

Sheep Farmer

MARCH/APRIL 2014



A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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ON CARCASE SPLITTING**

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**NSA EASTERN REGION
WINTER FAIR REPORT**

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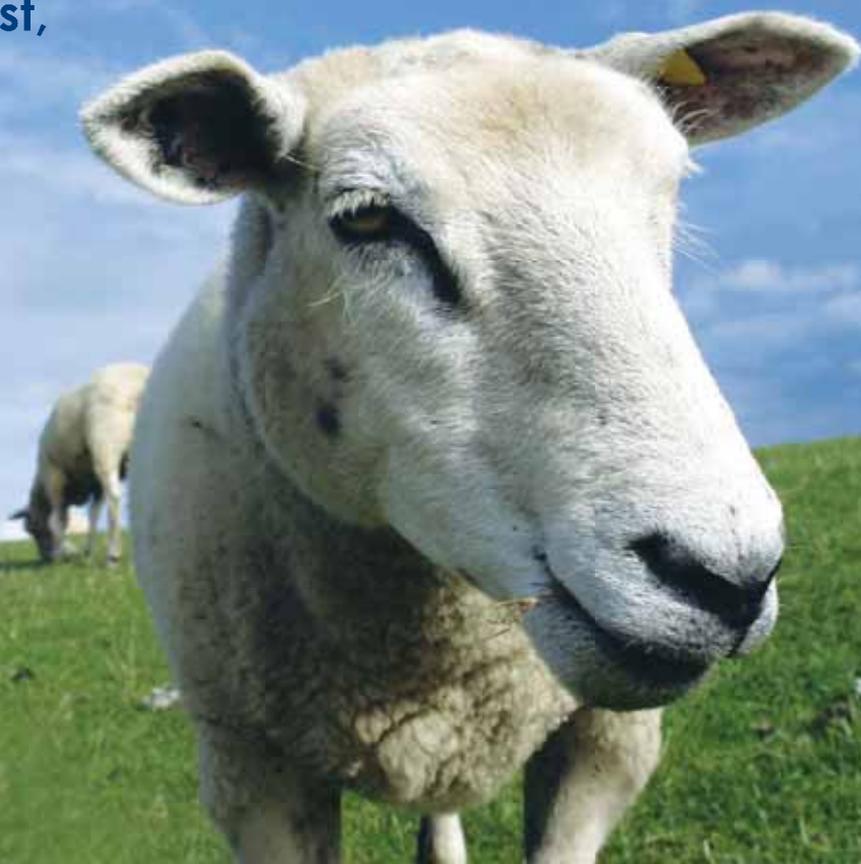


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Front Cover

The front page cover picture was taken by Paul Clarke, Head Gardener at Darley Estate, Newmarket, Suffolk, where NSA Eastern Region Vice Chairman Dan Phipps is Flock Manager. Paul is a keen amateur photographer and took this picture from the farm's January-lambing Mule flock. If you would like to see your photographer on the front page of Sheep Farmer, contact Joanne Briggs using the contact details to the left.



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A much appreciated gift at a crucial time for sheep farming

By Phil Stocker,
NSA Chief Executive

It is an incredibly generous gift and these few words are inadequate, but when an organisation is left a substantial legacy from a member it is evidence that the work and values of that organisation are appreciated.

To me this demonstrates the mutually beneficial relationships that exist between the NSA, working hard in so many quarters to secure a rewarding future for sheep farming, and our members for whom sheep farming is their life and passion.

RSPCA, RSPB, National Trust and many other charities have benefited from (and worked hard to attract) this type of income, but NSA hasn't chased or even suggested this type of support from members and so it was a complete surprise when we were informed a sheep farming couple from Northern England had decided to bequeath part of their estate to NSA.

Contacting NSA

Phil and the team at NSA are always available to members and interested to hear opinions, concerns and areas of interest. You can call NSA Head Office five days a week on 01684 892661, or direct an email to one of the addresses below.

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Once we overcame the surprise and the details were confirmed, we quickly realised we needed to plan for how best to make use of this gift and the opportunities it creates. We organised a small working group, comprising mainly of the NSA Finance and General Purposes Committee and involving people who all feel the absolute responsibility to use this money effectively, for the long term good of the NSA and ultimately the good of sheep farming. The decision made is that we strengthen our foundation of a sound financial reserve, allowing us to generate some income to fund activities, and then to invest in our plans to grow NSA membership.

Membership fees

Most NSA members won't be aware that over the last year the Board of Trustees has debated several times and decided against increasing membership fees, as there is a strong desire to drive growth and expansion via more members rather than higher subscriptions. Servicing double (for instance) the number of members doesn't cost twice as much, and this is no different to a farmer reducing the fixed costs of his business by spreading costs over a higher output. The vast majority of our funds come from membership subscriptions and this is undoubtedly a very healthy situation, as it means we are free to do what is in the interest of our sheep farmer members.

So our investment from the legacy into the association's activities aimed at membership recruitment and retention will initially be seen through: an additional member of staff to help us further improve the provision of information for NSA members, as well as step up our press activities; adding to our administration capacity so existing staff (at Malvern and in the NSA regions) can be more focussed and efficient; and investing in additional IT equipment, particularly video conferencing equipment, reducing travel time and costs in the regions and making it easier for all our officers and staff across the UK to take part in meetings and discussions. The aim is to make the NSA more efficient, inclusive, and effective.

Going back to the generosity of our donors, they were a very quiet couple who kept themselves largely to themselves and for whom farming (and



a particular interest in Bluefaced Leicesters) was important. Clearly the NSA was important to them too and we will be forever grateful for their gift and will recognise their generosity in a way that any visitor coming to The Sheep Centre will see.

I feel the gift has come at a crucial time for sheep farming, with recent floods not only hitting businesses but also being used by the anti-farming lobby to once again batter our sector and the landscape we work in. Our hearts go out to those affected by the floods and storms, particularly in western-facing areas that bore the brunt



of the jet stream's violent delivery.

There has been rightful criticism about the Somerset Levels and other effected areas not being maintained over the last two decades. Massive engineering works were put in place to 'tame' these flood plains, with water defences, drainage channels and pumps all an important part, but financial cutbacks, perceived higher priorities in

other areas and a focus on agri-environment schemes have all played a part in the dereliction that has happened.

I have been a big enthusiast of agri-environment schemes and, given where we were in the 1980s and 90s, still feel they have done a great job in raising interest and awareness of the possibilities for farming and biodiversity to be integrated. But they are now running alongside this interest in 're-wilding' and are becoming less 'agri' and more 'environment' without recognising that we've not had truly wild landscapes in the UK for centuries.

The vast majority of our land, in both the uplands and the lowlands of the UK, has been shaped through farming activities over many hundreds of years – and wildlife and ecology has simultaneously adapted to live alongside it. Wildlife adapting, changing and moving was so slow it may have gone unnoticed, until the last three or four decades when the scale and speed of change in agriculture created many of the problems we experienced.

Farmland biodiversity

Because of our past the UK is quite unique in that a very large proportion of our biodiversity is farmland/farming dependent and land abandonment (re-wilding) on any scale is disruptive to this delicate relationship. There is a difference between an environmentalist and a conservationist and the times I have heard conservationists, under the banner of the organisations that pay them, create a picture that suggests a separation of farming and wildlife – farms over there and nature reserves over here – convinces me that they don't quite get the plot.

The suggestion from George Monbiot (with the BBC seemingly keen to peddle his views) and WWF that sheep were to blame for the floods was yet another example of armchair conservationists dreaming up ideas and statements that are built on clouds. It was said the treading of hooves in the uplands meant all the rain ran into the lowlands. It went unnoticed that sheep numbers actually fell in the years coming up to more recent flooding, and that this fall undoubtedly took place in the uplands largely due to agri-environment schemes that were supposed to have protected these areas. It ignored the fact that many SSSIs have been designated and brought into 'good condition' throughout the same period, and it



Sheep, particularly in the uplands, are being blamed for a myriad of environmental, access and biodiversity issues.

ignored the fact that livestock grazing adds to soil organic matter and this improves water holding capacity and soil life that is so important in keeping soil aerated and well structured.

Of course there is no one size that fits all solutions – we need to protect the carbon stored in our peat-lands, we need trees, we need to manage our water far more carefully – but as a nation we also need to feed ourselves, protect our agricultural diversity and consider people and rural communities in all of this.

Regional Changes

This time of year often sees a flurry of NSA regional AGMs, but never three in three days before. That is exactly what happened in late February, resulting in several new faces as office holders.

At the NSA Wales/Cymru AGM, Paul Wozencraft took on the position of Regional Chairman, stepping into the shoes of David Pittendreigh who did a tremendous job for NSA in Wales during his two-year term. Paul farms near Rhayader, Powys, where he, wife Nicola and their three children are all involved in the 300-acre farm. They run 600 ewes and a small flock of pedigree Balwens, plus a dozen cross-bred suckler cows, which are sold as stores. Paul says his ambition as Chairman of NSA Cymru/Wales is to create a stronger voice for Welsh sheep producers.

The appointment of a new Chairman and Secretary meant significant changes at the NSA South West Region AGM. With Robert Jordan completing his two-year stint as Chairman, he handed the reins over to Bryan Griffiths of Umberleigh, North Devon. Bryan and his wife Liz run 800 Mule and Suffolk Mules ewes, plus 70 beef cattle, on 320 acres of permanent pasture.

Bryan introduces himself by saying: "Over the last 30 years we have tried to develop a simple and efficient system that maximises prime lamb production. The flock is housed in the winter, lambs in March and the lambs are sold direct to slaughter by Christmas. In common with many family farms, we have no regular paid labour or non-farming income streams. As the new Chairman of NSA South West Region, I hope to be able to channel the thoughts and concerns of this



Bryan Griffiths

region's producers to the English Committee and beyond."

Bryan will be ably assisted by his new Secretary Kate White. Kate is a new face to the NSA and is looking forward to taking on administration of the region from Sue Martyn, who served as NSA Regional Manager for many years. Fortunately NSA has not lost Sue's expertise and commitment, as she continues as Regional Treasurer, NSA South West Ram Sale Secretary and NSA Sheep South West Organiser.

NSA Northern Region held their AGM on the following night, with no changes to their main officeholders, while NSA Scottish Region held their



Paul Wozencraft

AGM right at the end of January and welcomed Ian Hepburn as Vice Chairman. Our thanks go to our retiring chairmen and warm greetings to the new officeholders; their contact details can be found over the page.



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Regional News

Cymru/Wales

By Helen Davies,
Development Officer



Since writing the last report we have barley had a dry day and are now getting battered by the wind. Although we are not as badly affected as some other parts of the UK, it is still going to take a long time for the industry to recover from this winter. Let's hope spring is better.

CAP and RDP issues have yet again been at the forefront, with NSA Cymru/Wales meeting with Welsh Government officials on a number of occasions to discuss the effects 15% modulation and area payment rates will have on the whole of the industry, but particularly the uplands. We cannot understand why the Welsh Government has taken 15% modulation, far more than other parts of the UK, and will continue to ask why this has happened and urge Welsh Government to put some funding directly back to the industry via RDP to help compensate for the predicted shortfall in farm income with the proposed CAP changes.

The Animal Health and Welfare Committee met for the last time in January, and is being replaced with a new Board of five Welsh Government officials and five publically appointed members. We hope this new system will not dilute the ability of NSA and other stakeholders to feed into the Government. At the last meeting the paper prepared by the Sheep Scab Task and Finish Group was approved and has now gone to Minister Alun Davies to be considered for wider consultation. Meantime the Livestock Identification Core Group continues to meet, and while we have received confirmation that the CPH review will now go ahead, things have still to progress on the six-day standstill front (more on page 20).

At our recent AGM David Pittendreigh stepped down as Chairman. David has enjoyed the role and has voiced his opinion on the above topics and the issue of how the red meat levy is distributed. I am sure David will stay as an active committee member. Paul Wozencraft has taken over the Chair and will become a NSA Trustee too. Llew Thomas is now Vice Chairman and will continue to sit on the NSA's Finance and General Purpose Committee too. The AGM was followed by a very useful talk from Kate Hovers and Neil Mackintosh about liver fluke.

The Region is pleased to announce that NSA Welsh Sheep 2015 will take

place at Glanmeheli and Drefor Farms, Kerry, Newtown, by kind permission of Geraint and Moreton Powell on Tuesday 19th May 2015.



Retiring NSA Cymru/Wales Chairman David Pittendreigh, pictured with Regional Development Officer Helen Davies, chairs his final meeting before retirement.

Central

By Anne Payne,
Manager



The weather has been everyone's major pre-occupation and our hearts go out to all those suffering in the Somerset Levels and other flood-affected areas. The NFU's fodder bank has been organized again and anyone wanting to make cash donations can do so via the Farming Community Network (formerly Farming Crisis Network) at www.justgiving.com/fcn, amongst other options.

We have been receiving reports of a number of incidents of sheep stealing in the Staffordshire and Derbyshire areas. For those with large flocks it's often not possible to tell until sheep are gathered, by which time the culprits are long gone. One member recently found he had lost 100 from two different areas, adding it had become a constant problem in recent years, involving a continuing dialogue with the local police.

The issue of dog worrying is ever-present and six sheep were found dead by one member recently on the moors in the Peak District. How to educate the general public effectively is the biggest challenge of all, with so many folk assuming that the numerous notices displayed in such areas to 'Keep your dog on a lead at all times' do not apply to them, because their dog 'wouldn't harm a fly!' (More on page 25).

