nature Recovery.



Seminar timetable

Seminar 1 11.00am

Where is the balance between our diverse market opportunities?



Supermarkets, butchers, export destinations, domestic and international ethnic markets, artisan outlets, restaurants ... The UK sheep sector is fortunate in its range of outlets for sheep meat – but where should we focus our future efforts? Volume sales of a commodity product, or added value markets? And what can be done at farm level to meet demands? This seminar will tackle these big questions and help future business planning.

Chairman: Dan Phipps, NSA. **Speakers:** Nicholas Jolly, Beef & Lamb New Zealand; Phil Hadley, AHDB; Mike Gooding, independent consultant.

Seminar 2 12.15pm

Is grassland our salvation for carbon capture and nature recovery?



A session looking at future land use and whether carbon sequestration in sheep-grazed grassland can achieve as much as mass forestry and other alternatives. What will the UK look like if policymakers continue to pursue tree planting targets and/or rewilding ambitions? Will there be space for sheep? If not, what are the implications for climate change, nature recovery and rural communities? This seminar will consider sheep and grassland in the positive light they deserve.

Chairman: John Lloyd, NSA. **Speakers:** Robin Pakeman, James Hutton Institute; Sarah Wynn, ADAS; John Pawsey, Suffolk sheep and arable farmer.

Seminar 3 1.30pm

Sheep farmers – a force for social good

To counteract the negative view of agriculture, it is time for sheep farmers – the people who work tirelessly to produce quality food, care for the environment and underpin rural communities – to stand up and be counted. Sheep farming is a career to be proud of, and often the first step into farming for young people and new entrants. This seminar will consider what it takes to gain the required recognition for the incredible wealth of public goods provided by sheep farmers and their sheep.

Chairman: Adam Henson, TV presenter and Gloucestershire sheep farmer.

Speakers: Dr Matt Lobley, Exeter University; NSA Next Generation Ambassadors and sheep farmers Caryl Hughes, Kirree Kermode and Clarke Hibberd.

Seminar 4 2.45pm

Implementing radical change to meet future sheep farming challenges



We are increasingly told the world needs radical change to meet challenges around climate change, food security and animal welfare. If sheep farmers accept extreme measures are needed, where could the most effective change(s) be made? This seminar will welcome speakers with strong views about constructive disruption to flock management, to challenge the audience on whether slow evolution is enough, or if a radical shake-up is needed.

Chairman: Campbell Tweed, NSA. **Speakers:** Liz Genever, consultant; Tim White, Wiltshire sheep farmer; Peter Williams, North Wales sheep farmer.



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Sheep Event competitions provide spectacle and opportunity

A popular feature of the event will once again be a series of competitions providing entertainment for visitors and allowing those attending to get involved to show off their skills and knowledge.

New for 2022, NSA is excited to launch a competition giving attendees chance to share their innovative on-farm ideas in the NSA Inventions competition. Sponsored by Rappa, the competition has a class for farmers attending on the day and a class for trade exhibitors to enter new products or equipment launched in the past four years. Day visitors can bring along a piece of equipment or an explanation of a tip (that has cost no more than £200 to design/produce) to be displayed at the event for a chance to win prize money of up to £125.

The Tornado Fencing competition will also take place at NSA Sheep 2022. The contest is open to teams of professional fencing contractors and gives visitors the opportunity to see these teams pit their skills against fellow competitors and demonstrate the advantage of good quality fence erection on farm.

NSA will be joined by an expert grader from British Wool to judge fleeces brought along by visitors on the day of the event, hoping to win prize money for the quality of the wool they add to the fleece display.

Next Generation finals

And once again, the NSA Sheep Event will play host to the exciting finals of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd national final, sponsored by the Texel Sheep Society. Having qualified from regional heats across the UK, 18 skilled young sheep farmers will compete in a series of common shepherding tasks, demonstrating why the future of the UK sheep sector is in safe hands. Successful competitors will take home a slice of the impressive £2,000 prize pot.

Young sheep farmers will also be able to enter the National Federation of Young Farmers team shearing competition, sponsored by Lister Shearing Equipment and Timac Agro UK. Entries are via local YFCs.

Other competitions running on the day will include a chance to win prizes from the event's major sponsors in a lucky 'sheep dip', and a carcase classification contest open to all visitors. Even more good reasons to enjoy NSA Sheep 2022 this summer.

Come and see the skill and speed of professional fencing contractors.



Shepherding stars

NSA Central Region

Reuben Paisley and Archie Roberts.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region

Tomos Glyn Davies and Harri Wyn Griffiths.

NSA Eastern Region

Ben Connor and Cameron Farman.

NSA Marches Region

Ben Edwards and Thomas Garlick.

NSA Northern Region

Thomas Watson and Matthew Fearon.

NSA Northern Ireland Region

Alexander Boyd and Matthew Robinson.

NSA South East Region

Clover Crosse and Tom Evcı.

NSA South West Region

Martin Harris and Owen Pengelly.

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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 second breeding sheep 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

Sale information at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/ram-sales
See page 4 for contact details of our Ram Sales Organisers.



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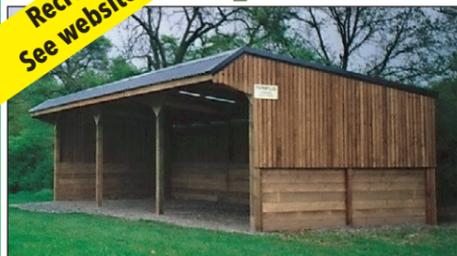
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Sheep worrying by dogs survey once again reveals concerning findings

As part of the yearly NSA sheep worrying by dogs campaign, this spring brought the release of important survey results.

Responses to the NSA survey of sheep farmers showed a high rate of incidents and severity, highlighted the continued failure of some dog owners to take full responsibility for their pets.

Grabbing the farming press headlines this year were survey findings discovering less than 5% of sheep farmers receive direct contact from owners of dogs that have been involved in an attack on their livestock. Almost 60% of survey respondents said they were left to come across evidence of an attack having taken place, rather than being alerted by the owner or another witness of an incident.

Results

Results confirm what many NSA members will sadly already be all too aware of – that sheep are often likely to be left suffering and injured for a period of time before being found. This delay is likely to lead to a greater chance of sheep death from serious injury and increases the distress for the farmer discovering the upsetting scenes.

Following the release of the survey results, NSA repeated its call for dog owners to take responsibility should their dog be involved in chasing and/or attacking sheep.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "NSA believes it is important to try and reach



NSA feels there is an increased need for dog owner education.

out to dog owners. Try and work with them, not against them, when it comes to this serious issue.

"It may feel daunting as a dog owner to come forward to a farmer to admit responsibility but openness can mean a more amicable resolution can hopefully be achieved. It is better than having to explain a 'failure to report' if the dog is able to be traced.

"Often dog owners simply do not realise their pet is capable of doing so much damage, and while we appreciate this crime is not one that any animal lover would set out to commit, taking responsibility is crucial and could help reduce cases for the future."

Incidence

In line with previous years' survey results, respondents once again reported an increase in the incidence of attacks. Around 76% believed cases had increased over the past three years with many identifying the increase in dog ownership during the covid-19 pandemic as a perceived cause of this.

NSA has worked tirelessly to raise awareness of the issue of sheep worrying by dogs, encouraging farmers to ensure they report each case to their local police force, and it appears this message is working. Just over 80% of survey respondents said they now report some, most or all of the attacks they experience. This increased reporting could be driving an improved response from

rural police forces, with survey contributors rating police response to reports as 6/10. This figure has increased significantly from ratings of 4/10 in 2021 and 3/10 in 2020.

Policy

The new draft Kept Animals Bill is proposing greater powers for police to trace and gain access to dogs involved in attacks. There is hope this could create an improved situation for those involved, although NSA has expressed its frustration in waiting for further detail on this legislation to be announced.

In the meantime, members are reminded that a range of graphics are available from NSA, including signs to display around farmland reminding walkers to keep dogs on a lead.

NSA Communications Manager Katie James comments: "NSA is happy to send out signs to members to help encourage responsible behaviour from dog owners when walking through or near fields with livestock. With the summer holidays approaching it is a crucial time to ensure your flock is as well protected as it can be from an increased number of walkers and holidaymakers. Please do get in touch if NSA can help supply you with signs or any other advice."

For more information on sheep worrying, including the full survey results, see www.sheepworrying.org.uk.

NSA believes recent legislation changes to tackle sheep worrying don't go far enough.



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Brexit legacy continues to impinge Northern Irish sheep farmers

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



Despite the latest round of elections resulting in a swing in the Members of the Legislative Assembly elected, at the time of writing we are no nearer a solution to the Northern Ireland Protocol and its far-reaching implications.

Stakeholders are working to alleviate the consequences impinging the movement of livestock to and from Great Britain and NI. Favourable solutions to the restrictions for the cattle industry are being considered, but greater biosecurity requirements and EU proposals continue to make it overly problematic for sheep breeders and livestock markets involved in the GB/NI sheep trade.

Rest assured, NSA is a key player in the negotiations and will be doing its utmost to find a satisfactory conclusion to an almost impossible situation.

Medicine access

Further issues inherited from Brexit are access to essential veterinary medicines and vaccines in our disease-combatting toolbox from the beginning of 2023. As GB is now classified as a third country by the EU, products will need to have batches retested before entering NI. NSA and other industry stakeholders have been working extensively with DAERA and Defra, making suggestions to find a derogation to avoid a health and welfare crisis.

Away from Brexit, Moredun has announced it will be leading a ground-breaking £220,000 project to tackle sheep scab in NI, enabling farmers, vets and other professionals to unite in tackling a disease that has tormented the sheep farming community and their flocks for decades.

Increasing costs

Global volatility has created a significant rise in agriculture input costs that has left farmers in a delicate position trying to balance cost versus income. NSA Northern Ireland Region is part of a group looking at costs, benchmarking and simulating practical solutions. It is obvious decisions made now will affect the availability of forage and feed next winter, when it is likely to be more expensive, so it is crucial advice is disseminated throughout the industry now, as a 'do nothing' approach is not an option.

The long-awaited Future of Agriculture policy document has been published. Unfortunately, the sheep sector has not been assured the same financial support as the suckler cow and beef sectors. NSA NI Region and Ulster Farmers Union have shared their disappointment with DAERA, which recognised the vulnerability of the sheep sector but was unwilling to provide solutions. Talks to find an equitable solution continue.



Welsh focus on a sustainable future

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



NSA Cymru/Wales Region has been busy increasing its visibility and support for the Made with Wool manifesto, which is soon to be launched.

This initiative provides a free service for farmers and wool producers to test their wool for micron quality, enabling producers a better understanding of the quality of their wool and the possibility of using improved genetics to lower the micron count within their flock and access higher wool prices.

NSA has also extensively supported the Welsh Affairs Committee in its calls to protect Welsh farmland. The report published in April called for greater transparency and information about the purchase of viable farmland in Wales by corporations using carbon offset schemes, citing that the greater contribution of agriculture to the Welsh economy (compared to England) makes it a significant cause of concern for the region.

NSA is continuing to work closely with stakeholders and Welsh Government to try to ensure agricultural land in Wales is not lost to bureaucracy and carbon offsetting.

Work is ongoing to tackle sheep scab, a concern across the industry in Wales and nationally. Welsh Government has funded several activities to test approaches around

scab control and raise awareness. I've been actively involved in stakeholder workshops and feel encouraged by the collaboration between Welsh Government and industry. Workshops have been available to encourage collaboration on improved biosecurity, enforcement, licencing and dip disposal. NSA Cymru/Wales Region is also involved in a recently formed sheep scab collaboration group.

Antimicrobials

NSA Cymru/Wales Region is working collaboratively with the Arwain DGC (responsible antimicrobial use) stakeholder group to reduce on-farm antibiotic use by improving productivity, animal health and welfare through new and innovative technology, as well as adoption of good practice. The project will also develop a collaborative approach to address antimicrobial resistance in animals and the environment.

Looking to the future there is now further clarity on future farming schemes and policy in Wales. A pilot Sustainable Farming Scheme will be announced around the Royal Welsh Show, along with the Agriculture Bill later in the autumn.

NSA is continuing to work collaboratively with stakeholders and government to ensure the best possible outcome for Welsh farming businesses - and encourages farmers and land managers to take part in these pilots if they can, to ensure future farming policy is fit for purpose.

More information about the wool micron testing project at www.gwnaedagwlan.cymru.



Small steps for Scottish agricultural policy

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



Despite a busy few months for NSA Scottish Region in the lead up to NSA Scot Sheep and the Royal Highland Show, policy work has remained a priority.

Food security and rising input costs remain at the forefront of our minds during political unrest. Despite this, prices remain high for outputs which is encouraging for the future.

Land prices in Scotland are continuing to skyrocket with tree planting, carbon credits and alternative land uses high on the agenda. Many businesses are considering these agile offers due to increasing volatility within the agricultural sector.

Wool value

With the majority of NSA members in the region now having finished lambing and looking ahead to shearing, one point of reassurance is the considerably higher wool price than this time last year, with a refreshed vision from British Wool to rediscover the value of wool on the world stage.

We are encouraged to see some stability from Scottish Government and some strides towards a Scottish agricultural policy. It is anticipated a consultation will be announced this summer, which will help shape the Scottish Agricultural Bill expected in 2023.

The National Test Programme announced last autumn builds on the work of the farmer-led groups and Agriculture Reform Implementation Oversight Board. It is to be supported by up to £51m over the next three years. Any

farming or crofting business that has an active business reference number and is Rural Payments and Services online-registered will be able to apply to receive a standard cost payment of £500 towards having a carbon audit performed for their business. This comes as an encouraging first step in the journey towards replacing the Common Agricultural Policy.

It is expected that the application process will be simple with no pre-approvals required. Further details will be issued soon with an anticipated pilot involving 1,500 farmers to be announced.

Policy

Despite the livestock industry being resilient, it is vital for our future viability to have robust government policy and funding that drives productivity, efficiency and the environment. Farmers have always been in the business of risk management and it is this that makes them resilient. Looking to the future, farmers and land managers are being asked to deliver on a range of public goods that risk overlooking the business, community and families that rely on a profitable farming enterprise.

The debate between food production, climate change mitigation or biodiversity cannot escalate to the point where one is prioritised over another. Finding a sustainable approach that delivers for the environment while feeding the nation will be key.



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NSA suggests a target of 75% self-sufficiency for future UK lamb production.

Food security versus environmental policy – a balancing act

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

Recent political turmoil around the world has drawn a sharp focus to food security with a realisation that, globally, we are reliant upon imports for many ingredients.

The recent UN Global Report on Food Crisis says 193 million people are acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance across 53 countries.

The definition of food security can vary widely but, in part, must be considered in the context of self-sufficiency. The UK currently produces 60% of its domestic food by value, part of which is exported as the UK imports 46% of the food it consumes. Compared to 1984, the UK was 78% sufficient, but the population has grown in that time frame by more than 12 million.

Resilience

The UN has called for a transformation of agriculture to make it more resilient to shocks, amid fears the war in Ukraine could soon cause a global food crisis. Together Russia and Ukraine produce 30% of the global wheat supply, with Ukraine in particular being seen as the world's breadbasket. The conflict has cut off supplies from Ukraine's ports, which once exported vast amounts of cooking oil as well as maize and wheat.

This has reduced global supplies and caused the price of alternatives to soar. Global food prices are almost 30% higher than the same time last year, according to the UN. It is well known the impact on agriculture has been far reaching, with input costs such as feed, fuel and fertiliser having tripled.

Sourcing staple foods from global markets can increase food supply resilience, as it reduces the risks associated with potential limited food availability. However, balance is key and often higher levels of self-sufficiency can be seen as preferable to reduce potential logistical, political and production risks, while ensuring any imports come from a diverse range of sources to increase resilience in food supply and diversity of diets.

There will be no sudden fix to a broken food system where primary ingredients cannot meet demand – but NSA has been highlighting that the UK must act now to ensure it is in a position to feed itself. NSA encourages a self-sufficiency target to be set to fulfil 75% of national basic nutritional needs.

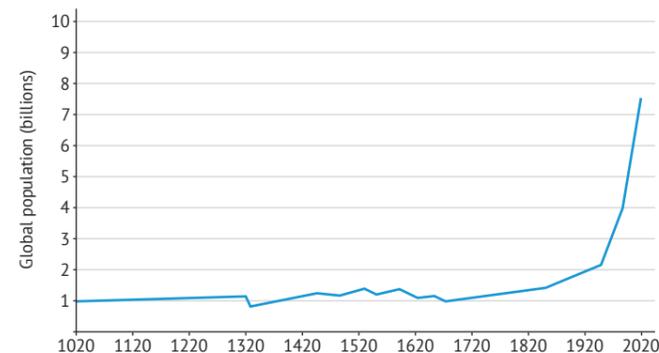
Challenges

Climate change, exploitation of natural capital, resource availability and biodiversity loss, are the biggest factors that threaten the stability and long-term sustainability of food production, and therefore food security. Ultimately there needs to be a balance between producing high yields to satisfy food demand and ensuring sustainable production and land use. It is still not clear what the true value of nature or natural resources really is, and whether it should come at the cost of food production, or in harmony with a thriving agricultural sector.



The UK risks offshoring our carbon, environmental and animal welfare footprint by relying on exports.

Fears of increasing pressure on food security with global population rising sharply from c1920.



As part of the Agriculture Act 2020, the UK Government committed to publishing a report relating to food security every three years. The first report, published last year, explores, past, current and future data to set a baseline for reports to come.

NSA hopes the long-awaited government food strategy will provide targets based on land use for all food categories. The UK has a maritime temperate climate, mainly fertile soils even in upland areas, and very few completely natural environments – all conducive to good levels of quality food production.

Our environment and biodiversity have evolved around human land management activity. As a principle, food production and environmental management should be integrated rather than be separate and conflicting. The UK has around 60% land mass as grassland and NSA believes strategies should be employed to ensure its sustainable management to deliver a

low impact food production in the form of livestock production (red meat and dairy) while also optimising its positive impact on carbon storage and sequestration, biodiversity, soil quality, wildlife environments, water quality, flood management, culture, heritage and landscape.

Looking ahead

As an industry, sheep farming is fortunate it can provide high quality protein while improving the environment. UK national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty are home to 75% of upland farmers with a huge proportion of protected landscapes coming under private ownership or tenancies. Almost 37% of the UK's national sheep flock graze in these protected landscapes.

The Lake District's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site is specifically attributed to farming creating and maintaining the landscapes we enjoy today. Farming practices in these areas, including commons in many national parks, are vital in sustaining and improving these particular landscapes. Failing to support and nurture their viability now would have profound detrimental impacts not only to the landscape, but nature, biodiversity and the rural communities and economies within.

NSA's strongly held position is that our future farming and environmental policies, and related schemes, must deliver for the environment without compromising food production. Currently we run the risk of moving our carbon and environmental footprint, not to mention our animal welfare footprint, around the globe by in shipping products we could be growing and rearing on our doorstep.

With free trade agreements on the horizon from Australia and New Zealand, it is vital the UK Government realises the benefit of a thriving sheep industry on home soil, not only to the environment but the economy and feeding the nation.

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Regenerative agriculture – a real solution or a passing trend?

By Emma Bradbury, NSA

With farming currently facing a myriad of challenges, is there a role for regenerative agriculture as the industry finds a way to balance food production with sustainability?

Agriculture has faced many challenges in the past. The big issues of producing enough to feed ourselves versus producing too much and having to dump it. And smaller, more specific challenges, including health and welfare, disease outbreaks, contradictory government policy, weather extremes resulting in droughts or floods, a recession, a pandemic and, to top it off, a global conflict.

The livestock industry has been at the sharp end of many of those crises. However, it has not impacted the sector's ability to adapt and advance businesses.

Nitrogen fixing

Taking a look back through history, agriculture was praised for introducing nitrogen fixing legumes, sown since the Middle Ages in the form of peas, beans and vetches. From the mid-17th century farmers began to establish systems of crop rotations, growing clover, both white and red, for the same purpose and, by the 19th century, had dramatically increased the quantity of

nitrogen in the soil available for cereal crops. In Norfolk, for example, between 1700 and 1850, the doubling of the area of legumes and a switch to clover tripled the rate of symbiotic nitrogen fixation.

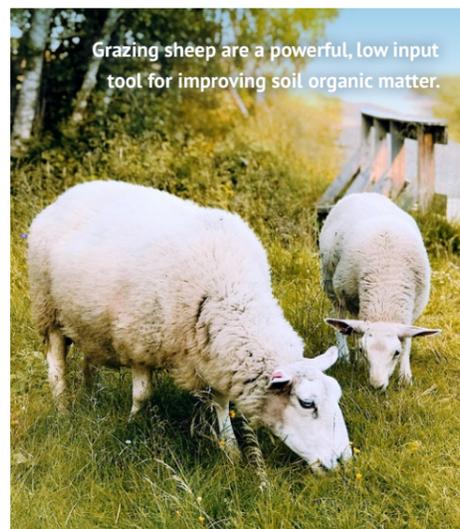
This new system of farming was deemed to be remarkable because of its sustainability. The output of food was increased dramatically, without endangering the long-term viability of agriculture.

Population

But just as sustainable agriculture had been achieved, the population began to grow at a phenomenal rate and, in turn, the demand for food, the development of chemical fertilisers and other external inputs undermined consumer requirement for sustainability.

An essentially organic agriculture was gradually replaced by a farming system that depended on energy-intensive inputs reliant on the exploitation of fossil fuels.

However, the climate has now and is continuing to become more extreme. Even if we hit targets of 1.5°C warming by 2050, we still face serious environmental and social pressures. This is what's driving future policies – to focus on what industries can do to lower emissions, lock up more carbon and 'build back greener' futures.



Regenerative agriculture for some is providing a vehicle in which to do so. Essentially a system of farming that focuses on enhancing ecosystems, with soil health at its heart. It's a lower input style of farming, with less reliance on cultivations, artificial fertilisers and pesticides, and a focus on plant and crop diversity with minimal soil disturbance. The aim is to improve soil health through rebuilding organic matter and consequently improving soil life.

Continued overleaf.