On a more positive note, there feels to have been an emphasis on youth in recent weeks. In addition to selecting our candidate for the NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group (see page 12), NSA Central were invited to take part in a YFC Agricultural and Rural Affairs forum. NSA shared a platform along with NFU, the Leader Programme and Rodbaston College to talk about what we can do for

young farmers, and while the young farmers (regrettably) do not feel they had the expertise to join our NSA committee, we have responded positively to their request to provide judges for their stockjudging classes at the YFC rally in May. We hope this will be the start of a continuing relationship which we trust will be mutually beneficial.

Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager



The NSA Easter Region Winter Fair at Melton Mowbray Market was a success. You can read the full report on page 8, but in addition my thanks go to Carroll, Eleanor and Ceres Solutions for all the administration of the event. On the day we also received a huge amount of support from the committee and friends acting as stewards, chairing the seminar sessions, running the young shepherd competition and the stockjudging.

My thanks to NSA Head Office – Charlotte, Caitlin and Jo – in doing a splendid job and encouraging another 18 people to become members of NSA, which is great. Our stand judges and stewards had a challenging task, as the quality of stands was first class. My thanks to the excellent seminar speakers who gave their time freely and imparted top-quality information for free. The market staff could not have been more helpful in making certain the site was ready; the catering was top notch.

We were let down by the hire company who provided the patio heaters – late, with the gas arriving too late to be of use – we will succeed next time to provide some heat!

Our sponsors were very generous. Our special thanks to Novartis, Eblex, Mole

Valley Farmers and Lightsource. And thank you to all the exhibitors, without whose support these events would not function. If you visited the Winter Fair then do let us know your thoughts about the event and what we can do to improve it for 2016.

NSA Eastern Region will be holding a farm walk on Wednesday 11th June at Ickworth Park, Horringer, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, by invitation of Paul Seabrook. We are likely to be holding our second Young Shepherds Competition of the year, subject to demand. Hopefully we see you all there. Further details will be circulated to members nearer the date.

Don't forget to look at the Eastern Region Facebook page for photos and reports on our events.

Meet NSA Eastern Region Chairman Andrew Foulds on pages 22-24

Marches

By Kevin Harrison, Chairman



Congratulations to all the successful NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group candidates, and special congratulations to Kate Robinson who is from the Marches region (see page 12). Well done to all those involved in the process; if you were unsuccessful don't be put off and try again in the future.

NSA Marches Region held a joint meeting with Eblex in February and had an exceptional turnout, no doubt a reflection of the quality of speakers on the night. Clive Brown gave an excellent market update with some interesting food for thought and, as always with Eblex, there were some very enlightening statistics and figures.

Kate Phillips gave a talk on ewe nutrition reminding us of the calculations

we should be doing when working out a ewe ration to get the ewe in her optimum condition. Harriet Fuller gave a very thought-provoking and slightly scary presentation on antibiotic resistance and while the sheep industry is one of the lowest users of antibiotics, we all have our part to play in reducing the antibiotics we use on the farm so they are available to us in the future.

The meeting finished with a double act from Harriet and Kate as part of the Stamp Out Scab initiative highlighting the best ways to identify and treat sheep scab and how to prevent it spreading. Sheep scab can affect any sheep flock, good or bad. It doesn't make you a bad farmer if you are unfortunate enough to get sheep scab in your flock, but what is wrong is to not identify or treat scab correctly and effectively, therefore putting other sheep flocks at risk.

We were also lucky enough to have the first winner of an Advantage 3in1 feeder in our region and it was a pleasure to go and meet Antony Spencer when he was presented with it (see page 10). I'm sure he has put it straight to use and it is now nowhere near as clean as it was when it was presented! It's a great prize, so get out there and sign up some new members.

Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



What a wet beginning to the year! NI has got off lightly compared to South West England, but I suppose it's better that winter comes in wintertime and gets it out of the way before spring.

Continued on page 6



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► The NI CAP Pillar One consultation period closed on 21st January and the 850 responses show the degree of interest and effect it will have on farmers' livelihoods over the next 10 years. Normally when a consultation period ends we expect to hear nothing until the results and decisions are announced, but this time lobbying work is rumbling on to try and influence politicians and DARD officials. Unfortunately some farmers are going to win and others lose but it could be 1st August before we know. Landowners and conacre tenants need to have agreed on whether they should keep entitlements or sell them by 2nd April but cannot make any informed decisions without knowing the outcome of the CAP consultation. Leaving Member States with more flexibility on implementing the regulations may have created just as big a problem as too much red tape!



January saw a number of AFBI farm walks on NSA Committee Members' farms where those attending saw and heard about good farming practice which could help reduce costs on their own holdings. NSA Board Member Samuel Wharry hosted one of the events and is pictured above with the team from AFBI, CAFRA and Agrisearch.

NSA NI is delighted and very proud of our two qualifiers for the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors Group (see page 12 and page 44).

Almost all the places on our trip to Wales on 19th-21st May are taken and anyone interested needs to contact me immediately. This should be a very informative tour with visits to several top UK sheep flocks, Dunbia at Llanybydder, Innovis and the plant breeding station at Aberystwyth.

Scotland

By George Milne,
Development Officer

The NSA Scottish Region's AGM, which was held on the 31st January in Edinburgh, saw Chairman Sybil Macpherson continue in her role and Ian Hepburn return as Vice Chairman, with Neale McQuistin and Sybil representing Scotland on the NSA



Board. Maimie Paterson continues as Treasurer and Jack Clark and Andrew Douglas were co-opted onto the board.

Following the AGM a very successful dinner was held where 100 guests enjoyed Scotch lamb, kindly donated by Morrisons supermarket, after dinner speaker Alyn Smith MEP and entertainment from Lauren McQuistin and Jamie McGregor MSP. A successful raffle raised £750 for charity.

With CAP dominating the last three months, radical alterations have to be made to the current proposals if Scotland's beef and sheep farmers stand a chance of surviving post 2015.

Instead of the proposed two region approach given as an example in the Government consultation, I believe there must be three (if not four) different regions and some sort of mechanism to identify inactivity.

We have to be united with one voice on behalf of the sheep sector or we will be left with a two region approach, which will be a disaster. It is not just about getting a right decision for 2015-2020, it is about having the correct number of regions for the longer term. If the industry is faced with one sector experiencing difficulties by 2020 we must also have the flexibility to move money from one region to another for the long term stability of Scottish agriculture.

A three region approach of arable/temporary grassland, permanent grassland and rough grazing (or four regions with rough grazing split into two according to productivity) is vitally important both long term and for the immediate future. This would help to target payments in some way to production and therefore stand a better chance of maintaining breeding livestock to supply the quantity and quality of beef and lamb demanded by the public, whilst also delivering the environmental benefits that managed grazing provides.

South East

By Bob Blanden,
Manager

I am now able to report that two of our regional applicants for the NSA Next Generation Ambassadors Group have been successful.

Our congratulations to Marie Prebble and James Hamilton (more on page 12), and commiserations go to the unsuccessful applicants; we hope that they will re-apply next time. The standard of all seven of our hopeful applicants was very high and I was glad that, because of work commitments, I did not have to be involved in the selection process.

By the time you read this there will have been a regional meeting with a presentation by SouthWestern, the



company responsible for running the new movement database in England. That will have been held in Ashford Market and, although there will have been another meeting in Cirencester Market, it is generally felt that a large area in South England will have not been reasonably covered. NSA had to push hard to get the small number of meetings we did, as there doesn't appear to any money in the budget for communicating the changes with farmers.

With regards to NSA South Sheep 2014, I am pleased to announce that the two Major Sponsors from our last two events are supporting us yet again. We are very grateful to Novartis with Ritchey and Randall Parker Foods. There will be a full preview of the event in the next issue of the Sheep Farmer, but once again may I please remind you to put the date – Saturday 28th June – in your diary and on your calendar. Remember, entrance will be FREE to NSA Members on production of their membership card at the gate.

South West

By Sue Martyn, Manager

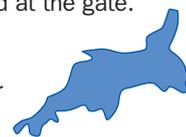
An amazing 180 people flocked through the doors for the our regional AGM, attending the meeting and the presentations afterwards from Joe Ryan of English database provider SouthWestern (more on page 21) and Gareth Jones of the British Wool Marketing Board.

At our AGM in February Robert Jordan stood down as Regional Chairman and NSA Board member and Vice Chairman Bryan Griffiths replaced him in both these roles. Bryan comes from Umberleigh and is a past Chairman and current member of South Molton Sheep Group, which means he meets a lot of sheep farmers and is ideally placed to hear their views on the current state of the industry.

The new Vice Chairman is Alan Derryman. Alan comes from Sidmouth, where he rents 600 acres and keeps 900 ewes and 70 suckler cows. He is well known as Senior Shearing Instructor for the South of England for the Wool Board.

I retired as Regional Secretary and was replaced by Kate White. Kate comes from Wellington and works for an outdoor company based on the Quantock Hills. She and her partner keep 200 ewes and some calves. I'm sure Kate will be a great asset to the region and wish her well in her position.

I have been Regional Secretary for 15 years and have enjoyed every minute of it (well almost!) Unfortunately for the region they are not going to be entirely rid of me as I am staying on as Regional Treasurer, Organiser for Sheep South West (next held in 2015) and Secretary of the South West Ram Sale at Exeter in August.





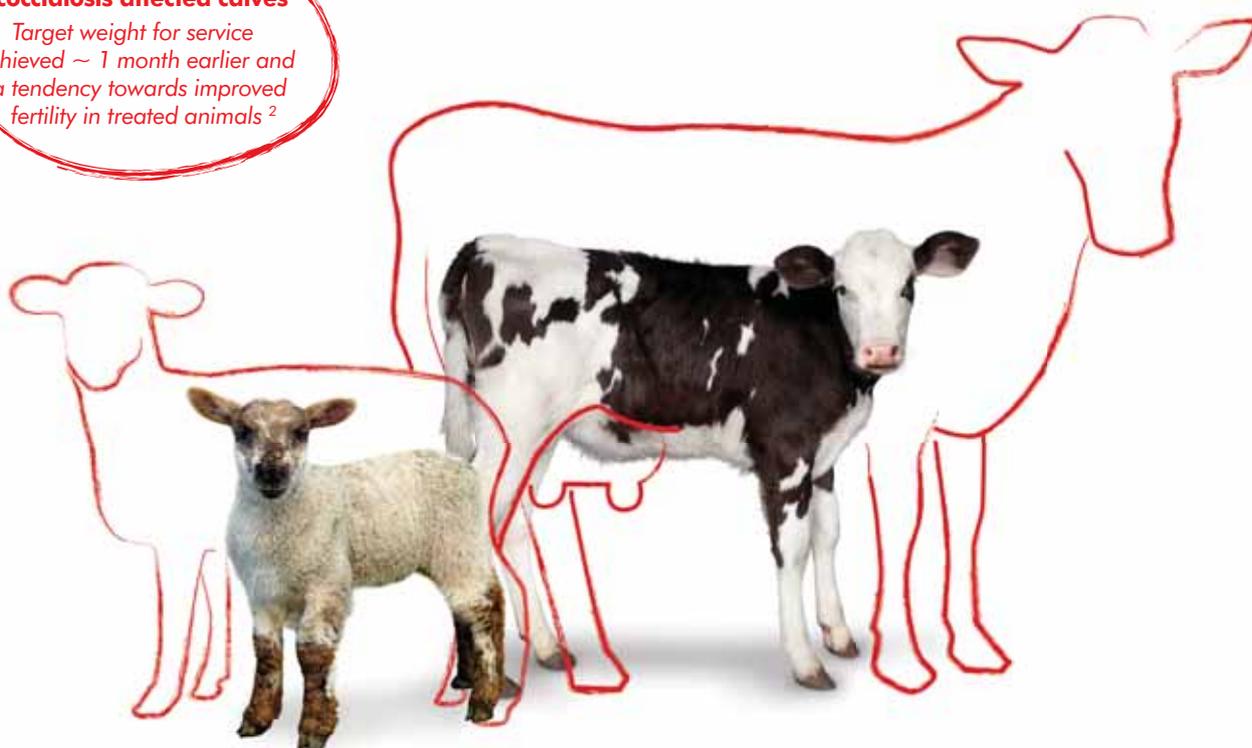
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¹Jonsson N et al. Parasitol Res (2011) 109: p113-p128 ²Veronesi F, et al. Parasitol Res 2013 Jun;112(6):2137-42.

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Interest and variety provided at NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair

Visitors to the NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair held at Melton Mowbray Market in Leicestershire at the end of January enjoyed the wide range of over 70 trade stands, seminars and training activities on offer for them.

A large crowd gathered in the seminar area early in the day to listen to local sheep specialist Lesley Stubbings. Her subject was 'pitfalls with feeding the pregnant ewe' and her message focused on the right balance between forage and concentrate feed for the ewe in late pregnancy.

"We must respect sheep are ruminants," she said. "The best way to keep them happy is to keep their rumen happy, which means forage should make up the biggest part of their diet. But it is important to know the nutritional value of that forage and how much the sheep is going to eat, as this determines the quality of concentrate which needs to be added."



Craven Cattle Marts receive first prize for a small trade stand from judge Charles Sercombe (left).

NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair Winners

Young Shepherd of the Year:

1. Harry Lombardi
2. Fred Love
3. Ryan O'Sullivan

Best large trade stand:

1. Eblex
2. Advantage Feeders
3. Rumenco/Nettex

Best small trade stand:

1. Craven Cattle Marts
2. Border Software
3. Manor Farm Feeds

Best breed society stand:

1. Charollais Sheep Society
2. Lleyn Sheep Society
3. Hampshire Down Sheep Society



Steve Powdrill (right) giving lamb selection advice on the Eblex stand.