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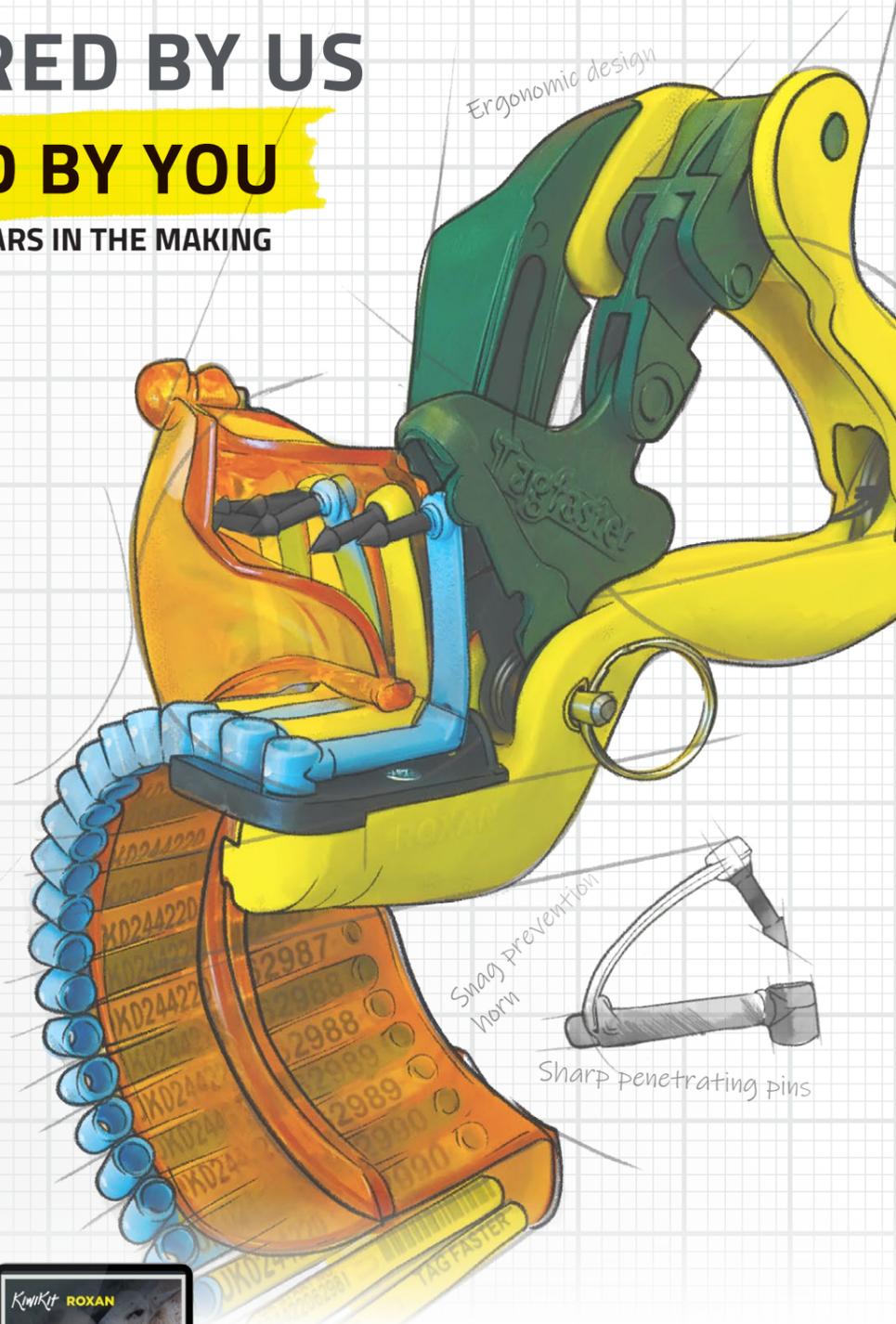
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Integrating sheep into arable systems promotes soil health and fertility.



▶ Relating this to sheep, they can be a major driver for regenerative farming, but there is also a strong interest in the sheep flock – not just in them regenerating the soil and cropping system, but being regenerative in their own right. This can relate to the responsible use of inputs, from feeds to veterinary medicines, and wider general responsibility.

Carbon building

Many aspects of regenerative farming are things many sheep, beef and arable farmers will be employing already, including min. or no till, cover cropping, crop diversity, livestock integration and grazing management. Governments like this due to the opportunities of building carbon in the soil. But farmers like it too, because it delivers those benefits that were seen back in the 17th century with the use of rotational farming. Sheep and beef farmers are utilising methods such as strip and cell grazing, and results are now speaking for themselves in terms of improved grassland, better regrowth and deeper roots that are helping to feed the soil.

Farmers have also started bringing livestock on to their arable fields to provide natural fertiliser,

akin to the previous mixed farming practice of keeping livestock alongside growing crops, a system that went out with the arrival of more intensive methods of farming.

Livestock have a key role in future, greener

Regeneration in arable systems

John Pawsey, NSA member and mixed farmer in Suffolk, took his arable enterprise into organic production in 2007. Poor yields and high weed burdens led him to start undersowing and utilising break crops. At this time he introduced sheep into the business.

Mr Pawsey explains "Sheep have brought more fertility to the ground, resulting in healthier crops, better weed control and another string to the bow of our increasingly diversified business. Perhaps most importantly, they have also brought enormous pleasure to all of us who work on the farm, as well as the people who come to visit us."



John Pawsey.

farming solutions and will be especially important in feeding an increasingly hungry planet, without crippling the life support systems on which we depend.

Delivery

How we deliver on both aspects is the important question, the solution to which will require action on a variety of fronts.

Increasing evidence shows that grazing livestock such as sheep, cattle and other ruminants are a powerful method of protecting our soil, providing highly nutritious food for us in the process, relying on few inputs other than rain and a bit of sunshine.

Grasslands have a strong capacity for storing carbon, which is not only the main driver in helping to prevent climate change but also the key ingredient in improving soil health and making soil more resistant to extreme weather.

See future editions of this magazine for the role of regenerative agriculture in grass-based systems and permanent pasture enterprises.

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Alastair likes the versatility of the North Country Cheviot breed, saying it is suited for his variable grazing.



Passion for pedigree breeding at heart of Northern Ireland flock

By Katie James, NSA

Coming home to the family farm in Tempo, County Fermanagh, 12 years ago, Alastair Armstrong returned to a lifelong interest in breeding pedigree livestock and hasn't looked back since.

Having worked for several years as an electrician, Alastair now leads work on the farm alongside his father Sinclair. Since February, he is also balancing this with his new role as NSA Northern Ireland Region Chair.

The farm has gradually increased its numbers and now runs 250 North Country Cheviot ewes plus 100 gimmers across the farm's 160 acres (65ha) plus 1,200 acres (485ha) of hill grazing on the heather/grouse moor of the nearby Aughtentaine Estate. In addition, Alastair shepherds the 100-ewe flock owned by the estate.

Alastair is a devoted advocate of the North Country Cheviot, valuing the breed's versatility and ability to both drive performance on the home farm and thrive on the estate's hill ground.

He comments: "The versatility within the breed makes it suit the varied ground types we have available to us. The Park type, with their good size and length, are run on our lower ground fields. The Hill type are perfectly suited for our less favoured ground, being a smaller, compact sheep able to make use of the heather and mountain grasses."

Crossbreeding

Until recently the farm and estate's flocks were bred pure but a trial of using a Bluefaced Leicester tup to produce Cheviot Mules proved successful, leading to 30 ewes from the estate flock being put to the same tup again this year.

"The strong trade for Cheviot Mules was the initial reason for us trying the cross from just a small number of our ewes that we would have otherwise sold," says Alastair.

"Due to the difficulties bringing breeding stock from the UK to NI, the demand for homebred Mules has increased, meaning there is a good market opportunity for us."



Alastair Armstrong

Following the successful cross, Alastair has also introduced a Border Leicester this year to produce Scotch Halfbred lambs from 20 of the farm's ewes. He says these 'chunkier' lambs fit nicely with his breeding aims and provide opportunity to meet the demands of a broader customer base.

The Park-type Cheviots lamb indoors starting in March, with most of the hill flock lambing outdoors but on lower ground in April through to May.

The lambing percentage of both flocks has increased over recent years. An improvement Alastair credits to using a mineral drench instead of a bolus. "We use a mineral drench four to six weeks before tupping and then again at scanning. I believe this has helped bring our barren rate down remarkably from 10% to 2.5-3%. Our rate of twins has also increased slightly," he adds.

"Otherwise, in general, I try and use as little medication as possible, especially the highest priority critically important antibiotics. These are medicines, like anthelmintics, that need to be protected and only used when absolutely necessary.

"So many farmers jump straight on the newer group four and five wormers because they will kill everything. But practices like this mean in another few years we will have the same levels of resistance as with some of the older groups.

The only time we use group four or five wormers is on imported stock when they go into quarantine."

The farm vaccinates against abortion and clostridial diseases but chooses to monitor risk rather than vaccinate against pasteurella or lameness. To minimise disease, the farm only brings in rams and a small number of replacement ewes if a particular bloodline is desired.

Restrictions

With the majority of rams being sourced from sales in Scotland the farm is experiencing real difficulty with the restrictions now in place when importing stock to NI. Alastair explains: "When we buy a ram from mainland UK, it is 60 days before it can enter NI and this is then followed by a further five months in quarantine at home. Restrictions on scrapie monitoring since the UK's departure from EU and MV accreditation mean sourcing rams can be frustrating.

"When you are buying valuable rams, you want to be able to use them as soon as possible. We often buy a handful of ewes to put with them before they can run with the main ewe flock so we can get some bloodlines started. We also take semen from them as soon as we can as an insurance policy against illness or death."

The Park-type Cheviots are performance recorded with Signet, with Alastair finding a lot of buyers now ask for this data. Ram sales are a good source of income for the farm with most sold privately off farm, including a number to Europe. This includes the Republic of Ireland, as Leam Farm is only 20 miles from the border.

Having built a good reputation for quality stock the intention for the future is to increase numbers further. But with input costs spiralling, Alastair says numbers will be kept static this year.

"Despite lamb prices being good for the past year, looking at the latest data, prices have now fallen 10% on this time last year and all our inputs are up 30-300%, he says.

"Not only are increasing costs putting pressure on the farm, changing weather patterns are also creating difficulties. We had bad weather in February this year when usually we would be covering all our ground with slurry. This was put back until the end of March so grass growth is behind where we would like."

Most of the farm's fields are able to carry stock all year round, apart from being closed off for six weeks before silaging. "We try and make 50-60 round bales of good hay/haylage for the sheep and 250 round bales of silage for our small number of pedigree Limousin and Charolais cattle," he adds.

Stock not sold for breeding will likely be sold as stores through the local markets, Clogher and Enniskillen, although good grass last year meant the farm was able to finish all lambs for the first time in a while.

Ambitions

Alastair says: "The intention is to rear everything from grass alone. That is my breeding aim – to produce quality stock from grass. Although we will offer a little creep to lambs just before weaning, as we believe this helps minimise the shock of being removed from the ewes."

The farm and Alastair's aim to run as an efficient system as possible is an objective Alastair believes must be encouraged on all NI farms through Government support schemes.

He comments: "Recent promises of new farm support in NI have focussed on support for beef but the sheep sector's needs must be urgently addressed. Sheep farmers need to be supported to

increase efficiency through technology and labour saving devices. Allowing easier measurements of key performance indicators, such as daily liveweight gain, killing out percentages and lambing percentages, must be taken into consideration. It is no longer appropriate to manage sheep the way we always have done."

The respect of others for Alastair's views mean, in addition to his NSA role, he is also Ulster Farming Union Hill Farming Chair and a North Country Cheviot Sheep Society council member.

He concludes: "I became involved with NSA after joining the committee several years ago. I find the meetings and networking opportunities very interesting and look forward to being further involved for my term as Chair."

Farm facts

- Flock of 350 pedigree North Country Cheviots across the 160 acre (65ha) farm plus 1,200 acres (485ha) of heather/grouse moor of nearby Aughtentaine Estate.
- Most stock bred pure for private and society sales.
- Small number of pedigree Charolais and Limousin cattle.
- Focus on producing quality stock from forage with minimal inputs.
- Alastair elected NSA Northern Ireland Region Chairman in 2022, as well as serving on several other organisations' boards and committees.
- One of seven siblings all involved in family businesses, including an on-farm sawmill supplying logs and kindling locally and to major retailers.

“It is no longer appropriate to manage sheep the way we always have done.”
Alastair Armstrong



Chunkier Scotch Halfbred lambs are the result of a trial with a Border Leicester ram.



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Supply chain focus for Ambassadors

By Katie James, NSA



This year's cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors gathered in the Welsh borders for an informative and inspirational delivery session in May, focused on the supply chain.

Coming together for the second time, the group of young sheep farmers took part in farm, market, abattoir and retailer visits and heard from industry experts covering key topics.

NSA Communications Manager Katie James, who coordinates NSA Next Generation activity, comments: "Coming back together having spent a few busy months lambing, the group quickly returned to making the most of the opportunity the Ambassador programme offers them, getting fully immersed in the visits and engaging with industry experts."

"It was a varied and fascinating few days and, as always, the group demonstrated real enthusiasm and interest in all aspects. Our thanks go to the farmers and speakers who gave their time to pass on valuable advice."

Visits

Learning more about the UK supply chain, the group visited forward thinking farms to hear about their systems and selling options whether through markets, contracts with processors or direct to the consumer. They completed a fascinating marketing best practice training session with AHDB, then Farmers Fresh covered selection of stock for slaughter through to the ready-to-sell product.

The group visited British Wool to discuss options for wool sales and also heard from Signet on how recorded genetics can promote the sale of breeding stock from farm.



The NSA Next Generation Ambassadors visited various aspects of the sheep supply chain.

NSA Next Generation is funded by NSA regions and ram sales, with widespread industry support.

Meet the 2022 Ambassadors at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk via the 'Ambassador Group' tab.

NSA offers free mentoring through joint competition



Three lucky young sheep farmers will have access to free mentoring from members of the Register of Sheep Advisers (RoSA) this summer thanks to a joint NSA Next Generation and RoSA competition.

Selected at random from a flood of entries, the three winners are being matched with an independent sheep adviser to support them with their sheep enterprises in an area they inspire to improve.

Euan Sanderson from South Lanarkshire is one of the winners. He says: "I'm currently working in partnership with my dad on our sheep, beef and arable farm. The sheep enterprise consists of 330 bought in Scotch/Cheviot Mules with the Texel ewe lambs being kept. We are also running about 550 homebred Texel crosses topped with a Beltex.

"Our breeding programme needs work. It's a traditional system let down by the bought-in sheep underperforming. We would also like to consider how best to lamb, graze and winter the flock. I'm looking forward to working with the RoSA expert on these topics."

The focus for Josh Starling from Essex will be on nutrition. He comments: "We currently buy what we can afford to grow our numbers, which are currently 115 females. We graze permanent pasture from February to November and then stubble turnips November to February. I would like advice on grazing but more specifically cover crops, root crops and break crops and how to get the most out of them.

"My plans and hopes for the farm would be to rent more land so I can increase flock size enough to enable me to farm officially part time, with the objective to move to farming full time."

Luke Scott Paul from North Yorkshire makes up the trio. He says: "My brother, parents and I are tenant farmers and lambed 530 ewes this year. The flock is a variety of breeds predominantly put to a Charollais tup.

"I'm looking forward to receiving advice on improving fertility and, looking to the future, advice on how we can expand the business to support both mine and my brother's families."

NSA will follow the three competition winners and share their progress in future editions of *Sheep Farmer* magazine.



Euan Sanderson.



Josh Starling.



Luke Scott.

Useful traits include easy lambing, lamb survival and overall conformation.



NSA Next GENE-eration winners benefiting from genetics boost



By Katie James, NSA NSA Next GENE-eration Giveaway

Last summer, as part of a new initiative, NSA Next Generation teamed up with Kaiapoi Romneys to launch the NSA Next GENE-eration giveaway, gifting six Romney rams to worthy young sheep farmers.

Having just completed their first lambing season with the ram's progeny, NSA recently caught up with some of the lucky winners to see how the rams have performed, the immediate impact of the new genetics and the long-term plans for the flocks.

All the successful entrants to the ram giveaway were managing or looking to manage extensive, low input, outdoor lambing flocks.

Lambing

Ed Bray, a winner from Lincolnshire, reports: "Our giveaway Romney ram was let loose last November with 204 first and second crop ewes, alongside another shearling ram. He ran with the ewes for five weeks and worked well. We scanned overall 156% with 2.6% barren. I was a little disappointed as we'd scanned around 170% the previous two years. I suspect it was due to a copper deficiency.

"We started lambing in April and were fortunate with the weather. The ewes lambed easily and the lambs had plenty of vigour. Mortality has also seemed lower.

"Our aim is to keep improving the standard of our sheep, and we are also increasing the size of the business in line with opportunities that present themselves. Our long-term goal

is to build a business that can support our growing family. The addition of the ram from the competition has certainly helped us to move a little closer to this goal."

Stephen George, a winner from Powys, comments: "Our Romney ram from the giveaway served more than 90 pure Romney ewes, which all lambed on an outdoor, grass-based system this April with very little assistance.

"We have been pleased with traits such as easy lambing, an instinct to get up and start suckling, survivability and overall conformation.

"The genetics offer a balance of maternal instinct and meat yield for prime lambs, which seems to be linked to the Myomax gene. The ewes served also had a very high twinning rate.

"We will continue with this system for the next few years, helping us to increase the size of our Romney flock at a faster rate if quality ewe lambs can continue to be produced that fit into the high performing, low cost, low labour system that we aim to be running."

Replacements

Jethro and Lulu Agnew from Norfolk also won a ram. They say: "We were pleased to return home with our new Kaiapoi Romney ram. Our principal aim was to utilise the ram to improve our flock genetics and enable us to breed our own replacement ewes for our commercial Romney flock. Replacements had previously been bought in, which gave us little control over the genetics and increased biosecurity risks.

"It is proving an interesting trial combining this with the introduction of new commercial rams. It is allowing us to potentially use the different

sires for different purposes and consider what they bring to a flock run on the same system.

"Our outdoor Romney flock started lambing in mid-April with none requiring assistance or intervention. The statistics continue to be positive with 100% survival to date. His progeny appear to be a good bunch of well put together, strong lambs and we are excited to see their progression.

"This competition is hopefully going to be pivotal to the future bloodlines of our flock. Based in a predominantly arable area, we hope to be able to share the benefits of low input sheep in regenerative farming systems in the local area."

NSA was approached by Kaiapoi Romneys to facilitate this giveaway, linked to a grant received from the Frank Parkinson Agricultural Trust. NSA welcomes opportunities to work on similar initiatives.



Winner Ed Bray is impressed with the progeny of the gifted ram.

Positive safety behaviours such as wearing a helmet during ATV use will save lives.

Action needed to stop farming being the UK's deadliest job

July brings the return of the annual farm safety week, with the industry coming together to promote the most important of topics for all agricultural sectors.

Despite this annual call to action to improve on-farm safety, numbers of serious incidents and fatalities remain high. During the past two years numbers have increased, leading to farming retaining its reputation as the UK's most dangerous job.

The Farm Safety Partnership is an industry collaboration leading the work to improve this record. The partnership consists of organisations representing a broad spectrum of agricultural interests, including the large farming membership organisations, auctioneers, training providers, farming press, and machinery dealers. NSA is one of the key partners within the group.

Raising awareness

The group discuss how to coordinate activities to increase safety awareness, while tailoring delivery to engage farmers in the most appropriate way. Organisations involved in the partnership are encouraged to develop unique and complementary ways to engage with farmers, their workers and other people who may have an influence on farm safety. Throughout its work, the aim is for a constant message and to work together towards a safer industry.

The goals of the partnership are:

- To provide leadership to improve the safety of farms and allied industries.
- To reduce the numbers of deaths and major injuries to farmers, workers and anyone else coming into contact with farming activities.

Recent analysis of fatality data from the Health and Safety Executive once again rated farming as the most dangerous profession in the UK, with 133 fatalities recorded between 2016 and 2021. Of those, the highest proportions of deaths came from accidents involving falling from height or moving vehicles.

Avoid complacency

Although sheep farming may be considered as one of the less dangerous sectors within agriculture, sheep farmers must not be complacent to the risk, especially considering accidents involving all-terrain vehicles (ATV), an essential piece of equipment on most UK sheep farms, that frequently contribute to the sobering fatality records.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Farm Safety Week campaign, taking place from Monday 18th to Monday 25th July 2022. During the week

By Katie James, NSA



NSA will be working alongside the partnership, as well as the Farm Safety Foundation (also known as Yellow Wellies) to reflect on the campaign's 10 years' of achievements.

The week will also highlight the work still left to do to raise awareness of the importance of safety in agriculture, including encouraging positive behaviours such as wearing a helmet every time an ATV is used.

NSA encourages members to share Farm Safety Week messages, whether via social media using the hashtag #FarmSafetyWeek, or by ensuring notices highlighting safety are displayed around farm.



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Meat processors also under sustainability scrutiny

By Lucas Daglish, BMPA



UK primary meat processors are no exception when it comes to the challenge posed to every country in the world to deliver on 2050 emissions targets and support the United Nations' preferred limit to restrict global warming to +1.5°C.

Steps being taken in this direction are important for the whole UK red meat supply chain, in terms of ensuring a positive message around consumption of lamb and other products.

The structured, science-based targets used to measure progress in agriculture, primary and secondary meat processing, transport, retailing and consumption is split into three levels. The first two address carbon emissions within a business' operations and utilities emissions as a direct consequence of its activities. The third level is more problematic, requiring carbon emissions to be recorded for the entire supply chain back to farm, and retailers are beginning to look to their primary processors for this data.

Net zero

Although statements linked to net zero (or carbon neutral) have been grabbing the media headlines and attention of the UK Government, this isn't the only sustainability measure requiring action. It is well documented that the carbon emissions for UK lamb are almost half the global average. But, with increasing requests from retailers for progress and reporting data across the wider sustainability agenda, it should be no surprise that work has been underway in the meat processing sector for some time to

adopt a more holistic approach to end-to-end livestock sustainability.

Nevertheless, in the same way as on-farm action is needed, there are several interconnected sustainability tasks that members of the British Meat Processors Association are working to address. With specific commitments to reduce environmental impacts and some stretching targets, most are making good progress.



Focus areas include action to effectively monitor and reduce water usage. Rainwater harvesting, water use metering, maintenance of plumbing systems and the treatment of wastewater to reduce pollution are just some of the current initiatives in progress.

Also under scrutiny is the sustainable procurement and reduction of packaging and other factory waste materials, the effective control and disposal of food waste from abattoir operations and ensuring procurement decisions support the maintenance of biodiversity and the reduction in deforestation and pesticide use.

Animal welfare is a key priority for processors and will continue to be vital in delivering consistent high quality meat products. Good animal husbandry and stringently compliant

abattoir practices are critical to ensure all the hard work conducted on farm is carried through to the processing stage.

Good animal welfare underpins not only the processors' legal compliance but also their reputation with farmers and the wider community. It's also key to maintaining consistent levels of efficiency. Although not immediately obvious, good animal welfare is a fundamental element of environmental sustainability best practice as well as an ethical imperative – a view that BMPA is aware NSA shares.