She warned against the substitution of forage with concentrate: "Too much concentrate will restrict forage digestion and can lead to acidosis. Sudden diet changes should also be avoided."

Another highly popular talk was given by Paul Heyhoe, senior analyst for market intelligence at the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board. Paul gave his listeners every reason to be optimistic about the future of sheep meat trade in the UK with the world demand for lamb meat on the rise. In China the consumer is now taking legs and carcasses and shifting from mutton to lamb and is the destination for the majority of New Zealand product. On the other side of the coin Mr Heyhoe warned on the profitability of sheepmeat production.

Don't rely on rising prices

"Producers cannot rely on prices rising as the customer will not be willing to pay much more for lamb, they will choose to buy something else. The biggest threat to the lamb market is chicken, not New Zealand lamb," he said.

"Farmers will have to look at what is happening on-farm to improve profitability. High cost systems will not be

sustainable so it might be a case of changing the way you sell, increasing physical output from the same cost base or lowering and spreading costs."

A highlight of the day for one young shepherd from Boston, Lincolnshire was victory in the Young Shepherd Competition. Best over the five disciplines of belly clipping, ATV driving, lamb selection, sheep management and the general sheep questions was 22-year-old Harry Lombardi.

Harry is a self-employed livestock contractor who can put his hand to most tasks but enjoys shearing, lambing and other stockman's duties. He took part in the competition at the NSA Youthful Shepherd Event in June



The seminar area saw large crowds throughout the day.

last year and picked up there how to improve his performance, which certainly paid off on the day. Harry won the top prize of £275, generously sponsored by Mole Valley Farmers, and now goes to the national final at the NSA Sheep Event on Wednesday 30th July. Second place Fred Love from

Retford, Nottinghamshire, who was also the best 21 and under competitor, also qualifies for the national final.

More photos on the NSA Facebook page www.facebook.com/natsheep.



Harry Lombardi, first place Young Shepherd of the Year.

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NSA member 'over the moon' to win specialist sheep feeder

Warwickshire farmer Antony Spencer was 'over the moon' when he heard he was the first NSA member lucky enough to win a 3-in-1 Advantage Feeder in the 2014 membership recruitment campaign.

NSA is giving away six of the feeders this year (more below about how you can be in with a chance of winning) and being the very first winner was a result of Mr Spencer filling in a membership form at the Lamma machinery show in January.

Mr Spencer says: "I had been meaning to re-join NSA for quite some time and was quite surprised to see the stand at Lamma. Being an out-and-out stock person, I'd soon worked out where to make for to get away from the tractors for a bit and I found myself at the Advantage Feeders stand where I could happily chat away about feeding sheep without reference to any sort of horsepower! Roll on NSA Sheep 2014 at Malvern; it's more my scene.

"I am very glad to be a member of the NSA again. In this ever uncertain agricultural world it's good to know UK sheep farmers have a voice – plus I'd forgotten what good bath-time reading Sheep Farmer magazine is! And I was absolutely over the moon to hear I was the lucky winner of the feeder as a result of joining up.

"I have been looking at the 3in1 Feeder for some time now, especially after one of my neighbours has been so pleased with his. I can't wait to put this one to work, as I still have about 600 store lambs left on roots and will probably pull off some smaller ones to try the feeder on, particularly as you can restrict their intakes, making it possible to feed whole barley at a fraction of the price of pellets."

Restricted intakes is a key feature of the 3-in-1 Feeder. It can be set for ewes

or lambs to feed ad lib or, using a saliva restriction system, limit intakes to varying amounts. The restricted system requires stock to lick feed out of the groove between two adjusters, which can be moved into different positions to limit feed. Advantage Feeders says when the lick system is in the most restricted setting the stock lick for five to 10 minutes between periods of grazing. The licking period is limited because the livestock use the saliva from their tongue to get the feed out of the groove and the saliva decreases with progressive licks.

Expanding flock

Mr Spencer is a fan of any kind of technology to make his life easier, be it the Advantage Feeder or automatic weighing and drafting systems. "My goal is to build up to 1,000 breeding ewes in the near future and invest in new equipment and technology to make the job easier," he says. "My labour force consists of a collie, kelpie and huntaway, and a very understanding fiancé (complete with our six-month-old son) when needed, so anything to make life simpler has got to be a winner."

Envious of Mr Spencer's luck in the NSA prize draw? We have five more feeders to give away this year as part of our membership recruitment campaign, and as an existing NSA member you can get into the draw simply by recommending friends and neighbours to join NSA.

Cut out the membership form opposite, write your membership



Antony Spencer (centre) accepts his prize from Robert Ball of Advantage Feeders (right) and Kevin Harrison, NSA Marches Region Chairman

number and/or postcode in the space provided and pass it onto a non-NSA member to get them to join. The more people you recommend, the more entries you get. The five remaining draws will be staggered through 2014 so the sooner you get your name in the hat the better, as you will be eligible for each subsequent draw if you don't win straight away. People like Mr Spencer, who have been a NSA member in the past, are not eligible if they terminated their membership with the last 12 months.

Full terms and conditions at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw.

3-in-1 Advantage Feeders

Save time. The 800 feeder (the model being given away by NSA) holds 500kg of pellets or barley. For 75 sheep on 0.5kg/day, the feeder will only require filling every 13 days.

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Find out more at www.3in1feeders.co.uk or by calling UK Distributor Robert Ball on 08000 786030.

Winner Profile

- Anthony Spencer of Lower Quinton, Stratford Upon Avon, Warwickshire.
- Started his own sheep flock on the family farm when he was 20, buying pedigree Vendeen ewes and becoming active on the show circuit.
- Supplements his income as a sheep contractor, offering jetting, dipping and shearing services. Works with a couple of neighbours to shear around 15,000 sheep a year.
- Built flock up to 500 breeding ewes today, with about 350 of these as North Country Mule ewe lambs to sell as theaves or with lambs at foot. Aims to increase to 1,000 ewes in the near future. This year also bought 700 store lambs to finish on stubble turnips rented from an estate that he lambs for.
- Base is 75 acres belonging to his mother, with other land spread 'far and wide' in blocks ranging from five to 140 acres.

NSA membership

Pass this form to a friend or neighbour to be in with the chance of winning a 3in1 Feeder.



NSA membership subscriptions are vital to us, as they fund our work providing a voice for sheep farmers and enable us to offer a wide range of benefits to members, including this magazine. Help us to help you by encouraging friends and neighbours to become NSA members too – and get entered into the free prize draw to win a 3in1 Feeder 800 from Advantage Feeders with the ability to offer creep, rationing and ad lib feeding with no waste and a capacity of 500kg of feed. We are giving away six feeders in 2014 and the more people you recommend to become NSA members the more chances you have to win. Just make sure your details are in the referral box below.

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your business your future

NSA Next Generation Ambassadors selected from all over the country

By Joanne Briggs, NSA



When we opened the application process for the first ever NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group little did we expect the reaction we got. More than 40 applications flooded in, each and every one a worthy candidate for the programme we were planning.

Between NSA Head Office and the NSA Regions we shortlisted the applicants and interviewed 26 individuals from every corner of the UK. The interview process was incredibly rewarding for all involved and our thanks goes to all who attended an interview – your enthusiasm and passion for the sheep sector was a joy to see and left us with some incredibly difficult decisions to make.

The final line-up of Ambassadors has been selected and it is a great

pleasure to introduce them to you on these pages. As you read this, they will have just completed their first delivery session with NSA and will be looking forward to the four other sessions timed through the year, covering technical and personal development skills, such as market selection, food chain development, sheep husbandry, brand development and adding value, optimising genetics, meeting targets, business planning, presentation skills, conflict resolution and promotion of the sheep sector. I look forward to providing regular updates in this magazine in the months to come. *The NSA Next Generation project would not be possible without our founding partners – Dunbia, Eblex and Two Sisters. Find out more at www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk.*

NSA Next Generation 2014 Ambassadors

1. Jennifer Craig
2. James Davidson
3. James Drummond
4. Thomas Gibson
5. James Hamilton
6. Sara Jones-Richards
7. John Kirkpatrick
8. Marie Prebble
9. Andrew Prentice
10. Kate Robinson
11. Rhydian Thomas

NSA selected 12 ambassadors but unfortunately the 12th has just dropped out, due to personal reasons.



Jennifer Craig, 24

Jennifer runs the family farm at Biggar, Lanarkshire, with her father and has a real passion for the sheep they run

on the 710ha (1,750-acre unit) upland unit. She is highly ambitious, wanting to improve performance within the flocks of 800 Blackface ewes and 200 commercials and start selling pedigree ram lambs and shearlings bred from her personal flock of 25 pedigree Charollais ewes within the coming five years. She also wants to reintroduce cattle onto their hill land, to create an integrated and mutually beneficial beef and sheep enterprise.

Her excellent appreciation of the industry beyond her own farm gate means Jennifer sees a strong Scotch Lamb brand and high welfare standards as something to strengthen and utilise in the future, while at the same time wanting NSA and others to continue fighting for a fair lamb price from retailers and support for upland farms to maintain livestock numbers. “We must unite and figure our case, not only to our own Governments but also that of Europe,” she says. “The people making

the decisions that affect the industry need to have the knowledge of what the implications of their proposals are.”

Top fact: If Jennifer could change one thing in the sheep sector, she would insist that sheep be presented in the show ring in their natural state.



James Davidson, 20

Nothing has been able to stop James get into farming – not even his father letting out the family farm nearly a decade ago. He has taken some of the land at Ballymena, County Antrim, over himself and built up a commercial flock of 150 ewes in just four years from a base of Blackface cast ewes. His focus is 100% on maternal traits and he is a firm believer in recording the performance of his stock to select and breed better quality replacement ewes to produce good commercial lambs off grass. His would like to keep growing the flock to 600-800 ewes in order to be

able to move into full-time employment in the sheep sector, leaving his job on a local dairy farm behind.

James sees the overuse of drugs and drenches as a threat to the sheep sector and would like to see increased use of faecal egg counts, as well as improved biosecurity to protect the industry from spreading disease and wormer resistance. At the same time as sheep farmers buying in less disease, he would also like to see retailers buy in less ‘cheap imports, which are not the same high quality as our own lamb’.

Top fact: James is the youngest person selected for the Ambassador Group and you can find more about his sheep enterprise on page 44.



James Drummond, 30

James runs the sheep enterprise on his family's mixed farm at Alnwick, Northumberland, and

has already implemented several changes within the 1,250-ewe flock including EID for performance recording and more vigorous selection for worm and footrot resistance. The focus is on production of finished lambs for the market, but with an appreciation that the performance of the Suffolk cross ewes is just as important as the fleshing characteristics of the Charollais and Texel rams used. James is also a believer in the monitor farm model and is establishing the family farm in this role to benefit himself and local farmers.

James is a real go-getter, believing that moaning about prices and falling Single Farm Payments achieves nothing. "I don't want to be stuck with old methods, unwilling to adopt or except new production advances to change to a more commercial farming system that is not reliant on subsidies but has a keen eye on profit through reduced costs of production and improved marketability of produce. Improved genetics, grazing strategies, seed selection and links to markets are the key to easily managed low production cost systems."

Top fact: James is also a Nuffield Scholar and will be travelling the world in the next two years to study ways to optimise ewe performance.



Thomas Gibson, 27

Genetics and grassland management are the two priorities for Thomas, who works alongside his father on their mixed livestock farm at Broughshane, County Antrim. He has already introduced some hybrid breeds into their flock of 800 hill ewes to improve maternal lines, is using AI on his best Blackface ewes and, after a trip to New Zealand, has drawn up a reseeding plan for the whole farm. Thomas wants to reduce concentrate use and maximise

kilos of lamb produced, saying farmers cannot control the price they receive but can improve quality and quantity of lambs finished.

Thomas thinks falling Single Farm Payments means more must be done to encourage lamb sales: "In my farming situation loss of SFP will be our biggest obstacle in the coming years. More emphasis on environmental schemes will maybe help with the reduced payment, and educating consumers may increase lamb consumption. That little bit of water between Northern Ireland and the mainland effects the price we get for our lambs but Northern Ireland and also Ireland as a whole is trying to get products onto the shelves in different countries under the 'Irish' brand."

Top fact: Thomas has competed as a NSA Young Shepherd on a regional, national, European and international level, taking many prize cards home with him.



James Hamilton, 25

James has been shortlisted for three FBTs in recent years and, despite not being

successful yet, is determined to secure one in the future. In the meantime he is far from resting on his laurels, continuing to build up the ewe flock he started from scratch three years ago and working as a contract shepherd. With a flock of 120 ewes on his parents 28ha (70-acre farm) in Hadow Down, East Sussex, shearing 4,000 sheep each summer and shepherding 500 ewes owned by two landowners, James is definitely a busy man! With land as his limiting factor, he wants to maximise value of output and has set himself a five-year target of producing 1.9-2 lambs per commercial ewe and selling 40 home-bred Charollais and Suffolk rams from his pedigree flock each year.

James is keen on new varieties of grass, clover and brassicas as a way to tackle rising costs. He says: "Some threats cannot be mitigated at farm level, such as the effect of currency exchange rates, but other costs such as feed and fertiliser can be tackled through growing your own forage crops, making use of nitrogen-fixing legumes and adopting risk management policies."

Top fact: James ran his grandmother's upland farm in the Scottish Borders for four years while completing his agricultural degree at Newcastle. He has also worked as a land agent.