Labour

As a labour-intensive sector, people are a key asset and fundamental to the continued availability of high-quality and sustainable meat products. Recruitment, training, career development and employee wellbeing including health and safety measures support consistent productivity, ensuring progress towards all sustainability objectives is maintained.

As part of their contribution to both carbon reduction and wider sustainability objectives, meat processors are also investing in sources of renewable energy such as anaerobic digestion, solar panels and wind energy. Both on farm and across the food supply chain, improvements are being made to refrigeration systems and electricity metering equipment is being installed to monitor those improvements in efficiency.

All these initiatives are good news for sheep farmers, the livestock sector and meat processors alike. By enhancing the collective reputation of the meat industry there is the potential to ensure the continued consumption of sustainably produced red meat as part of a healthy and balanced diet.



Farmers and processors are investing in renewable sources of energy.

Demand is up for fleeces passing through British Wool depots.

BUSINESS



British Wool promises immediate lift to prices and longer-term optimism

British Wool claims it will be making payments worth £8.4m to members for the 2021 clip, an increase to an overall average of 34.5p/kg.

Andrew Hogley, Chief Executive, comments: "The 135% increase since 2020 is down to improved auction prices for wool last year alongside a push to reduce operational costs. With the challenges the industry faces, we are really pleased this year's payments are an improvement. Although the price is not yet where we would like it to be, it represents a huge recovery since the difficulties of 2020. We continue to work hard to enhance returns further."

British Wool collects, grades and tests wool on behalf of its members to offer a consistent product for buyers and maximise the prices received at auction. Alongside this the organisation aims to continue to drive demand for British wool across the supply chain and to consumers.

Mr Hogley continues: "We are optimistic the strong demand we have seen over recent months will be sustained, that the recovery in the wool market will continue through 2022, and that this will result in further price increase for the 2022 wool clip. Everything we do has the primary aim of adding value to British wool to boost payments to our members. As always, grade returns are determined on the average auction price for the season."

Updated prices

British Wool estimates that returns for the 2021 clip will be around 40p/kg for many core grades, around 30p/kg for Blackface wool and around 15p for Welsh and Swaledale. In all cases this is a significant improvement on 2020 prices, when sales were impacted badly by the pandemic.

"We recognise our members have a choice to deliver wool to us. On the whole our returns are competitive relative to the prices offered by our competitors and in many cases are significantly higher. However, unlike our competitors, we don't make a profit from wool. We sell on behalf of our members and deduct the cost of marketing and processing. The more wool we have to sell, the lower our costs per kg and the better returns are for all British Wool members," he says.

British Wool says it has increased efforts to reduce business costs, bringing about savings of around £1m/year. Mr Hogley says: "This is equivalent to around 7p/kg wool, which is passed back to members. The free haulage offer introduced in 2021 will continue this year. Meaning members

who take wool to any British Wool drop points will not be charged onward carriage.

"British Wool's primary aim is to maximise the value of wool for our members. Now more than ever, it is crucial that farmers work together and market their wool through British Wool so that, collectively, we can maximise returns for this year's clip and beyond."



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Putting Welsh Lamb to the tenderness test

Meat tenderness can now be scientifically assessed.

Internationally renowned technology is helping maintain the quality and reputation of PGI Welsh Lamb, maintaining its position as a first choice for buyers at home and abroad, says Owen Roberts of HCC.

The Welsh Lamb Meat Quality Project focuses on meat tenderness and follows consumer panel testing, using the acknowledged, scientifically robust, Warner Bratzler Shear Force method. This measures the physical force required to cut through precisely measured samples of cooked meat, with tender pieces requiring less force than tougher ones.

Dr Roberts explains: "The aim is to fine tune the elements of lamb production and processing that influence tenderness, with taste one of the most important factors prompting consumer satisfaction and repeat purchase.

"The project looks at how on-farm and processing factors affect the eating quality of lamb, as well as its nutritional value. Trial three is investigating the effect of lamb gender and seasonality. It follows two previous trials on muscle cut, breed type, meat ageing period and lamb finishing diet."

Testing

For the shear force testing, PGI lamb chump muscles have been selected from four time points – May, August, November and February – with a mix of female, entire and wether lambs on each occasion. This has amounted to 288 lambs samples from 26 farms across Wales, sourced from four major processors to ensure an integrated approach within the supply chain that is representative of the Welsh sheep industry.

Elizabeth Swancott, also from HCC, says: "Tenderness can be influenced by many different factors across the supply chain, from farm to

processing, packaging, storage, cooking and pre slaughter stress. There are also processing factors, such as hanging methods and electrical stimulation.

"But, also, there is animal age. This is quite a persistent factor in the seasonality trial, as we are looking at lamb of different ages at slaughter. We already know intramuscular fat levels can have an influence, which will also be affected by age.

"We know tenderness has a low heritability and this is generally a low to moderate influence. There are ways of breeding for tenderness, but it is mostly influenced by those processing factors, especially pre slaughter stress."

Results

The results are expected at the end of the year. The report will form the basis for industry discussions to further understand what on farm and processing factors could be influencing eating quality, to see what can be done to maintain or even maximise meat tenderness.

The shear force project results will be combined with consumer scores taken at the previous taste panels to understand how meat

tenderness can be impacted. By the end of the project 2,000 consumers will all have taste tested seven samples of lamb each, commenting on tenderness, juiciness, flavour, aroma and overall liking in various samples of cooked lamb.

Dr Roberts concludes: "It is yet another element in building the story of Welsh Lamb. The science behind the tenderness, as well as the taste, will help to reinforce the message that it ranks among the best in the world."

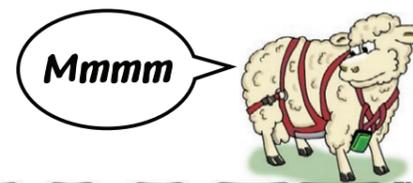
The Welsh Lamb Meat Quality Project is one of three five-year projects in the Welsh Government/EU-funded Red Meat Development Programme.



Cooked samples of Welsh Lamb are prepared at the laboratory for tenderness analysis.



Results will help inform farmers and processors on what factors influence lamb tenderness.



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Managing summer brassicas – establishment and reducing the risks

By Dr Liz Genever, contributor

Summer brassicas can play a role in boosting feed quality and quantity in late summer and early autumn for growing cattle or lambs - but there are risks that need to be managed.

Examples of summer brassicas include rape/kale hybrids, forage rape or turnips, as they have shorter time to maturity, normally 80-90 days.

They are a useful break crop for a re-seed, as it helps to break up the turf as well as break the pest cycle. Normally a first cut of silage is taken, with the grass being sprayed off just before the cut. Then the crop can be drilled into the grass stubble. It could be an opportunity for well composted muck or slurry to be spread to meet its nutrient requirements.

Establishment

The ambition would be to direct drill the brassicas to maintain the moisture in the soil during the drier time of the year and to reduce establishment costs. It also helps provide more solid ground for grazing if the weather becomes wet. However, if there is a soil structural or weed issue, then more cultivations may be needed.

Nutrient management is a key factor. Like for all crop establishment, it is important soil tests are done in advance to ensure any deficiencies are dealt with. Brassicas respond well to good soil fertility and are particularly responsive to nitrogen (N) and phosphorus (P). Any lime required could be applied onto the grass stubble. This also helps to counter the acidifying effect of the decaying grass plants.

With the price of N this year it is likely artificial N rates may be reduced, with organic manures being used after establishment to help achieve

Nutrient recommendations (kg/ha) for forage rape, swedes and stubble turnips (grazed). Source: AHDB.

Nutrient	SNS, P or K index						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Nitrogen	100	80	60	40	0-40	0	0
Phosphate	85	55	25	0	0	0	0
Potash	110	80	50 (2-) 20 (2+)	0	0	0	0

requirements. For example, applying 10t/ha of farmyard manures will provide around 19kg/ha of P and 72kg/ha of potash (K). However, it would only provide around 6kg of available N.

It is important nitrogen is not under-supplied, especially as the breakdown of the grass plants will take nitrogen out of the system and brassicas are very responsive to N. For summer brassicas, no additional nitrogen should be used for the growing crop to avoid nitrate poisoning, unless grazing re-growth.

Grazing

The key thing to remember about summer brassicas is to ensure they are not grazed before they have reached maturity. Days to maturity is normally quoted on the seed mix. This is because immature plants will be high in nitrates and increase the risk of nitrate poisoning in stock.

Once they have passed their maturity dates, the risk is reduced, but never removed. A forage sample can be taken and nitrate levels greater than 0.5% means the crop is not yet safe to graze.

The risk this year may be lower as N applications may be lower, but use of organic materials and their variable patterns of availability mean forage testing may be useful.



A cold or cloudy spell during grazing could also affect nitrate levels.

Nitrate poisoning causes difficulty breathing, staggering or muscle tremors, weakness collapse, or even sudden death. Think about the availability of long fibre before and during grazing and careful transition incorporating diet adaptation (for example one to two hours on the crop at the start, working to full time on the crop full time by seven days, may reduce the risk).

Photosensitisation can also occur in stock, also known as rape scald, particularly in white headed animals in sunny conditions. If animals show symptoms of hair loss, swollen ears or sores on their faces, they should be removed from the crop immediately.

Some types of brassica, such as forage rape, rape/kale hybrids and leafy turnips, can be re-grazed if drilled early (around June). During the first grazing they are grazed to 5-10cm, ideally by block or strip grazing. Animals are removed, N can be applied and after four to six weeks the plant should be available for re-grazing.

Some farmers are using summer brassicas in late summer grass re-seeds. This means the brassicas can be grazed off to provide dry matter before the grass starts to get going.



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



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Getting more lamb from grass with rotational grazing and monitoring

By Dr Aurélie Aubry and Tara Meeke, AFBI Hillsborough

Grazed grass is the cheapest feed source for sheep farms, yet many systems are not achieving much more than 50% of their grass growing potential.

Many lowland grass-based livestock production systems in the UK have the potential to grow 11-15tDM/ha/yr. But, it is estimated many achieve only 50-60% of this.

There is clear evidence of the benefits of rotational grazing compared to set stock systems, to improve grass production, grass utilisation and lamb liveweight gain.

Benefits

Setting up rotational strategies can represent significant costs, but benefits include increased grass utilisation. Even just 1tDM/ha can result in an increase in lamb output per hectare, representing an estimated increase in profit of more than £230/ha/year. A key challenge is to determine the optimal number of paddocks to include within a grazing system. To address this, it is crucial to monitor both animal and grass performance.

AFBI has compared a four and eight paddock sheep grazing system using the same number of ewes and grassland area, as well as the same pre and post grazing targets.

Over two years, grass yields were higher from the eight-paddock system by 1tDM/ha/year, with no significant effect on grass quality. However, lambs grazing the four-paddock system had higher daily liveweight gain from six weeks onwards, reducing days to slaughter by 36 days in comparison to those on the eight-paddock system. There were no effects on carcase quality.

A similar study on five commercial lowland farms in Northern Ireland found higher grass production and utilisation on the eight-paddock system but higher lamb growth on the four-paddock systems up to weaning.

Results indicate a greater number of paddocks offers opportunities for silage production or higher stocking rates but may result in an increase in days to slaughter. Farmer feedback suggested, once the eight-paddock system was established, it was easy to manage, especially up to weaning. Having the flexibility to take paddocks in or out in response to grass shortages (during prolonged dry weather) and excesses was a key benefit.

Measuring weekly grass covers is crucial to inform these decisions, as it can provide a grass wedge in spring (see diagram). Using plate meters is important, as well as setting more ambitious targets.

Monitoring

GrassCheck NI and GrassCheck GB involves sheep farmers taking weekly grass growth figures for each of their fields using a plate meter. Data shows grass yields can be much higher than anticipated, often greater than 8tDM/ha/year on lowland farms. These levels of performance are very encouraging, demonstrating real potential for sheep farmers to produce grass well above the current estimated levels of 4-5tDM/ha/year.

Grass management software tools are particularly beneficial when used collectively between farms. They can be used to optimise grazing days on each paddock, decide which paddock to be grazed next (post grazing targets are 4cm or 1,600kgDM/ha), and identify grass surpluses if covers are greater than 3,500kg DM/ha (see diagram). They also quantify the variation in paddock yields. This information can be used to



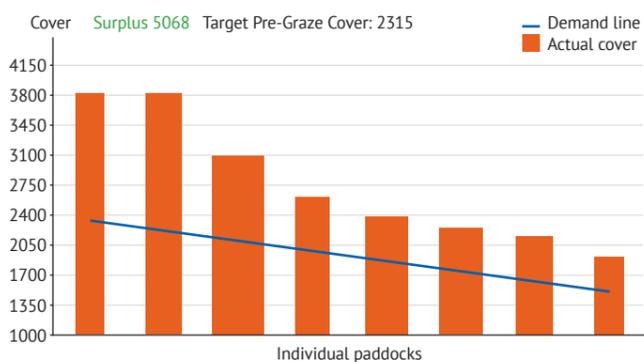
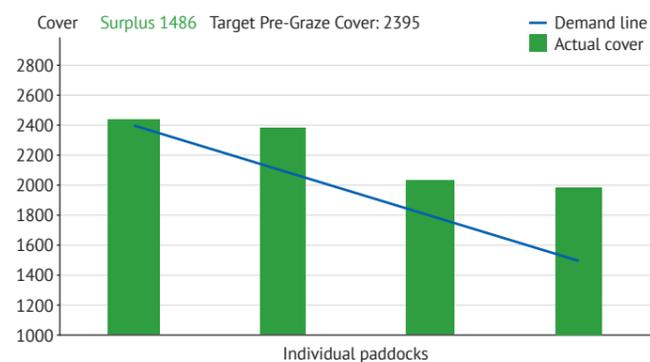
identify the best paddocks and those that need intervention (reseeding or soil management).

The thing to remember is that rotational grazing is key to produce more grass. However, there is a fine balance between optimising herbage utilisation and animal performance, which can only be achieved through regular grass and animal measurements. The ideal number of paddocks will be different depending on flock size and slaughter targets.

In light of rising input costs, we need grazing strategies to produce more lamb from grass and with lower inputs. Rotational grazing is one solution, as well as the use of legumes and multispecies swards. Further research is needed to better understand how options can be used together within rotational management systems.

Importantly, the additional resilience and biodiversity benefits more efficient and diverse grazing systems provide will also help address rising environmental concerns.

Examples of a grass wedge across fields. Cover below the line is required to meet demand. Cover above the line is surplus.



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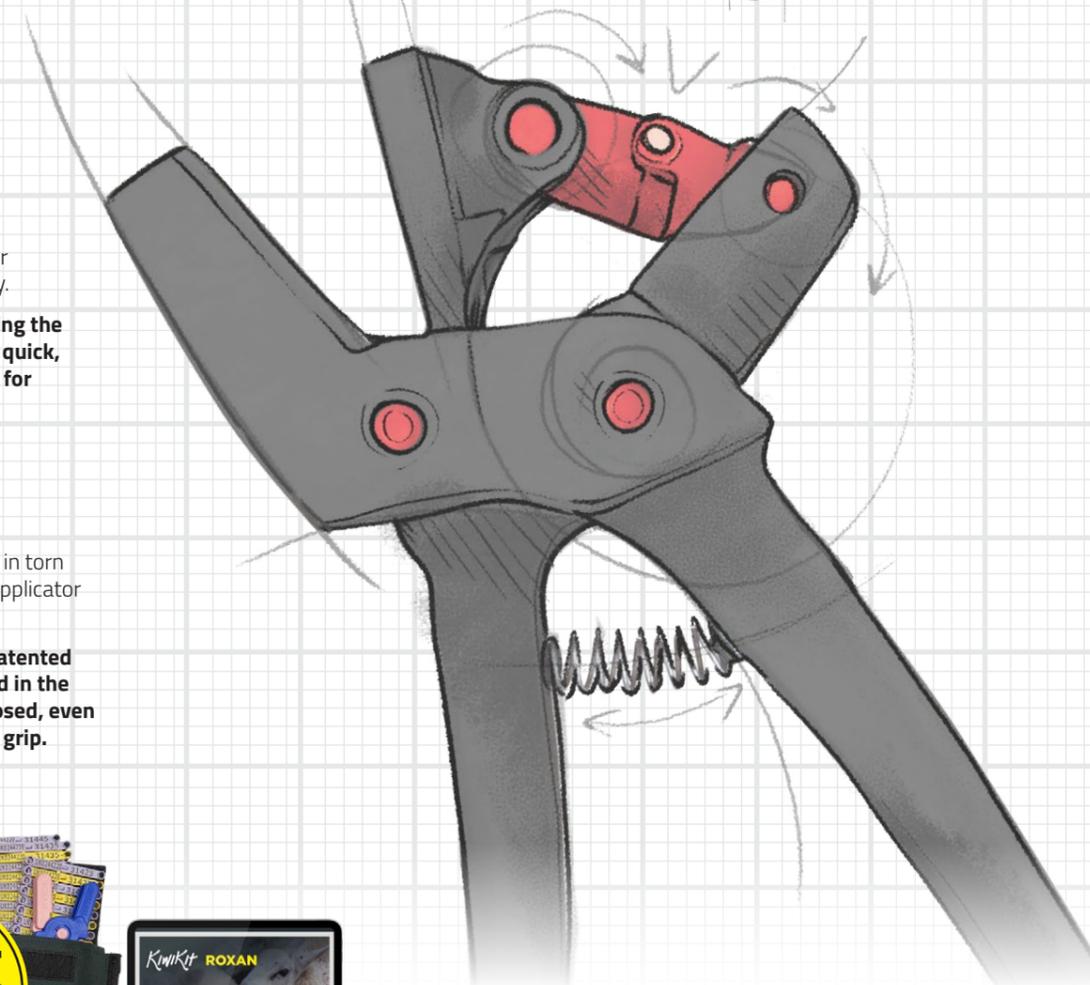
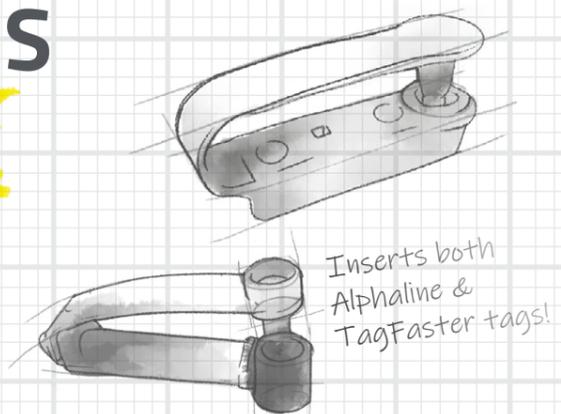
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Separating out a 'red' lame group will reduce infection spread.

TECHNICAL

Recent studies provide tips and encouragement to reduce lameness

Lameness is still a significant sheep health and welfare issue in flocks throughout the UK, with the impact on individual sheep health and overall flock productivity often underestimated.

As a prey species, sheep hide pain. If they are clearly displaying lameness, their pain will be significant and affecting their ability to perform. Every lame sheep needs attention quickly – both to limit the length of time they are in pain and to limit the spread of infection to other sheep. A lame ewe will lie more and graze less, significantly impacting milk production and, therefore, the growth rates of her lambs. Every

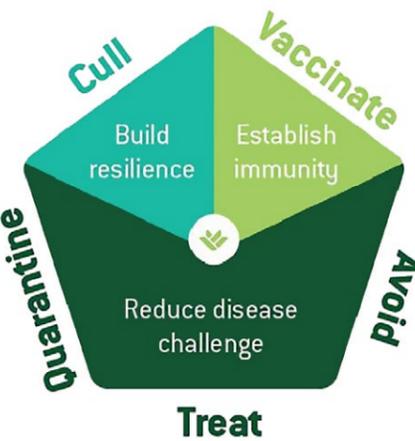
shepherd knows the lambs of a lame ewe are never the first off the farm, and usually they are the ones still hanging around at the turn of the year.

Infection

Lame sheep are a significant source of infection to previously sound sheep in the same management group. Therefore, the consequence of any delay in treatment is that more sheep go lame. It is for these reasons that we simply cannot afford to wait until sheep go lame to treat them, and we must do whatever we can to prevent lameness occurring in the first place. One way of preventing lameness is to use the industry-recognised five point plan.

A 2021 Nottingham University study interviewed 15 sheep farmers, predominately from the English Midlands about their perception of the five point plan. Together they managed approximately 11,000 sheep, with an average lameness rate of 15%. Only 60% had an awareness of the five point plan.

- **Treat.** Antibiotic injections and topical antibiotic spray were commonly used, with 46% of the farmers claiming they caught and treated within three days. Unfortunately, 66% were still trimming feet (despite evidence this delays healing).
- **Cull.** The commercial farmers were good at culling repeatedly lame sheep. Predictably this was used less often in pedigree flocks.
- **Avoid.** Use of clean handling areas and regular moving of troughs were recognised as useful strategies.



The five point plan for lameness.

By Fiona Lovatt & Phillipa Page, Flock Health flockhealthltd

- **Vaccinate.** Only 27% vaccinated their flock against footrot.
- **Quarantine.** Only 46% quarantined for the recommended four weeks and very few either footbathed or vaccinated incoming stock. The main reason given was lack of available facilities.

In a separate project this year, Flock Health led on a series of on-farm discussion groups in Wales for more than 70 farmers. Here the results were more encouraging as examples of how farmers were using the elements of the five point plan to prevent the spread of disease and protect the flock by vaccination.

Top tips

These were the top tips and strengths identified from the discussion groups:

- Involving the vet in getting a good diagnosis allows for appropriate and effective treatment.
- Farmer attitude/tolerance makes a difference. Within the groups, those who could not stand seeing lame sheep had much lower levels in their flocks and would not hesitate to quickly catch lame sheep for early treatment.
- Long wet autumn grass and housing in the run up to lambing are high-risk times for the spread of lameness.
- Don't trim feet (those who used to trim said they would not go back to doing so).

- Footbaths only work for lambs lame with scald or for disinfection of feet after ewes are gathered. Footbaths are not a suitable treatment for clinically lame ewes.
- You need to be rigorous with culling of sheep with misshapen feet and those that have been treated more than twice. This requires good identification and records so they can be transported off farm when the cull price is high.
- Vaccination works. Farmers in the study who vaccinated against footrot were vocal in pointing out its benefit, with preventative action being vastly better value than waiting until lameness levels have risen.

The study also found areas where there was room for improvement. Most shepherds involved said they found it difficult to treat every lame sheep within three days, unless levels of lameness were low enough that it only involved catching a handful of sheep.

Quarantine

Quarantine of new sheep, or those sheep returning from common grazing, was also a weak area. This was despite it being recognised as a big risk for bringing in new strains of footrot or CODD.