Sara Jones-Richards, 25

As a final year vet student, Sara is looking forward to going into mixed practice near her home

in Penzance, Cornwall, while also running a flock of 60 milking ewes for Greek yoghurt production and 25 pedigree Poll Dorsets for meat production with her partner Hugh. Sara plans to increase to 500-700 Dorsets over the next five years and up to 2,000 after that, taking advantage of available rented land in the area. Sara says: "My personal goal is to have a large well-run production flock, to maximise economies of scale and economic return. I feel my knowledge as a vet will help me maximise productivity and minimise costs. I would also like to sell rams to other pedigree and commercial breeders."

As a vet, it is not surprising that Sara is concerned about resistance to wormers and flukicides on UK farms and sees it as a worry for her own business in her quest to make the most of the grass on her farm. She says the availability of published research, scientific data and advice is a strength for the UK flock, if professionals and farmers take advantage of it.

Top fact: Sara has a long list of targets for the coming years, including selling the highest priced ram at the Dorset May Fair and producing a Poll Dorset Centurion Breed Group 'ram of the year',

John Kirkpatrick, 33



From his home in Northern Ireland to a rented unit in the Highlands to a small owned farm in Mercaston, Derbyshire, John

Kirkpatrick has seen his love of sheep take him all over the UK. It has also seen him develop a real passion for wool-shedding sheep

Continued on page 14

► and he now runs a flock of just over 100 hybrid Easycare, Wiltshire Horn and Texel ewes (which he calls 'Easex'), all naturally wool shedding and producing Beltex cross lambs for a boxed lamb scheme.

"To many this may seem somewhat radical, but the cold hard economics speak for themselves – as a business I cannot produce wool which shows returns well below the true cost of production and, more importantly, dictates many of the management practices employed within the business," he says.

With a focus on selecting the right genetics for a commercial sheep system, John believes the lack of information being fed back from abattoirs to farmers is a problem that needs urgently addressing.

Top fact: John's other job in the poultry industry regularly takes him to the Middle East. Even considering the much shorter generation turn-over, he would still like to see the sheep sector make as speedy progress as broilers and layers.



Marie Prebble, 25

Many readers may recognise Marie from the article she wrote in the last edition of this magazine, outlining her plans for the family's tenanted farm at Dover, Kent. Marie hopes to retain the FBT to secure her future on the farm and is in the process of writing a very detailed business plan and improving attention to detail in her accounts for immediate and long-term benefit. Coupled with a detailed health plan, a focus on husbandry and business and financial mentoring, she hopes to ensure her farming business is sustainable and profitable for the years to come. During that time she also plans to increase her 250-ewe flock to 400-500 by taking on additional rented grazing and improving her own permanent pasture by reseeding and improving soil and grassland management.

Marie says: "The future of the sheep industry lies in the hands of its new entrants, who are already proving to be a breed of high focused individuals, hardworking and committed to high standards in flock health and business planning. I would like to see the progression of the brightest individuals improved by creating more opportunities for business innovation and share

farming/grazing agreements, whilst tackling tenancy, tax and land management issues."

Top fact: Marie sells home produced lamb directly to individuals and restaurants but also works one day a week in Ashford Market, providing her with an insight to both ends of the supply chain.

Andrew Prentice, 31

With two ferries to take before he even gets to the mainland, Andrew will definitely have the longest journey to the NSA Next Generation Ambassador sessions. He only recently moved to the island of Iona with his wife and two children, taking on a 95ha (230-acre) farm because he saw more opportunity to expand his sheep enterprise on the west coast of Scotland that where he was previously in Aberdeenshire. In the immediate future his focus will be on building up his flock of Blackface ewes (pure-bred south type), with the potential to take on more land on the island and/or nearby Mull after five years or so. In the meantime achieving 'near top end' prices for ewe lambs at Dalmally market and winning a top three place at the Royal Highland Show are key targets.

Andrew would like to see a higher profile for lamb in the future with it advertised not only as a naturally-fed, tasty product, but also an investment. He says: "As a taxpayer funding farming subsidies I feel the sheep sector is better value for money as it does less environmental damage, and yet we do not get as much help or aid as those in cattle or arable."

Top fact: As a talented mechanic, Andrew is currently supplementing his income by providing a mechanicing service to islanders. This is a business he wants to retain and maybe pass to his son in time.



Kate Robinson, 23

Kate is employed as a shepherd at Mitcheldean, in the Forest of Dean,

Gloucestershire, working with a closed flock of 1,000 breeding females (a mix of pure Charollais, pure Lleyn and commercial ewes) and finishing 1,700 store lambs per year. She has developed a very good understanding of using EID and computer hardware/software to aid performance recording and takes a lead

on this with the pedigree ewes, with the intention of extending it to the commercials too. The aim is to start making selection decisions based on the data, and so Kate is walking the fine line between wanting accuracy but knowing the limitations of the technology.

Kate feels that awareness of health and disease issues is vital for everyone involved in the sheep sector and that it is her duty as a responsible shepherd to stay up to date with existing and emerging health threats. She says: "There is little pressure on farmers who do not wish to actively take part with other farmers in tackling diseases. I believe farmers taking responsibility deserve more support than those who don't."

Top fact: Kate had a degree in Psychology and Criminology. The subject may not be directly applicable to sheep, but Kate says the presentation skills she learnt will help make her a good sheep ambassador.



Rhydian Thomas, 24

With 600 Beulah Speckled Face ewes on his family farm at Llandeilo,

Carmarthenshire, 950 Suffolk Mules on the farm where he works and a shearing round in the summer, Rhydian is never far away from sheep! He is actively looking for land to rent near the home farm and, knowing that would likely be hill ground, would run more Beulahs to produce pure-bred and Mule breeding females. While he knows he would not get SFP on this ground, he believes all farms should be geared up for the end of payments anyway. He says: "New Zealand farmers stood on their own two feet when they lost all Government funding by making the best use of grass and also using good genetics by culling any problem ewes so they ended up with 'survival of the fittest'. We need to learn from this system and identify our best performing ewes and use their genetics with the aid of EID, since it is a legal requirement to have EID already."

Rhydian sees contracts between farmers and abattoirs as a priority for the future, so abattoirs can plan their supply and farmers have a price to work from to budget their costs

Top fact: Rhydian had a massive year in 2013, named as NSA Welsh Young Shepherd of the Year and European Young Shepherd of the Year.

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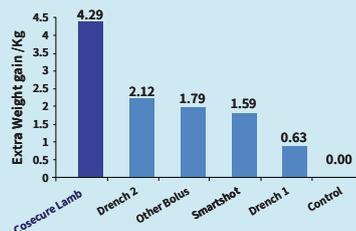
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Firm focus on future-proofing the sector at NSA Sheep Event 2014

The Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, is the place to be on Wednesday 30th July, as this year's NSA Sheep Event promises to be bigger and better than ever.

The event is being organised to the theme 'securing the future of the UK sheep industry', with a focus on everything from driving profit for sustainability to embracing new technologies.

"NSA is committed to covering the issues vital to securing a future for the sheep industry for those involved now, as well as preparing the way for the next generation," says Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive.

"We intend to build on the success of previous Sheep Events and our regional events to encourage and showcase a new generation of innovators, ideas and products in all areas of the sheep industry. We will also be promoting our NSA Next Generation project and our Young Shepherd of the Year competition as a way to show the opportunities the sheep industry can offer to young people as a source of vibrant career opportunities."

Familiar features at the Sheep Event will include free technical seminars, the Young Shepherd of the Year final, fencing competition (see page opposite), stockjudging, demonstrations and shearing. New features will include a focus on renewable energy, additional workshops and drop-in clinics and a new video competition (see panel).

If you would like to exhibit at the NSA Sheep Event, please contact Event Organiser Helen Davies (contact details on page 1). If you are representing a breed society or group and are interested in inviting international guests, please contact Henry Lewis at British Livestock Genetics (BLG) on 07990 506003 or livestockgenetics@outlook.com.

Mr Lewis says: "BLG will again be acting in a service delivery capacity for EBLEX to manage, coordinate and help with inward missions from potential overseas business contacts around the Sheep Event in July. We will be pleased to receive submissions from breed societies, breeding companies and individual breeders for financial support towards inward missions, but you will need to act now as we have already



NSA Sheep Event 2014
Wednesday 30th July

committed to accommodate several groups including from Eastern and Western Europe and South America."

Remember, entry to the NSA Sheep Event is much cheaper for NSA members and even cheaper again if you take advantage of our early bird ticket offer launching this spring – watch this space for more information.

£700 prize fund in new video competition

A new feature at the NSA Sheep Event will be a competition to find the best 'advert' for a career in sheep farming.

We all know how rewarding living and working in the countryside can be, producing top quality lamb for British and international consumers, so this is your chance to shout about it and encourage youngsters to consider taking a shepherding job or a role in ancillary services when they are older. Show off how beautiful your corner of the UK is, how proud you are of your stock and why there are enough good things about your job to outweigh the days when it just never stops raining!

You have between now and **Friday 16th May** to submit your video, which will be shortlisted and the best eight hosted online for people to vote for their favourite, with the best three or four going to the Sheep Event to be aired on large screens for the final vote.

Farmers Guardian are involved in the competition as media partner of the Sheep Event and have offered a skilled videographer to help edit the final eight videos – all you need to do is send in lots of footage (up to one hour) and the shortlisted eight will get a three or four

minute advert especially made for the big online vote.

The video voted as the best advert for the UK sheep sector will receive a £500 first prize, with second and third attracting £200 and £100 respectively – so get your cameras and smart phones out now.

Tips for sending in footage include taking shots of your farm and you and work, as well as spoken bits to the camera. You can send the footage in any format but, particularly if you are using a video on a mobile phone, please select a high setting so the filming is a high quality. Sent your video to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk marked 'Sheep Event Video Competition'.

Full terms and conditions can be found at www.sheepevent.org.uk, as well as a full explanation of how the voting and judging will be decided; the judge's decision will be final.

**Farmers
Guardian**

Livestock fencing, past and present

The biennial Tornado Wire Fencing Competition, hosted by NSA Sheep Event, celebrates its 30th year this July. Held at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, the popular competition welcomes teams from around the country to test their fencing speed and skills. Entries to the competition are limited and based on date of application, so for a chance to compete at the NSA Sheep Event this year (Wednesday 30th July) please request a form from Event Organiser Helen Davies (contact details on opposite page) and return it no later than Friday 30th May. In the meantime, Tornado Wire and Syd Dallyn look back at the chances to fencing over the last few decades.

For Syd Dallyn, a trip across the Bristol Channel in a boat laden with fencing equipment and tractors is one stand out memory from a fencing career stretching over more than 45 years.

For two years running Syd and his team were marooned on the island of Lundy for two weeks during the winter undertaking essential fencing repair work

“Because it was winter, we had to wait for the boat to return, which was dependent on the weather,” explains Syd. “As a National Trust Island, they used to look after us well. We were put up in pretty basic wooden huts, but we had three meals a day. We had our breakfast in the Island pub, but I remember it used to close at about midnight because the generator got switched off.”

Through the years, Syd has worked across the West Country as part of his fencing business, run with wife Joy. During that time he has witnessed big improvements in the type of fencing available, along with greater market competition.

“With any fencing job, you have to be physically fit – I’ve yet to see any fencers going to the gym. But when I first started out, it was a lot more manual. You didn’t have the machinery and post-bangers you have now,” he says.

It was largely by accident that Syd started out as a fencing contractor in 1966. As a sheep farmer running 850 ewes on Exmoor, it was a trip to the

Grassland Show at Stoneleigh to look at machinery and fencing that presented him with the business opportunity.

“We had decided to reclaim 100 acres of moorland, so we went to the show to look at what fencing we could use,” explains Syd, who now farms with daughter Kay and grandson Kevin at Kemacott, Martinhoe, near Barnstaple.

At the time, a new high tensile dropper fence had come to the market. This labour saving fence was radical at the time, allowing 1,000m of wire to be stretched between two steel posts. Having decided to use this on the farm, the fencing company approached Syd to become one of their agents. As a result, S.W. and Joy Dallyn fencing was born.

“I was 33 years old then so the manual side wasn’t too much of a shock,” says Syd. “In the early days I had a couple of local lads working for me. We covered a much wider area then including West Somerset and the whole of Devon – there weren’t as many contractors then.”

The business quickly expanded and to this day the company still supplies some of their original customers from the 1960s.

“The equipment has changed a lot since the early days. Now you’ve got modern post-bangers which are streets ahead of what was available then. The old ones weren’t much better than a sledge hammer,” Syd comments.

The type of fencing favoured by farmers has also evolved. The dropper fence, with several plain rows of wire and wooden stakes every 10 yards, has become less popular since the introduction of wire mesh.

“In the mid-eighties we started using high tensile wire mesh fencing from Tornado Wire which meant you had eight strands of wire straight away. These fences were a lot more stock proof because of the vertical wires,” he says.

In general, Syd says high tensile



Syd Dallyn says it’s worth investing in high tensile wire for sheep fencing.

fencing is a much better product for farmers, reducing the amount of maintenance required. “Being a farmer, I know the ways of the animals and I know what’s needed to keep stock out. Soft fencing is only really OK for temporary fencing. It is worth investing in high tensile.”

Syd explains how the type of fencing carried out has also changed following the introduction of environmental schemes.

“Environmental schemes have created a lot more work for us over the last 20 years; 60 to 70% of fencing work is protecting hedges for stewardship,” he says. “There’s also a lot more competition for work. We used to have two or three contractors in a 30-mile radius. Now farmers’ sons think they can make money doing fencing. It is a lot more of a competitive market, but there is a lot more fencing about so there seems to be an opportunity for everyone.”

Now Syd has taken a step back from the manual side of fencing, but the company still sells fencing materials to local contractors, with 90% of product sourced from Tornado Wire. Fencing has also remained in the family, with son Mark self-employed as a contractor.



The Tornado Wire Fencing Competition was as popular with spectators in the 1980s as it is now.

Securing sustainable land management

By George Dunn, Tenant Farmers Association Chief Executive



This year's Oxford Farming Conference research report, authored by Bidwells, examined the structural change and investment needed for UK agriculture to be sustainable over the next decade.

Looking at the tenanted sector of agriculture, the report rightly identified that the nature of tenancies let under the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (farm business tenancies or FBTs) had become too short term providing little security for tenants and no confidence for tenant investment. However, rather than looking to address the fundamental issues, the report concluded that traditional tenancies should be abandoned in favour of 'new, dynamic structures to combine land, labour and capital' such as share farming.

The flaw in this argument is that share farming, whilst a worthy venture in its own right, is no substitute for the security available under an agricultural tenancy. Indeed, most share farming models offer little by way of long-term security. There is also the danger that landowners will be encouraged to look even further away from traditional models of letting land towards schemes which are driven more by a desire to save tax and acquire subsidy than to provide a good framework to encourage the development of farm business activity.

Average lengths of term on FBTs are much too short. The Central Association of Agricultural Valuers suggests the average is around four years. Whilst this might be on the margins of acceptability for arable producers it is completely unsustainable for anyone establishing or developing livestock enterprises. However, rather than leaping to the conclusion that the tenancy system is inherently broken, the TFA suggests that we manipulate two of the most important levers that determine land owner decisions – tax and subsidy.

Tax advantages

Since 1995 all landlords with land in their possession for at least seven years have the benefit of an extremely generous tax advantage of 100% relief from inheritance tax on the agricultural value of the land regardless of the nature of the tenancy agreement offered. The TFA has long questioned



Long term FBT are needed to provide security and stability to the tenanted sector, says the TFA.

the extent to which the nation receives value for money for this subsidy in light of the apparent unwillingness of landlords to let for sustainable lengths of term. As a result, the TFA argues that this tax benefit should only apply where landlords are prepared to let on at least a 10-year basis.

Advisers of land owners will now be prophesying that such a change in tax law will encourage more of their clients to abandon tenancies and utilise other platforms such as contract farming, share farming, grazing licences, share partnerships and the like. However, as part of the TFA's strategy for taxation reform, we need also to see the Government clamping down more robustly on the aggressive tax avoidance that is occurring on a broad swathe of agricultural land farmed under the auspices of sham versions of these types of agreements.

The TFA has no argument with owners who use other types of agreements beyond agricultural tenancies where these are used in legitimate ways with both the land owning and farming parties sharing risk, entrepreneurial input, investment and management control. However, where the agreement says one thing but the practice on the ground shows another and where the land owner obtains effectively a fixed return, clearly these agreements have been drawn up only to give the land owner access to trading status for income and capital taxation.

Understanding this and not wanting to put a major disincentive in the way of landlords looking to let longer, owners prepared to let for 10 years or more should be able to treat rent received as

trading income, as opposed to investment income, allowing them to offset costs and losses from wider business interests.

In the same way as there has been an industry of advice in relation to assisting land owners to minimise their tax liabilities, there is also an industry of advice established around assisting them to maximise their subsidy take through CAP schemes. The TFA has argued that individuals should not have access to funding under any CAP schemes where they are unable to demonstrate that they are in occupation of the land being used to support a claim, unable to show that they are in close management control of all of the activities taking place on that land and where they are bearing none of the entrepreneurial risk.

Active farmer test

Without an adequate active farmer test such as this, there will be an increasing temptation for landowners to abandon the use of tenancies in favour of shorter, less secure and riskier ventures for operators such as those previously referred to. Again the TFA is not opposed to the use of other forms of land management beyond tenancies but these must be entered into for the right reasons rather than simply to avoid or evade tax or gain subsidy advantage for the land owner.

Have your say: Agree or disagree with Mr Dunn's comment?

Have your say by emailing enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk or write to NSA, The Sheep Centre, Malvern, WR13 6PH.



Conor McGuigan

HOW TO SECURE WEATHERPROOF GUARANTEED FARMING INCOME

According to a recent survey carried out by the National Farmers Union, this year's extreme weather and soaring costs have seriously hit farmers' confidence to invest in their businesses in the short term. Some 42 per cent of farmers told the NFU that their farm businesses were in for a tougher year, up from 30 per cent in 2012.

However, in spite of the gloom and uncertainty, increasing numbers of farmers have been discovering a way to reap a weatherproof, guaranteed income over a 25 year period – with zero set up costs to themselves. They have achieved this by renting out land or roof space to the UK's leading solar energy generator, Lightsource Renewable Energy.

Lightsource Renewable Energy, the UK's leading solar energy generator is currently assessing land areas in the UK to establish their suitability for a solar farm installation. Lightsource has already developed over 80 solar farms, across 2,200 acres which currently provide clean, secure electricity to over 100,000 UK homes, and aims to double this capacity by December 2014. The company is confident that its solar farms will boost rural business providing options to landowners across the country to diversify their income



Sheep graze happily in the sunshine at Marley Thatch Solar Farm, Devon

with a solar installation on their property. Conor McGuigan, Business Development Director for Lightsource comments, "Contrary to the unfounded opinions of some, solar farms do not harm the land they are installed upon. In fact they safeguard it for future generations and provide further options for farmland diversification like grazing small livestock or providing an ecological habitat for rare birds like the English Grey Partridge. If you are a farmer with land available for rent, it is best to come straight to us because we prefer to cut out any 'third parties' or 'middlemen' who will sometimes have their own agenda. We like to deal directly with the person who is potentially going to be our landlord

"Solar farms safeguard land for future generations."

for the next 25 years. It's very important that we get to meet face to face and build a strong, comfortable relationship because of the length of the commitment and contract we would be entering into. The same applies to the relationship we foster with the local community around the site – they are going to be our neighbours for a long time."

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The farmer or landowner enters into a fixed-term 25 year lease with Lightsource, at which point rental payments begin and are then paid quarterly in advance. Rent is priced per acre and is increased annually in line with inflation. There is no risk of any default on rental payments as Lightsource projects are backed by a long term government sponsored incentive schemes, making the company and payments guaranteed and secure.

The solar farm panels and infrastructure only occupy less than 30 per cent of the rented area. This allows both landowner and Lightsource to work together to ensure the land allocated to the solar farm is managed responsibly and sustainably. The gaps between rows usually range from 4 meters to 8 meters and as the panels are mounted above the ground, the land is ideal for grazing small livestock like sheep or chickens.

GUARANTEED INCOME FOR 25 YEARS

Conor continues: "Solar power is a dependable source of energy, and farming it creates a great opportunity to establish a sustainable local supply chain. The land owners we work with currently have used the stable income the solar farm provides to diversify their business and even invest in new equipment to continue farming. If the farmer can spare that land, he is in a win-win situation because not only will he be able to continue doing what he does best – farming the land, he will also have the benefit of a reliable long-term revenue stream to back him up. Some farmers even see this as part of their future retirement plan."

RENT OR SELL YOUR LAND TO US

The criteria for land suitable for solar farming is simple. It has to be relatively screened, not within an Area of Outstanding National Beauty and of low grade agricultural quality, ideally grade 3 and below. The solar farm will need a grid connection to export the electricity, and Lightsource's in-house grid team will carry out the necessary checks to ensure there is a viable connection available.

Lightsource is keen to demonstrate that solar farms will play an important role in addressing the UK's electricity needs and will aid the drive towards cheaper, cleaner electricity bills for the consumer; this maturing industry now plays a vital role supporting the economic stability of the agricultural sector and creating full time employment for local communities.

Any farmer or landowner with a site of at least 25 acres wishing to discuss its suitability as a solar farm should call 0333 200 0755 or email harvest@lightsource-re.co.uk Free educational resources about solar energy and climate change can be found at www.lightsource-re.co.uk



THE UK'S LEADING SOLAR ENERGY GENERATOR

Changes afoot in England and Wales – but progress will be slow

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

The Red Tape Review (Macdonald Report) in England and Working Smarter Report in Wales both promised to cut red tape, but it has been so long since their publication you would be forgiven for thinking they are just sat on a Government shelf gathering dust.

NSA is one of several stakeholder groups sitting on Livestock Identification Core Groups in both nations and is being told the painfully slow progress is due to Government spending cuts reducing staff and removing funding for new projects, and also the need for the electronic sheep databases to be in place before sweeping reforms can be made.

Database launch on 1st April

We know the English database will launch on 1st April for farmers (see facing page), with a phased implementation for abattoirs and markets to follow, and (however painful they may be) we now understand the changes being made to tagging options. Wales is slightly behind but has now announced they will be adapting Scot EID into EIDCymru with a planned start date of 1st January 2015; we are also expecting a Welsh consultation on tagging options any day.

Both nations have also promised a CPH review and extension of the five-mile sheep movement rule to 10 miles (to bring sheep in line with cattle), which will allow farming businesses to amalgamate CPHs within 10 miles and associate rented land, removing the need to report or record movements. However, this will not be completed until



Electronic databases will change movement reporting for farmers, market and abattoirs, while the CPH review should ease reporting and recording rules for shorter movements between land parcels.

2018 at the earliest. This is completely different to the announcement made by Defra Secretary of State Owen Paterson in January, which was interpreted by many as an immediate change to the five-mile rule. NSA has taken many enquiries about this, as the change would bring benefits to so many businesses, but regrettably it was a case of poorly presented information.

Defra says the timeframe is indicative of how long it has taken them to get financial sign-off from Government for implementation, only recently getting the green light to begin the project that farmers would like to have seen completed years ago.

Proposed changes delayed

The CPH review has delayed proposed changes to the six-day standstill rule.

Both England and Wales were considering separation units for incoming stock (a formally approved building or field where incoming stock could be quarantined, allowing off movements to go ahead sooner than six days) and despite considerable effort by NSA and other stakeholder groups to help Defra and the Welsh Government develop the concept, this has been put on hold until 2018. The only silver lining is that while Wales is saying it will simply pick up the concept of separation units at that time, England is promising a full-scale review of the six-day rule including an assessment of the Northern Ireland decision last year to do away with it completely until a disease outbreak is confirmed. NSA will keep members informed as and when we hear more.

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Questions answered on the new English sheep movement database

By Caitlin Peck, NSA

NSA has run six open meetings for sheep farmers in recent weeks with SouthWestern, the company running the new electronic database in England on behalf of Defra. The meetings addressed a number of key questions about the new Animal Reporting and Movement Service (ARAMS) that launches on 1st April 2014 with paper and electronic reporting options.

What changes will there be to paper reporting?

You can continue to report by paper if you wish, but from 1st April the current AML1 form will be replaced by a new but similar ARAMS1 form. Whereas AML1 forms go to your Local Authority, paper reporting forms should instead be sent to SouthWestern's new centralised recording service at Milton Keynes. ARAMS1s will be available from markets, abattoirs, shows and local authorities, as well as online.

How do I get started with electronic reporting?

If you chose to report movements electronically you will first need to register for an account online at www.arams.co.uk. SouthWestern expect the system to be open for registration by the end of March, so you can sign up in advance. Joe Ryan of SouthWestern advises everyone to sign up and have a look, as you don't have to use it once you have registered.

How do I report a movement electronically?

To create a movement report electronically for a move between farms, sign into your ARAMS account via the ARAMS website (or via your farm management package if you choose – see below). You can then set up a movement by entering the CPH numbers of the holdings the animals are moving from and to, along with the tag numbers. A movement document will be filled out automatically, which you can then print. This printed form will go with the animals in transit. If the keeper receiving the animals is registered to report electronically, they can report receipt by logging in to ARAMS and confirming the details of the move you created, which will have appeared in their account. When moving to an abattoir, you set up the movement in the same way you would a farm to farm move. But movements involving markets and collection centres are a bit different – more below.

What if I already use a farm management package?

Many farm management systems will link up with the electronic ARAMS service so make sure you tick the box to say you use a farm management system when you register with ARAMS, so you can connect the two. You can then log in to your farm management system (using your ARAMS account details) and upload movement information to ARAMS through it. You will also be able to confirm receipt of movements through your farm management package.

If you are using a farm management system you will not need to use the online holding register on offer – more below – but should speak to your package provider to ensure they are linked-up.

What if I am moving sheep to or from someone reporting on paper?

It's not a problem if the keeper on one side of the movement is reporting on paper and the keeper on the other is reporting electronically. If you receive stock from a keeper reporting on paper you can enter the movement details into the online system and confirm receipt electronically. If you wish to report on paper and receive animals from a keeper reporting electronically, you simply send the movement form by post to Milton Keynes.

How do I report moves to and from markets and collection centres?

When moving animals to a market you log in to ARAMS, set up the movement and print off a movement form to send with your sheep. You then have two options. You can update your holding register with either the details you entered when creating the movement or with those the market sends back to you having scanned the animals.

You also have two options when receiving animals from a market – you



The first of six meetings held by NSA attracted around 60 people to Cirencester Market on a Wednesday afternoon; the next meeting that same evening saw 180 people at Exeter Livestock Centre.

can either confirm the details the market sends to your account when they create the movement or enter the details yourself. It doesn't matter if the details (i.e. tag numbers) you enter don't match those the market send you. As long as you are confident that your holding register has been updated accurately there isn't a problem.

How do I report cross-border movements between England, Scotland and Wales?

In farm-to-farm movements between England and Scotland, the keeper sending and the keeper receiving can both choose to report either electronically or on paper. If both report electronically, the information is simply transferred between ARAMS and Scot EID. Movements from or to markets and abattoirs across the Scottish border are the same as those within England.

As there is currently no electronic database for Wales, in moves across the Welsh border the Welsh keeper continues to report on paper while the English keeper can choose to report online or on paper.