Options when lameness levels are high

Between weaning and tugging, there is great benefit to working closely with your vet to apply all aspects of the five point plan as rigorously as possible.

One method is segregation via a traffic light system. Ideally pull all the lame ewes out of the main flock to create a red 'crock' flock. The green (sound) remaining flock needs to be checked closely to immediately identify any lame ewes so they are quickly removed.

Once ewes in the red flock have been effectively treated, they can move to a holding orange flock until they are definitely cleared as completely sound and lesion-free before return to the green flock. Careful records are necessary to ensure ewes that have been treated twice or more are culled.

It was also discussed that rejecting purchased sheep that are lame at the point of sale, on arrival home or while in quarantine, presents an awkward dilemma, with many shepherds being too embarrassed to send sheep back despite the big risk to the home flock.

Both groups reflected on how an increase in the number of lame sheep had a significant negative effect on shepherd mental health. The two studies make it clear action on lameness is a good investment of time, effort and resources.

The five point plan was developed by Clements and Stoye (2014) and is now recognised as industry best practice.



Handling within three days for treating lameness is recommended.

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TECHNICAL

Changes to appearance of the eye can be signs of infection.

TECHNICAL

Rapid spread a challenge in management of sheep eye infections

By Jenny Schmidt, Torch Farm & Equine Vets



Eye infections can be problematic and tend to spread quickly once they appear within a flock.

There are a range of potential causes and risk factors that need to be considered to avoid introducing eye infections, and treatment choices to consider as part of disease control.

Pink eye

Pink eye is a superficial infection of the membranes inside eyelids (conjunctiva) and surface of the eye (cornea). It has many other names such as infectious keratoconjunctivitis, snow blindness, contagious ophthalmia and, sometimes, new forest eye.

It is caused by a range of unusual bacteria including mycoplasma and chlamydia, which don't have a proper cell wall. As penicillin antibiotics target the bacterial cell wall, eye ointments containing cloxacillin have poor efficacy against these infections.

The infection is spread through tears, either directly from sheep to sheep, or via flies, long grass, dust or feeding equipment. It is not unusual for both eyes to be affected. Bacteria can cause infection secondary to trauma, as direct trauma opens a route for bacteria to enter. This is a common cause of pink eye.

Pink eye tends to affect a large proportion of the flock, generally 10-15%, but spread can be rapid, affecting up to 80% of the flock in the worst cases. Time of year affects the impact of the disease. Poor nutritional status, concurrent disease or stress may worsen the impact.

Gathering sheep for treatment may temporarily increase the number of cases. The infection may resolve without treatment after about three weeks, but treatment is usually required on welfare grounds to limit the spread within the flock and limit eye damage.

Silage eye

Silage eye (listeria) is a bacterial infection of the surface and deeper structures of the eye. Listeria is found in the soil and multiplies well in poorly conserved or spoiled silage. Therefore, sheep exposed to silage that has sat in a ring feeder for more than three to four days may be high risk for introducing listeria infections. Silage from damaged or obviously affected bales should not be fed to sheep.

Unlike pink eye, silage eye doesn't appear to be contagious from sheep to sheep. Infection usually results from direct contact of silage with the eye, commonly occurring as sheep push their heads into bales in ring feeders.

Silage eye is associated with silage feeding. It tends to affect fewer sheep – usually less than 5%, but up to 25% in some outbreaks. Interestingly, the majority of cases only affect one eye. Listeria can also cause meningitis and

abortions, but usually not at the same time as eye infections. If left untreated, infections may resolve in one to three weeks but new cases may appear for a couple of weeks after the source material is removed.

While pink eye and silage eye may vary in the early stages of illness, symptoms and signs can be similar once infection has established. These can include:

- Rubbing of the head and face, demonstrating irritation.
- Lack of appetite.
- Eye starts to close from pain.
- Photophobia, where sheep may resent bright sunlight/squint.
- Tear discharge stains face.
- Swelling of the cornea turning it milky or blue, opaque.
- Inflammation causes the eye to look red.
- Advanced infection produces an abscess in the cornea, leading to rupture of the eyeball.

When considering treatment options, the main aims must include fast resolution of pain and infection, rapid treatment helps to reduce the spread, the ability to resolve with one handling event, and minimal antibiotic use.

It is also worth investigating whether treatment is necessary and/or whether there are other risk factors that could be removed to reduce the spread and potential reinfection. Some points to consider would include:

- Number and severity of cases.
- Whether you can make any useful management changes first.
- Consequences of not treating (for example risk of abortion in heavily pregnant ewes, animals becoming blind in both eyes leading to inability to find food/water).

If there are a low number of cases that are not increasing, where animals are not in distress, seem to be coping well and are managed at a low stocking density, monitoring rather than immediate treatment might be preferential.

Treatment

However, as with most illnesses, the earlier the animal is treated, the speedier the recovery and the better the overall results. It also aids in reducing the risk of reinfection or infection of other animals. If the number of cases are increasing, leaving treatment until the weekend or until the next gather will result in more sheep needing treatment, more medicine used, higher production losses and more pain experienced by the animal.

If feasible, it is best to minimise overall antibiotic use by using topical or local treatment – see table. Treatment may not fully remove the infection, as complete elimination is rare and natural immunity following infection is poor. As a result, recovered sheep are likely to be carriers and can have repeated infections.

Treatment options.

Administration route	Examples	Pros and cons
Topical	Eye ointments and powders	Uses small amount of antibiotic, treats only the affected area.
Local injection	Depot injections of antibiotic under the eyelid	Uses small amount of antibiotic, treats mainly the affected area.
Systemic injection	Depot injections into the muscle	Uses considerably more antibiotic, exposes the sheep's whole body to the medicine.

Outbreak control measures

- Stop trough feeding. If possible, feeding with a snacker on clean ground may reduce heads being close together. Or using feed blocks instead of cake. But try to minimise changes made to the feed of heavily pregnant ewes.
- Provide shelter from harsh environmental conditions.
- Consider turning out if sheep are housed.
- Move sheep to less dusty or shorter grazing.
- Where feasible, isolate affected sheep to reduce spread and facilitate treatment.

Scarring of the eye may still occur but early treatment will help minimise this. In cases where the cornea has ruptured, this is likely to give the animal ongoing pain. Consideration should be given to whether the sheep is culled, or the damaged eye removed.

The comfort and safety of the affected sheep needs to be considered during treatment and monitoring. For example, should they be housed or moved to a safer field where death by misadventure is less likely (particularly if both eyes are affected)? Isolation of affected individuals can help limit the spread, as well as providing shelter from bright daylight, allowing the animal to be more comfortable. It also makes monitoring response to treatment easier.

Some immunity may remain in previously affected animals, but this varies and can be short lived. Clean out any troughs/ring feeders or move feeders before putting in fresh silage. Effective quarantine of new or returning animals for four weeks should reduce the risk of reinfection/infection.

Risk factors

- **Introduction of an infection into a naive flock.** New stock arriving on farm with inadequate quarantining, or carrier animals from your last outbreak.
- **Activities that encourage close head proximity.** Housing, concentrate/hay/silage feeding, and routine gathering and handling. Take appropriate hygiene measures when administering injections.
- **Damage to the eye surface that allow bacteria to enter.** Windy and/or snowy conditions, dusty feed, long grass or sheep burrowing head into hay/silage bale.
- **Stress.** Weaning, gathering and handling, changing management groups, heavy pregnancy or lactation.



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*interval varies according to the product used.

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Sheep health 'vital and achievable' to reduce methane emissions

By Lee Innes, Moredun 

A new report, produced by the Moredun Research Institute together with the Ruminant Health and Welfare Group, highlights the role reducing key endemic diseases in ruminants can play in contributing to the global methane pledge agreed at COP26.

The pledge to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030 has the potential to reduce global warming by 0.2°C.

The Action on Methane report highlights immediate action farmers can take for priority health and welfare conditions, stimulating discussion with vets and advisors about the health status of flocks, with methane reductions in mind. On many farms methane contributes to more than 50% of total emissions. As it is the only short-term gas among the big three greenhouse gases it has been identified as having the potential, if managed, to have a more immediate impact on slowing global warming than CO₂.

Baseline work on greenhouse gas diseases found that improving livestock health and welfare could reduce methane emissions by approximately 10% – meaning livestock disease is an area where the sector can respond immediately. Livestock health was identified as immediately accessible to all farmers, as disease is a key constraint to efficient production. The report takes us further by mapping the greenhouse gas profile of key endemic diseases.



Improving health could reduce methane emissions by 10%.

For example, recent research has shown a significant (10-30%) reduction in emissions associated with effective and sustainable worm control in sheep. The report includes a rapid evidence assessment of impact, options and priorities for controlling major sheep diseases.

Reducing emissions

As emissions and productivity go hand-in-hand, reducing the burden of endemic disease contributes to improved productivity through better feed conversion efficiency, improved liveweight gain and increased reproductive performance. This puts the emphasis on immediate actions to make an environmental difference alongside active steps to tackle diseases on farm.

Vaccination programmes, improved biosecurity measures, diagnostic testing and using appropriate treatment strategies are all successful examples. Data collection can measure success and credit farmers for improvements to the health and welfare of their livestock. High health status enables other greenhouse gas mitigation options, such as breeding and feeding.

It is important our industry continues to remain focused on the bigger picture of how we can work towards improved livestock health, productivity and environmental impact despite the global pressures we are facing. Ruminant health is one of a small, but important, group of mitigation measures that can reduce emissions while delivering a cost-benefit.

Progress on health is identified instantly through flock performance data, which feeds into on-farm carbon calculators and the national inventory. Tools and resources identified in the report, for example monitoring and mapping out disease goals, are already available for farmers to utilise now.

Effective farm health strategies are a gateway to low emissions production and should be a pillar of future low carbon production systems supported by flock health security.

Read the full report at www.ruminanthw.org.uk/actingonmethane.

Online resources

All NSA members are also Moredun associate members, meaning you can access disease factsheets, webinars and other resources via the Moredun online portal. Go to www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-and-moredun, or visit the Moredun stand at NSA Sheep 2022.

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So you think you might have Johne's?

By Fiona Crowden, SRUC



Johne's disease causes chronic weight loss in sheep and can be a significant cause of ill thrift, increased culling rates and reduced flock performance.



Johne's disease affects absorption in the intestines, leading to weight loss.

If you are concerned about Johne's in an individual animal or your flock, there are various options for testing.

- **ELISA blood test.** Blood sampling 12 thin cull ewes prior to slaughter is a useful screening test for the presence of Johne's in the flock. But it will not pick up early infections or infections in sheep where low numbers of bacteria are present.
- **Faecal PCR test.** Submitting faecal samples from six animals (which is pooled at the laboratory) can be useful to screen a group of thin cull ewes. Testing individual animals is usually cost prohibitive. The test picks up very small numbers of bacteria, but infected sheep typically take eight weeks to start shedding organisms in faeces.
- **Faecal culture.** Also reasonably expensive for individual animals and takes up to 12 weeks. However, a recent Australian study found the culture of faeces from 350 animals (seven tests with 50 pooled samples in each) gave 90% confidence a flock was Johne's-free.

• **Post mortem.** Submitting four thin cull ewes with no other explanation for their poor condition (for example, broken mouthed or lame) can be a useful screen for Johne's and other causes of ill thrift. Johne's disease and other infections that cause ill-thrift can have a significant impact on the profitability of your flock. Regular monitoring of flock health status is recommended. SRUC's Johne's Accreditation Scheme is available in the UK based on annual testing of all animals over 12 months of age alongside health planning and practical biosecurity measures.