How do I use the online holding register?

When you register for ARAMS you will be given the option to adopt a free online holding register. To opt in, pick the default setting when registering to ARAMS. This register will update automatically when you create a movement or confirm receipt of a movement electronically.

A SouthWestern helpline will be available to farmers once the website is open to registrations and Defra will be putting out extra information later in the month. In the meantime, find out more at www.arams.co.uk.

Home-bred lambs and bought-in stores guarantee year-round supply

By Joanne Briggs, NSA

For Andrew Foulds it's about starting with the end product and working back. He discusses supply, demand and price with the processor and supermarket, then looks at factors such as land and feed availability, before giving the green light to buy store lambs from September onwards.

If it was that simple everyone would do it, but it is only after years of building up volume that Andrew has the sway to sit at a negotiating table with an abattoir and retailer. He finishes 20,000-30,000 store lambs a year, plus progeny from his 1,350 January-lambing Suffolk Mules, 750 March-lambing Mules and 400 April-lambing Scottish Blackfaces.

"We don't get it right every year, but I like to think we're good at what we do," says Andrew, who is the long-standing Chairman of NSA Eastern Region. He is based at Elveden, Thetford, and runs his sheep on a mix of long-term and temporary rental and grazing agreements with arable/vegetable farmers throughout Suffolk and Norfolk.

"You're only ever as good as your staff and the relationship you have with your arable farmers," he says. "This business only works because of cooperation from arable farmers and dedicated staff."

Main Job

"Our main job is buying and finishing store lambs. We do big volumes and have a very good relationship with Randall Parker, which has been built up over very many years."

Andrew 'thrashes out' a pricing deal

"You're only ever as good as your staff and the relationship you have with your arable farmers. This business only works because of cooperation from arable farmers and dedicated staff."

Andrew Foulds

with Randall Parker each year based on the numbers they need to supply to Sainsburys from Christmas to May. This is based on Andrew hitting the right spec with every lorry load of lambs, delivering them clean and with clipped bellies. They don't all have to hit the Sainsburys specification (for example his Blackface cross Charollais lambs are sold straight off the ewe for the lightweight export trade) but Andrew has a 'gentlemen's agreement' with Randall Parker that he supplies them exclusively, providing critical volume from October to July.

Getting to this position has taken a lot of work and originates from Andrew's boyhood interest in sheep that, despite being a country parson's son with no farming background, prompted him to



The early lambing flock are strip grazed on stubble turnips for the first couple of months of the year.

study agriculture at Cirencester in the 1960s. He took on a full-time job with the local NFU in 1969, progressing from junior to group secretary while also emulating a friend's low-capital business running keep sheep on sugar beet tops. The concept worked in Suffolk/Norfolk and in the mid-1980s, by which time Andrew was finishing 5,000 store lambs a year, he decided the sheep could pay his wages instead. He kept expanding via numerous grazing agreements with arable farmers, including on the 9,300ha (23,000-acre) Elveden Estate owned by Lord Iveagh of the Guinness family.

Having had grazing rights on Elveden since 1985, Andrew established Elveden Livestock Ltd in 1999 to take on a formal 810ha (2,000-acre) FBT.

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Andrew Foulds

This provides useful grazing for this sheep business and a base for his 60 pedigree South Devon sucklers (Andrew's self-confessed 'pride and joy') and a bed-and-breakfast arrangement for up to 1,500 Angus and Hereford crosses per year, owned by a local beef finisher supplying Waitrose and with Andrew providing the site, one full-time employee and machinery. The resulting FYM is traded with the estate for 3,000 Heston bales per year.

HLS payments

The HLS payment the estate claims on the land Andrew rents (which is home to the largest UK population of Stone Curlews) has seen stock numbers decreased and out-wintering systems adopted for the South Devons and Blackies. Given the nature of Andrew's farming business, such restrictions are part of the job. The local land type also provides limitations, remaining reasonably dry in winter but 'burning up like the Serengeti' in summer. He is therefore a great believer in forage rape for finishing store lambs, and stubble turnips for in-lamb and freshly lambled ewes in the winter before supplementing

spring grass with creep and contract-grown fodder beet.

"We feed the ewes like we would a dairy cow, as we want as much production out of her as we can," he says. "All the lambs go on creep because I want them done and out of the way as quickly as I can. The easiest way to shepherd a lamb is in the bank! So by the time we have any drought we can wean the ewes – they have done their bit and the lambs can live off creep."

Network of agents

Andrew uses a network of agents to buy his store lambs and says it is not unusual for him to get stock from the Scottish Borders, Longtown and Ashford in the same week, but once on-farm all lambs are treated identically. They get 10 days to 'settle in, fill themselves up and get used to the electric fences' before being given a combination wormer/flukicide and vaccinated for clostridial diseases and pasturella. Andrew's real bugbear (even more than incorrect eartags in store lambs) is the high incidence of scab and the long meat withdrawal on the OP dip he uses to treat it.

Farm Facts

- Finishes 20,000-30,000 store lambs a year.
- Lambs 1,350 Suffolk Mules to the Charollais in January and 750 Mules to the Suffolk in March, all outside in yards created with Heston bales, with ewes and lambs penned individually indoors after lambing.
- Also lambs 400 Scottish Blackfaces to the Charollais outside in April.
- Everything sold deadweight to Randall Parker, with many supplied to Sainburys.
- Owns 16ha (40 acres) and takes all other land and buildings on long-term and temporary rental agreements

Lambs are batched according to treatment groups, type and predicted finishing time, scattered all over the place and then brought to the central lairage area once finished for drafting and loading up for the abattoir in Llanidloes, mid Wales.

On his own breeding ewes, Andrew uses a Suffolk on the Mules and Charollais on the Suffolk Mules, but keeps replacement Suffolk Mules only if he thinks the ewe lambs are worth more to him as breeding stock than finished. This year he thinks shearlings will be affordable come autumn, so will likely sell all his own lambs and buy in replacements for both flocks either privately or from Bicester Sheep Fair. Buying privately in July suits him as it gives enough time to get the two abortion vaccines in three weeks before the tup.

"Breeding ewes are hugely, hugely expensive," Andrew says. "My biggest competitor is the family farm where the wife and kids all muck in at lambing time with no labour bill – but at the



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same time I rely on those guys to buy store lambs from. Whenever I sit down with Sainsburys and Randall Parker to talk about the price of store lambs that year and what price I need to cover my costs, they always say my labour costs are too high. But to run a system like this I have to pay self-employed shepherds and for them to run their own trucks."

Andrew has three regular shepherds, with more brought on in September when the stores start arriving and building up to 12 by lambing time, coinciding with when work on arable farms dries up. His longest-employed shepherd started 25 years ago aged 19, but the average age of the rest is about 20. He clearly thrives on sharing the job with these youngsters, working them hard but enjoying the fact that play hard too and joining in the banter about weekend antics and misdemeanours.

"They have tremendous enthusiasm and are gaining in maturity," he says. "I have to put huge trust in them and they're a super bunch. My partner Nesta says I'm a control freak, but I try to give them responsibility and encouragement. When it rained nonstop for three days during lambing I could have cried for them, but none of them whinged or complained. My life would be very easy



Andrew says his staff are key to the operation. Here George Hartley-Webb (front) and Marcus Searle (back) draft finished lambs to send to the abattoir.

if I got rid of the breeding flock, but it would be very boring for me and them."

Next generation

This enjoyment in the next generation extends beyond his own business, as Andrew says he would like to run another NSA Youthful Shepherd event (first created by the Eastern Region last year) before he retires as Regional Chairman. And when that retirement

comes, he passes the role to Dan Phipps, who came to him at 19 as a shepherd and worked up through the ranks before taking on a flock managers job nearby.

"There is a good future for the sheep industry with these young people," Andrew says. "They are out there and keen to do the job, but you've got pay them and you've got to give them responsibility."

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Activity on sheep worrying continues

Sheep worrying by dogs has long been an issue that NSA has been vocal about and we are stepping up our activity this year by continuing our joint initiative with Farmers Guardian newspaper.

For the first time NSA and Farmers Guardian are gathering information from dog walkers as well as sheep farmers. An online survey at www.farmersguardian.com is being promoted by the Ramblers Association, dog magazines and the British Veterinary Association and, at the time

Let us know about dog worrying on your farm

Please take the time to report experience of dog worrying on your own farm at www.nationalsheep.org.uk. If you do not have an internet connection please call NSA Head Office on 01684 892661 and we will post you a hard copy.

of going to press, more than 1,000 people had completed it anonymously to voice opinion on their pets, especially around livestock. Once the survey is closed it will provide a powerful tool for discussing the issue of sheep worrying with a wider audience than the sheep farming community that already know how serious the problem is.

Separate to the dog walkers survey is a questionnaire about dog worrying for sheep farmers on the NSA website. This is slightly longer and gathers information (also anonymously) about the seriousness and cost of dog attacks. This will help support the dog walkers survey by providing information



to regional and national news channels about the victims of the crime.

NSA urges you to complete the survey; the results of this survey will be kept separate to the questionnaire we did about sheep worrying in 2012/13 and so please complete it even if you have done the questionnaire previously.

We are also in the process of increasing the amount of information about sheep worrying on the NSA website, so if you have been affected by dog worrying and are willing to be a case study on the website please contact enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk. NSA has been having difficulty replenishing our stock of dog worrying signs, but will be sending them to members on the waiting list in the near future. If you're not already on the waiting list please contact NSA Head Office.

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New NSA report demands urgent action on carcass splitting rules

By Caitlin Peck, NSA

A new NSA report on TSEs is calling for relaxation of controls that are crippling the sheep sector. As you read this article, NSA will be in the process of chasing media coverage and using the report to encourage MEPs to look at the issue at the European level from which the rules originate.

TSEs (transmissible spongiform encephalopathies) include scrapie in sheep and goats and BSE in cattle – and since BSE regulations were loosened in March of last year, calls for reform of TSE rules for sheep have grown louder. While the requirement to test healthy slaughtered cattle for BSE was dropped for animals born in EU states except Romania and Bulgaria last year, the sheep industry is being left behind with no change to scrapie controls currently in the pipeline. Unnecessarily tight UK scrapie regulations have huge costs for farmers and the sheep industry that are currently being ignored.

In response to members' concerns, NSA has prepared a paper for MEPs, outlining the current situation, the problems posed by scrapie controls and NSA's recommendations for action. The report aims to debunk unhelpful myths surrounding scrapie – such as its wrongful association with BSE and the belief that it may pose a human health risk – and demonstrate the need for and the safety of change to the current rules. The report will be released to MEPs and the press in the coming weeks, alongside a more in-depth version of the paper which will be available to view on the NSA website.

Costs to the sheep industry of current TSE controls include the



In the time it takes to have scrapie controls removed, NSA calls for immediate relaxation of UK rules so abattoirs here can remove as much SRM as possible, as in other EU Member States, rather than 100%.

devaluation of carcasses, the slowing of slaughter lines to split carcasses and remove specified risk material (SRM), the necessity of checking for teeth at live markets, and the limitation of exports. NSA has gathered industry information and come up with estimates of these costs to be presented in the report – see panel.

Impact of carcass splitting

The £23.3 million figure does not include the impact of carcass splitting on the export potential and domestic competitiveness of UK sheep meat. Firstly there is the devaluation of carcasses caused by splitting, which limits export potential. And secondly exports are hit by the impression our strict scrapie controls give to potential importers that UK sheep are not healthy animals producing safe, high quality

meat, an effect worsened by the popular association of scrapie with BSE. It is difficult to put a figure on this disadvantage, but it leaves the UK unable to make the most of growing export opportunities. Reduced carcass value makes domestic produce less competitive against imported competition. Again, this effect is difficult to put into numbers, but has a significant negative impact on the UK sheep industry.

No human health risk

The problems caused by the current scrapie regulations need to be tackled. Extensive research has found no human health risk from TSEs in sheep, no natural occurrence of BSE in sheep and no link between scrapie and BSE. The original justification for the UK's strict scrapie controls therefore no longer

Estimated costs of carcass splitting

Carcass splitting, the halving of the carcass, is the compulsory UK method of removing the spinal cord from animals aged over 12 months or with permanent incisors. Industry opinion suggests that carcass splitting slows slaughter line speeds by in excess of 50%, leading to a yearly estimated increased cost to processors of approximately £262,000. This cost is

passed on to farmers through lower carcass values.

Halving a carcass causes its value to drop an estimated 40%, as it is identified as an older animal and has limited butchery options. This leads to an annual average lost opportunity cost of approximately £22.4 million as a result of splitting, the brunt of which is ultimately borne by farmers.

Taking in to account the estimated £646,800 yearly cost of checking for teeth in auction markets, carcass splitting has a total yearly estimated cost to the UK sheep industry of over £23.3 million.

This does not include the impact of TSE controls on our export market, which could enter into the millions too.

stands. In the upcoming report NSA recommends five steps to be taken as a priority to relax TSE rules for sheep and lessen the unnecessary burden they place on the sheep sector, while continuing to allow for the better understanding of scrapie and the further improvement of the UK flock's health and productivity.

1. The first NSA recommendation is that the EU Commission should give its immediate attention to the 2012 EFSA BIOHAZ Panel Report on *Scientific Opinion on BSE/TSE Infectivity in Small Ruminant Tissues* and take the action it suggests. The BIOHAZ panel's paper questions the necessity for and effectiveness of current SRM controls, suggests the improvement of data collection and risk assessment with regard to TSEs in sheep and the development of specific assessment models to enable a more precise estimate of the effectiveness of TSE controls. It also recommends further review of this subject when the results of experiments currently underway become available.

Although the BIOHAZ panel's report does not directly call for a change to scrapie controls, it does encourage the review of current SRM controls in light of scientific evidence. Its recommendations would allow more and better evidence to be gathered to demonstrate that current SRM controls are unnecessarily tight.

2. As things stand, the spleen and ileum count as SRM for sheep of all ages and the skull (including the

brain and eyes), the tonsils and the spinal cord must also be removed from sheep aged over twelve months or which have a permanent incisor erupted through the gum. NSA's second recommendation is that the spinal cord, skull and tonsils should instead be removed when an animal is aged over 24 months or where a second pair of permanent incisors has emerged. This change should be made as an immediate measure.

As the earliest onset form of scrapie generally occurs in animals aged between two and five years old, the removal of this SRM from significantly younger animals is not necessary. As they stand, the rules around removal of the spinal cord are particularly damaging to upland farmers, as the harder terrain on which they raise their sheep slows the animals' development and brings them to slaughter later, meaning that higher numbers must have the cord extracted.

The first pair of incisors often erupts unpredictably, appearing early or late. Animals whose first pair of incisors have emerged early are currently split and therefore identified, unfairly, as older animals – this leads to their devaluation on false grounds. Splitting carcasses aged over 24 months or where two pairs of incisors are visible would prevent the unnecessary devaluation of younger animals, while ensuring the removal of the spinal cord from all sheep of the age prone to scrapie.

3. Thirdly, NSA recommends that the

Food Standards Agency ceases to insist on 100% SRM removal when other EU Member States only require the removal of as much SRM as possible. The UK is currently gold plating a European requirement and the burden on abattoirs could be reduced without any changes being made to the law.

4. NSA's fourth recommendation is that, over time, scrapie controls should be relaxed and the practice of carcase splitting ended for sheep of all ages.

5. The rules as they stand are costly and unnecessarily tight. However, although scrapie has not been found to be a risk to human health, it remains a threat to the health and productivity of the UK flock. For this reason, NSA's final recommendation is that scrapie testing in sheep should continue. The eradication of scrapie would bring economic and welfare benefits for the sheep sector – see page 28 for more on this topic.

With the number of scrapie cases in the UK having plummeted over the last decade and BSE controls relaxed, it is high time for reform of current scrapie rules. As TSE controls are primarily EU regulations, it is key to demonstrate to MEPs the need for urgent action. NSA's report aims to do just that.

NSA would like to thank NSA member Susannah Parkin, who offered her time voluntarily and did all the groundwork for the NSA TSE report. We would have been unable to complete this project without her help.



With variability in when some lambs put up their first pair of incisors compared to others, and given that scrapie affects sheep aged between two and five years of age, NSA argues an immediate move to splitting carcase after their second pair appear would be a good compromise in the time it takes to have scrapie controls removed completely.

Sheep industry must continue to protect itself from scrapie

By Caitlin Peck, NSA

While NSA is fully in support of scrapie rules relating to human health being relaxed (see pages 26 and 27), this does not mean the sheep industry can afford to take its eye off the ball when it comes sheep health, industry experts warn.

Brian Hosie, Group Manager at SAC Consulting says: "It's a good news story that we now have much less susceptibility to scrapie in the industry, with fewer flocks being affected. It's important that we don't forget about scrapie, because it can come back".

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "While the number of confirmed cases has declined dramatically over the last decade, it is vital that farmers stay vigilant and continue efforts such as selective breeding for resistance in order to maintain progress. Further reduction of scrapie could also increase the productivity and health of the UK flock and improve the performance of UK sheep and their produce on the world market. Animals with genetic scrapie resistance or accredited under the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme already enjoy increased value and export potential."

While effective scrapie prevention brings benefits, at the other end of the scale occurrence of the disease in a flock can cause huge problems for farmers – as NSA experienced first-hand when it recently supported a sheep

Scrapie and pedigree exports

Recent changes to EU export rules mean pedigree breeders not enrolled in the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme will increasingly struggle to export live sheep abroad. New EU regulations coming in over the course of this year require sheep bound for EU member states to fulfil one of two requirements – they must be Group 1 animals (genetically resistant to scrapie) or come from a flock which has successfully taken part in the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme for three years. In order to export to Austria, Sweden, Denmark, Finland or, increasingly, world markets, sheep must be Group 1 or have been monitored for seven years.



Sheep in flocks selecting for scrapie resistance and/or in the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme can protect themselves from disease-related losses and strict restrictions resulting from confirmed cases.

farmer whose business was devastated by the discovery of a case in their flock.

It is compulsory to report suspected scrapie cases, which results in stringent Government controls. A farm with even a suspected case may be closed down and movement of all sheep from the premises restricted while the affected animal is placed under observation.

Sheep believed to be infected can be slaughtered before scrapie is confirmed, although compensation is available for animals destroyed under this rule.

If the case is confirmed as atypical scrapie there will be no further measures, but identification of classical scrapie will result in the flock being entered into the Compulsory Scrapie Flocks Scheme, which is applied on a case-by-case basis by AHVLA and will consider each of these measures for up to two years:-

- Restricted movement of sheep and their milk, ova and semen on and off the holding
- Genotyping and destruction of genetically susceptible animals and their reproductive products
- Compulsory testing of culls and fallen stock from the flock

The cost to affected farmers is increased as, under the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (England) Regulations 2010, a notice dictating relevant sanctions served to an individual must be carried out at that individual's expense. This sees farmers required to pay for the implementation of controls placed upon their flock. Failure to comply with the TSE (England) Regulations 2010 is an offence punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

Although regulations for the handling of reported cases of scrapie can have serious consequences for farmers, the unchecked development of scrapie in a flock can be even more damaging. Scrapie is fatal and infected flocks can therefore take a huge hit to productivity. SAC Consulting identified scrapie in a

200-ewe flock it was monitoring in the 1980s and saw losses of 100 animals, mostly younger rams and ewes. SAC monitored the disease rather than culling it out, but this shows the huge potential impact if the UK sheep sector does not continue to work to control the disease.

As classical scrapie can be spread through infected afterbirth, lambing time is a period of particular risk for scrapie transmission. AHVLA recommends that contact between sheep and afterbirth should be kept to a minimum. Frequent cleaning and disinfecting of buildings used for lambing and the speedy removal of afterbirths should also help reduce the risk of infection.

Flocks can enter the Scrapie Monitoring Scheme (SMS), after which they can only buy sheep from other SMS flocks, implement proper tagging, provide adequate fencing and test fallen stock for scrapie.

Case Study: Charollais Sheep Society

Having become aware of voices in the sheep industry questioning the ongoing importance of scrapie, discussion at a recent Charollais Sheep Society council meeting resulted in the society underlining the importance of scrapie avoidance to its members. From this year, all stock sires registered in the society's flock book are required to be certified as genetically resistant to scrapie. Charles Sercombe, member of the society's Finance and General Purposes Committee, says: "Scrapie is still an issue. Reducing scrapie prevalence will be one way to alleviate problems such as carcass splitting in the future. Currently, it is a tool in the box which we are not using."

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Farm Trial

I had been looking for bunker feeds suitable for ewes for some time when I came across 3IN1FEEDERS. All our ewes are at grass for flushing and tugging, but we generally supplement this as we've found it increases our scanning levels by an average of 15%. While this increase in scanning percentage generally more than repays the investment as with every sheep system the need to keep a tight control of costs is paramount.

With no experience of the feeders, I set up a trial to assess how ewes supplemented with the feeders compared to ewes fed on the usual block system for flushing and tugging. It was surprising how quickly they adapted, with average intakes of 0.3kg/ewe/day after just the first day on ewe nuts. Once ewes were used to the system I shut the groove down and intakes on straight barley settled out at an average 0.18kg/ewe/day."

After 53 days of flushing, 44 days of which included supplementation with either barley or feed blocks, the group on feed blocks had increased their body condition score (BCS) by 0.2 from 2.9 to 3.1, however, the group on barley managed to increase BCS by 0.63, rising from 2.7 to 3.33.

In the barley fed group 10% of the ewes had a BCS of less than 3.0, whereas, with the block fed group, there was much more variation in BCS with more than 20% scoring below 3.0.

Crucially, on a cost basis, feeding whole barley has been nearly twice as cheap - £1.20/ewe with barley at £150/t compared to supplementing ewes with feed blocks - £2.38/ewe with blocks at £840/t.

There was little or no impact on scanning percentage in the flock, with the group fed on feed blocks scanning at 177% and the group on the feeder scanning at 175%.

The single ewes are now on the feeders instead of blocks so the feed saving will continue right through to lambing. We may add a bit of soya into the barley if the ewes look like they need it nearer lambing but probably not.

The feeders are doing everything I hoped.

Jamie Leslie, Scholland, Virkie, Shetland

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Is there appetite for a common UK carcass dressing specification?

By Howard Walsh, contributor

Finished lamb producers have their own reasons for opting to sell liveweight or deadweight, or sometimes a mixture of both, but if you find it difficult enough trying to make a comparison between published liveweight and deadweight prices, establishing the most competitive deadweight price between processors is even more taxing.

The reason is the difficulty in comparing like-with-like due to the variance in carcass dressing specifications, or what 'bits' are intact at the point of weighing and what might have been removed. It is certainly not a new issue and has been a bone of contention for a long time, not least because similar issues were reasonably well resolved in the beef sector years ago.

It is, as one independent industry source describes it, 'a hornet's nest' leading to mistrust among some lamb finishers. This has of course not gone unnoticed by various farmer organisations and has been an issue with the NSA and NFU for some time, but it remains an arguably 'murky' area and the onus is very much on the finisher to try and establish, before he decides to who he will sell, how they are to be dressed and weighed, and try and

make an informed estimate of how they might kill out and the size of his cheque.

While some finishers consigning a small trailer-load of lambs on an infrequent basis might not become too hot under the collar about what the abattoir does or does not remove before weighing, for others selling bigger numbers of lambs the difference in dressing specifications can, in theory, equate to at least the value of one lamb in 100. Some farmers make the point that flesh removed before dressing in some company specs is saleable but the farmer is not paid for this.

The fact that nothing much has changed in the six years since Defra

commissioned AHDB Industry Consulting to produce a very detailed report on the subject, including positive recommendations (see panel), has frustrated many people in the livestock industry.

Some remain convinced the status quo has been allowed to remain simply because no other EU member state has a sheep industry of a size comparable with the UK. Although a dated EC regulation (2137/92) introduced a Community classification scheme for sheep this regulation has never been enforced and classification of carcasses remains voluntary. And because the sheep system is not mandatory under

The official line

The Defra-commissioned *Review of the EU carcass classification system for beef and sheep, 2008*, says: "The many different dressing specifications in use by UK abattoirs impedes market and price transparency, is confusing to producers and complicates any statistics produced on national or regional production and price levels. "In addition, weighing practices vary,

particularly over hot to cold weight rebates and rounding procedures. The damage these inconsistencies inflict on confidence in deadweight selling in general and classification in particular cannot be underestimated. We recommend that the industry is encouraged to adopt a unified carcass dressing specification and weighing procedure."

Comments from the industry

Whatever the perceived merits of a uniform lamb carcass dressing specification throughout the UK might be, Two Sisters Food Group livestock procurement director John Dracup says the fact is processors as a whole are serving a wide range of customers with wide ranging requirements in terms of carcass dressing. For that reason, he does not envisage any change to the status quo any time soon.

Nevertheless, Mr Dracup says that should not prevent farmers ascertaining and understanding precisely to what specification their chosen processor or processors are working, including the all-important weighing tolerance. They should then be able to make an informed assessment of the expected return.

"We have a very open policy on how we dress and weigh and farmers can see their lambs weighed if they want to," he says. "Furthermore we use

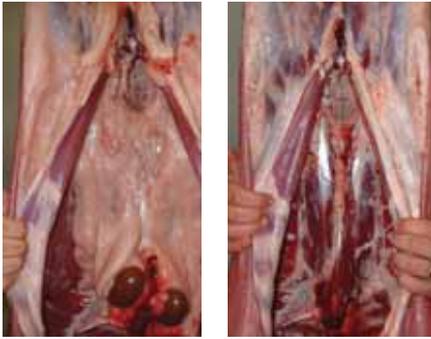
MLCSL for carcass classification and authentication of dressing spec, and no matter what some people might claim, this is truly independent and we value that independence. We are supplying large multiple retailers and need to dress the carcasses with kidney knob, channel fat and tail removed in order to produce the cuts as the retailers want them. We make this quite clear to our supplying producers. And we also make it quite clear we weigh to 0.1kg."

However, the country's only retailer to own its supplying abattoirs and processing operations, Morrisons, says it would not be averse to the development of an industry-wide uniform dressing specification for lamb.

Agricultural Manager Andrew Loftus says: "We are not against anything that would create a more level playing field and we would support that; it is fairer for us and the farmer. But we do not feel

there is necessarily any need for the EU to become involved and would prefer a common, industry-agreed approach to be overseen by an appropriate independent body."

Charles Sercombe, NFU Livestock Board Chairman and NSA English Committee Member, says NFU is continually seeking more transparency from the processing sector and lobbying Defra on the subject. He sees no reason why the processing sector cannot move towards a common dressing specification, but adds that the whole issue is further clouded not just by 'company specs' but the fact some abattoirs have a number of 'company specs'. He claims in some cases farmers have experienced one batch of lambs dressed to two specifications, but all labelled on the kill sheet as simply 'company spec'. "This makes comparisons meaningless, even within a



Some companies do weight with kidney knob and channel fat intact (left hand picture) and so do it without (right hand picture).