A more recent Johne's Monitoring Scheme has been introduced for commercial flocks. While this is not equal to accredited status, it does enable screening of the flock through vet-selected cull ewes and breeding tups, as well as bought in stock. Animals purchased from these flocks carry a lower level of disease risk.

Due to the gradual onset and complex nature of Johne's disease, both diagnostic testing and flock monitoring require selection of the right animals for the right test at the right time. But this should not be a barrier to getting started. Your vet can help you explore the best options for your flock.

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Following the flock

We visit Lanarkshire, Cumbria and Suffolk to catch up with NSA officeholders.

Jen Craig

NSA Scottish Region Chair, Lanarkshire

We have just finished our hill lambing in the past couple of days.

Apart from a few rough days to begin with, we have been rather lucky with the weather. It's been mostly dry with the grass coming slightly quicker than last year.

The lambs are doing well. Despite a few of our usual issues with predation, I expect when we come to marking we will have more lambs on the ground than last year.

My small flock of North Country Cheviots have again surpassed my expectations. They really are a pleasure to work with. I feel like a broken record going on about them these days but they are fantastic mothers to the extent I was being battered off the lambs when numbering the pairs. There were a couple of gimmers who needed assistance lambing and I was able to lamb them, let them up and walk away and they stayed with their lambs. This is definitely not something I have been used to in recent years.

It's been a busy few weeks for NSA Scottish Region welcoming back NSA Scot Sheep and immediately preparing for the Royal Highland Show. I'm optimistic I'll get some lambs marked around the two.



Jen's hopeful for more lambs than last year.



Eddie's investment in clover rich swards has resulted in a zero reliance on artificial fertilisers.

Eddie Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee Chair, Cumbria

Spring has been kind this year, with favourable weather for lambing.

Since the usual cool spell in March, grass growth has been good. Past efforts at establishing clover rich swards and investment in electric fence systems are now paying dividends with a zero reliance on artificial fertilisers. Within our farmed landscape, we have areas of woodland, several ponds and numerous hedgerows. These features support an abundance of wildlife that has also found the spring weather favourable.

Dry hogs kept for breeding replacements have now been shorn and all our over wintered feeding sheep are sold. Values of prime sheep have been above the five year average this spring but below the expectations of many who had hoped for a repeat of last year's high levels. Early born lambs have also been sold along with cast ewes.

Cereal values are predicted to stay high and this, along with an escalation of other farm inputs, means all aspects of our systems must come under the financial microscope. Actions resulting from this could involve minor tweaks to established systems, changes to tupping dates or even more drastic decisions. Whatever is decided, there will be no compromise around flock health and welfare.



Dan Phipps

NSA Chair, Suffolk

As I write this, we have a total of four sheep left to lamb.

It seems an awful long time since our first ewe lambed in mid-January. We did have a gap between flocks, but it always seems like the end of spring and a move into summer when the last one lambs.

The early lambing flock have been shorn with the May-lambing flock to be shorn in a couple of weeks' time. We look forward to the improved wool prices, which let's face it, couldn't have got worse.

We have sold a total of 500 lambs from the early lambing flock to a trade we would have been very happy with not so long ago. We started 40p/kg behind where we started in 2021 – but with many other costs having rocketed, it will dampen the mood. We have moved on slightly from Brexit and covid-19 to worrying matters in Ukraine. There are an estimated 20 million tonnes of grain in Ukraine unable to be exported and no viable alternatives to trade this grain before this year's harvest. With India's ban on wheat exports, it's no surprise wheat prices have risen by 60%.

Like every flock, we will need to look hard at how we progress. We cannot expect any of our costs to diminish and we can't assume people will have money to pay more for the lamb we produce than they already are.

It is time for the Government to take a long hard look at our developing support schemes that integrate all the environmental visions with an eye on food security. This in turn can lead us to a resilient and sustainable food sector that will encourage young people into our industry, enabling our country to secure a viable agricultural sector for future generations.



Like all sheep farmers, Dan is worried about the rising cost of inputs.



Peter and Christiane with their small flock of ewes and lambs.



Small but efficient sheep flocks at heart of German sheep sector

By Katie James, NSA

Preservation through use. That is the objective for German sheep farmer and NSA member Dr Peter Bette, with his small flock of native sheep in the Baden-Württemberg region of South West Germany.

Having begun their farming enterprise looking for a different way of life in their early 50s, Peter, a qualified vet, and his wife Dr Christiane Mohr, manage 20-30 distinctive Coburg Fox sheep, aiming to produce quality meat, wool and skins to sell through their own shop and other outlets in their local community.

Peter explains: "We sell our goods in our own shop in a nearby village. As well as being a shop, it is also a weaver's workshop of fine scarfs, woven by my wife, an art gallery, a small concert hall, a vintage vinyl record store, and a cooperative for handmade textiles – rather an unusual concept!

"Our lambs are slaughtered at a local abattoir and sold exclusively at a premium price to a local upmarket restaurant. We keep the wool from the Fox sheep and a handful of Wensleydale and Swiss Jura sheep, which is woven into carpets by a local carpet manufacturer, and the lamb skins are tanned by a local tannery."

Despite their unusual business, the sheep enterprise is typical of a German sheep farm. Peter continues: "The vast majority of German sheep farmers have less than 50 sheep. Recent

figures show there are approximately 20,000 sheep farms in total in the country with more than 14,000 of those having less than 50 sheep, and only about 300 being more than 1,000 sheep."

Coburg Fox sheep have recently regained popularity among less commercially focussed breeders. They produce fine meat and wool and fit with an increasing agenda to use sheep to maintain and care for the environment, in particular heathland, dykes and marshlands. "Environmental management can be a major source of income for large sheep farms now," comments Peter.

Support payments

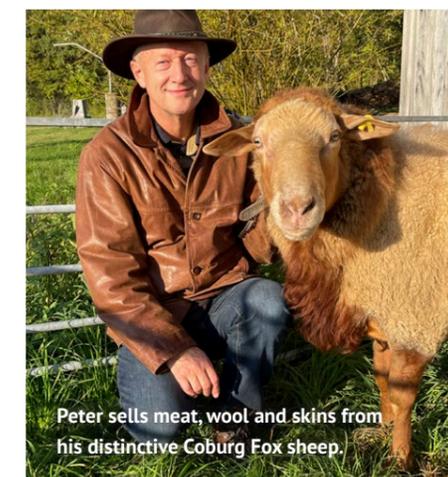
Farm support payments in Germany vary between its 16 federal states. "Some states, such as Bavaria, support the breeding of rare sheep breeds with €25-30 paid per registered breeding animal. Whereas others, like the one we live in, do not. From 2023, there will be nationwide support for keeping sheep on pasture irrelevant of the breed. Sheep farmers who keep their flock in natural habitats and thereby help to maintain the countryside, are supported under a contractual countryside protection scheme paying several hundred euros per hectare depending on the complexity of the site."

Holding the UK sheep sector in high regard, Peter joined NSA in 2020. "I believe the scientific contributions from agricultural, veterinary research institutes and universities in the UK, not to mention the prophylaxis and therapy of sheep diseases, are a valuable reference for the world.

"I became an NSA member to access this high quality information. With kind permission of NSA, I now publish a bimonthly column in 'Schafzucht', a German sheep breeding journal, to summarise, translate and comment on topics from the NSA magazine with relevance for readers in Germany.

"I have been especially impressed when reading about the UK's stratified sheep system, so much so I wrote an article, full of admiration on this unique breeding system. It combines genetic diversity with economic benefits and maintains a large gene pool for posterity.

"However, I recently read that the number of hill and upland breeds traditionally part of this are in decline. To my mind, if this were to continue it would be a major loss to the UK sheep sector and the gene pool of sheep on a global scale. I sincerely hope this does not happen."

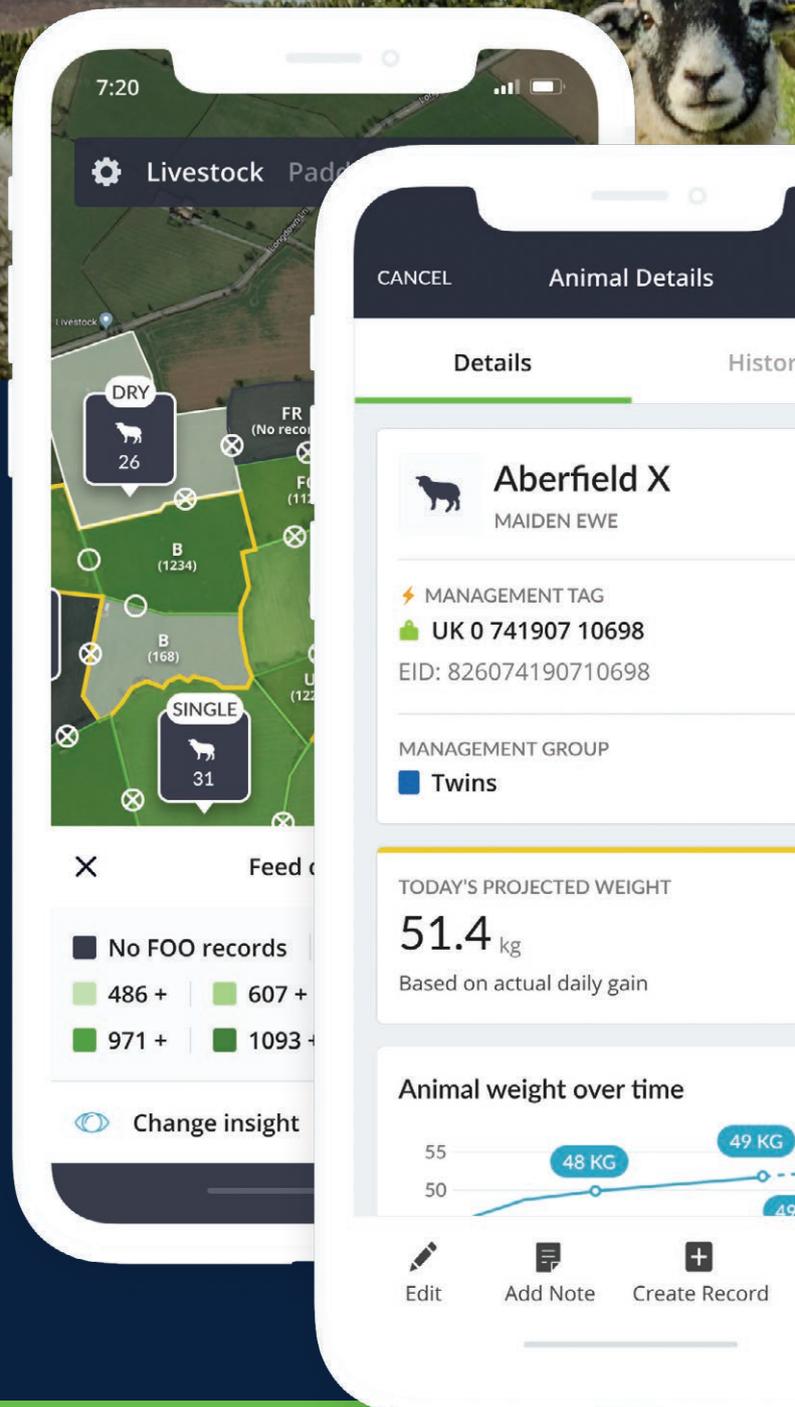


Peter sells meat, wool and skins from his distinctive Coburg Fox sheep.

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