EU regulations, the Rural Payments Agency has no role in scrutinising the classification system (as it does with beef). However, it has to be said, more than half of lambs classified are independently assessed by MLCSL, as opposed to the abattoir's own staff.

Four years ago, in a response to the consultation on beef and pig carcass classification regulations, Defra said it would consider further the application of EU legislation to the sheep sector (in the light of consultation responses) and would issue further guidance. But as far as can be ascertained, no further guidance has yet appeared, although there have been recent rumours that Brussels is at last waking up the fact there is little uniformity in dressing / weighing in the UK and is questioning the reliability of our deadweight price reporting.

So what is the current situation? There are two industry-agreed MLC dressing specifications – 'MLC standard' and 'MLC standard, tail removed'. However, and this is the real issue, while an EU Council regulation does contain a detailed dressing specification, it also says Members States will be authorised to use alternative presentations. We therefore also have a raft of 'company' dressing specifications – some 'hard', removing practically everything it is possible to remove, and some 'soft' and arguably, favouring the farmer. And there are plenty in between.

The problem is a company leaving intact such as kidney knob and channel fat, tails, belly flaps and necks will inevitably be quoting a lower price per kg as its base price on the grid. A company employing a harder dressing spec might well quote a higher per kg base price. But how do you, the producer, know which is genuinely the better price delivering you the best net return?

As the AHDB report pointed out, after extensive consultations with producers and processors, the current sheep carcass classification system was not seen to be delivering what it should – a trusted and transparent basis for the deadweight sale of finished sheep between producers and abattoirs. The main reason for this was not the 'grading' of carcasses on the EUROP grid, but the lack of standardisation of dressing specifications and weighing.

And AHDB said it was not just producers who were of this opinion: "The lack of standardisation is seen as a problem by many abattoirs of all sizes which makes it difficult for plants to demonstrate that their terms of trade are as good as/ better than others. For many abattoirs anything to improve this situation would be welcome," the report said. However, it did also say some abattoirs seemed to prefer working in a trading system that has as much fog in it as possible.



Two hypothetical company dressing specifications. The left one without kidney knob and channel fat (0.5kg) and tail (0.2kg) reduces carcass weight by 0.7kg. The right one also without neck flesh (0.2kg) and breast flaps (0.2kg) removes 1.1kg.



batch of lambs, never mind between abattoirs, severely impeding transparency," he says.

Mr Sercombe says the NFU believes there are other issues, part and parcel of practices which affect producer returns, that need standardisation. The first is price reporting, as the Government meets its obligation to report UK lamb prices to the EU using only 16% of the total weekly kill and without a system to check if the reported specifications it uses reflect the reality. The second is

rounding down of carcass weights, as modern abattoirs with digital weighing scales in place of analogue units can no longer justify rounding down to the nearest 0.5kg. The third is the hot/cold rebate (the calculation of the lower cold weight from the hot weight), which has two fixed

levels (0.5kg and 1kg) rather than the 2% used in the beef and pork sectors.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, echoes much of this: "We need to make sure there is more transparency on a number of issues, from dressing specs to pricing and payment structures. Farmers need to know exactly what they're getting paid for so they appreciate the value of things like skins and offal as well as meat. A good and open relationship with abattoirs is one part of this, and it would be great if

issues like rounding down (which cannot be justified in an era of modern weighing technology) could be sorted voluntarily, but regulation is also an important part of moving towards a greater level of consistency and transparency. It is not that farmers will necessarily get paid more but that different selling options can be properly compared and trust in the supply chain increased." Eblex National Selection Specialist Steve Powdrill stressed the need for finishers to familiarise themselves with buyers' requirements, and importantly, their dressing specification and weighing practices. While acknowledging the difficulty of comparing prices, he strongly recommends Eblex's deadweight price calculator tool to facilitate comparisons (www.eblex.org.uk/returns/tools/deadweight-price-calculator) and the Eblex *Marketing prime lamb for Better Returns* manual (visit www.eblex.org.uk/returns or call 08702 418829).

PMs on trial in fallen stock centre

Following the article in the previous edition of Sheep Farmer about closure of some AHVLA veterinary investigation centres, NSA was contacted by Ben Strugnell, farm vet specialising in livestock post mortems, who is involved in an Eblex-funded trial in North East England.

The trial will see Mr Strugnell installed in a dedicated post mortem room at J. Warren ABP fallen stock collection centre at Hamsterley, County Durham, ready to carry out investigative work on any sheep or lamb that a farmer requests a PM on at the time of carcass collection from the farm.

Collection for disposal

Mr Strugnell says: "This is convenient because carcasses are collected for disposal anyway. Instead of taking the time to deliver the carcass to a VI centre for a post mortem, busy farmers can get on with daily jobs while the carcass is collected and post mortemed. Results will be reported back to each farmer and his vet the next day, or in some cases that same day, by text, fax, email or phone. Post mortems will cost £20 for a lamb and £25 for a ewe or tup, with some basic lab testing included. Costs

of carcass collection are unaffected." The trial is aimed at finding ways to make most use of information present in fallen stock in a way which is affordable and convenient for farmers. Quick reporting of the most important findings means farmers can treat the rest of the flock promptly to prevent further losses and, as the year progresses, the project also plans to issue (anonymised) alerts when seasonal disease occurs so farmers can treat promptly e.g. for acute fluke, nematodirus, other forms of parasitic gastroenteritis, mastitis and coccidiosis.

Network change

"In some areas of the country changes to the AHVLA regional laboratory network will result in reduced access to a post mortem-based necropsy service for farmers. This may have particular significance for the sheep sector because many important sheep diseases are most

easily diagnosed in the dead animal at post mortem examination. And not all lambs you pick up will have died of pneumonia! I also hope there will be scope to discover information about important more insidious diseases which reduce ewe longevity, such as Johnes disease and ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma (OPA). These two diseases are probably underdiagnosed under current arrangements but may have a major impact on infected flocks."

For further details contact Ben Strugnell on 07899 950372 or Warrens ABP.



A trial is looking at sorting two problems at the same time – collecting fallen stock and getting a post mortem.

Sheep-focused vets tackle big topics

By Nick Hart, independent consultant

The Sheep Veterinary Society's 'Talking Sheep' meetings have a simple concept – that if a vet comes across an interesting or difficult case, discussing it with other vets will benefit them and their farmer clients.

We invited NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker to speak at the Herefordshire meeting in February, where he provided an optimistic overview of the UK Sheep industry before seven vets presented cases they had recently come across on farms in the area.

Ian Davies of AHVLA outlined the number of farm-reported cases of injuries caused by drenching guns, resulting in an alarming number of deaths. Discussion with the audience indicated there was further need for training in drenching techniques, methods of adequate restraint and not treating too many animals resulting in operator fatigue.

Liz Jones of Ddole Rd Vets complimented the previous talk by outlining the risks of administering boluses incorrectly, which can result in

deaths from severe trauma and infection. It is important that farmers using these products are fully aware of the administering techniques and seek advice if they are unsure.

Usk Vets' Hilary Jones presented on the detrimental association of administering Cydectin 1% and Footvax at the same time, resulting in the death and abortion of a significant number of ewes. This was a timely reminder for vets and farmers to check data sheets and to be aware of the risks of adverse reactions.

Differential diagnosis

Rhys Beynan Thomas, Tyndale Vets, illustrated his presentation on a collapsing ram with a short video. This was a well-informed talk focusing on the differential diagnosis with particular reference to the 'wobbler syndrome' in the Texel breed.

Representing the Wood Veterinary Group, Phillipa Page discussed the problems of CLA – which I know is a topic NSA are looking into at the

moment. This subject produced many questions and comments from the audience, covering the problems associated with blood testing, vaccination and eradication.

I concentrated my presentation on eyes and blindness with particular reference to the welfare implications of the pain associated with eye conditions. I suggested protocols should be written into farms' flock health plans to aid in the management of this problem.

The evening was brought to a close by Harriet Fuller, Marches Veterinary Group, with an illustrated presentation on Border Disease. This disease is difficult to investigate if there is a constraint on the finances allocated to identify the infected sheep, meaning there is perhaps more of this disease out there than we are aware of.

It was encouraging to see so many vets showing an interest in sheep matters and prepared to further their knowledge. It is clear the veterinary profession is prepared and keen to be involved with the sheep industry.

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Practical control of coccidiosis

By Dr David Bartley, Moredun Research Institute Senior Research Scientist

The incidence of coccidiosis has increased in recent years, mainly due to the intensification of farming and other changes in management practice. In addition to the financial implications associated with lost productivity, outbreaks of coccidiosis can also have severe welfare implications for young livestock.

Coccidiosis is the disease caused by infection with a small (single celled) protozoan parasite (*Eimeria*) which invades the intestinal cells of the host. Although there are 11 species of *Eimeria* which infect sheep in the UK, only two of these are considered to be of economic significance, *Eimeria crandallis* and *Eimeria ovinoidalis*. Other species may be present in very large numbers but do not seem to cause any clinical symptoms.

Eimeria are common in the farm environment and the majority of flocks will be exposed to infection at some stage. Infection occurs as a result of ingestion of oocysts (eggs) of the parasite shed in the faeces of infected individuals, which may contaminate pasture, bedding, feeding troughs and even the udders of ewes.

Once ingested the parasite multiplies in the gut lining of the host, before passing out thousands of next generation oocysts in the faeces. The severity of diseases seen generally depends on how many oocysts (eggs) have been ingested. Coccidiosis is more usually associated with intensive husbandry systems and high stocking densities.

Coccidiosis symptoms

Animals suffering from coccidiosis exhibit a variety of symptoms, the most obvious of which is profuse (sometimes bloody) diarrhoea. Infected animals also show a loss of appetite, reduced growth rate, open fleece, dull demeanour and abdominal pain. Untreated animals can experience dehydration, weight loss and eventually death.

Clinical coccidiosis is most commonly seen in lambs aged between four and seven weeks, but can occur in older lambs. Although the primary route of infection is lamb to lamb, oocysts can persist in the environment and may even survive freezing, so animals may become infected from contamination which has over-wintered. Ewes may also



Picture courtesy of Moredun

Coccidiosis causes severe scour in young lambs.

be a potential source of infection, as they can shed low numbers of oocysts, particularly around lambing in response to their lowered immune status. Thus the ewe may act as a reservoir of infection, which is subsequently amplified by the lamb crop. Later lambs then face a severe challenge, resulting in clinical infections. It is therefore important to diagnose and treat outbreaks early.

Since lots of different infections can cause scouring in young lambs it is vital to identify the causative agent before embarking on the appropriate treatment regime. Diagnosis of coccidiosis should be based on farm history, clinical signs, faecal analysis and, where animals have died, from a post mortem examination of the gut. Remember though that, due to the presence of non-pathogenic species of *Eimeria*, total oocysts counts may not always provide a good diagnostic indicator.

Coccidiosis is a flock problem, and once the diagnosis has been made, treatment should be administered on a flock basis to all susceptible animals. Oral and 'in feed' treatments are available for the control and prevention of coccidiosis. Oral anticoccidial treatment should be administered as soon as a positive diagnosis has been confirmed. Prophylactic treatment of ewes with an anticoccidial around lambing time can help to reduce contamination of buildings/pastures with oocysts. Prophylactic treatment may, however, delay the acquisition of natural immunity of young livestock so producers should be aware that when

treatments are stopped, disease may occur.

Reducing the challenge

When trying to prevent or control coccidiosis, the aim should be to prevent lambs experiencing a high oocyst challenge. This is best achieved through good husbandry, ensuring lambs are not overcrowded or stressed. Lambing in clean, well-drained pens, with dry bedding and clean feeding troughs will assist in reducing contamination. An adequate intake of colostrum will also assist the lamb in coping with coccidial infection. If possible, later lambs should be housed or grazed in different areas to earlier lambs, to reduce contact with potentially infected areas.

More from Moredun

All NSA UK-based members are automatically associate members of Moredun and receive topical sheep newsheets with Sheep Farmer through the year. The two most recent cattle newsheets (one on BVD and the other on cryptosporidium) can be requested from the Moredun Communications Scheme on 01314 455111. A 12-page coccidiosis newsheet is also available free of charge.

You can find out more about Moredun and becoming a full member at www.moredun.org.uk or by calling the number above.



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How to get more lamb off grass



By Liz Genever, Eblex Senior Livestock Scientist

Due to variable cereal prices and a greater appreciation of what grass can do, sheep producers have become increasingly interested in improving their grassland management. This can only be achieved by a combination of growing more grass and making sure that what is grown is utilised.

It all has to begin with the soil. It's not too late to carry out a soil test, which should take place at least two months since the last application of manure or fertiliser. Once the results are back they have to be acted upon. The correct pH (6-6.5 in most soils) is fundamental to good grass growth as it promotes the availability of nutrients, such as nitrogen, phosphate and potash. Basically, if the pH is wrong the value of other applied nutrients will be low.

Soil structure

Soil structure is something to bear in mind, as sheep can cause compaction in the top 5cm. It is worth digging holes to understand if compaction is limiting root growth and nutrient uptake and

More information can be found in the following EBLEX BRP manuals:-

- Improving Soils for Better Returns
- Managing Nutrients for Better Returns
- Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns

Download a copy at www.eblex.org.uk/returns or request a hard copy at brp@eblex.ahdb.org.uk or 08702 418829.

whether it is worth using an appropriate piece of kit to help alleviate the problem. Remember that moderate compaction may be able to repair itself, especially if the cause is removed, and it is worth monitoring it over time to see if it improves on its own.

The next element to think about is how grass grows. Perennial ryegrass only ever has three leaves - as the fourth one is produced the first one dies away. The time between the emergence of each leaf varies throughout the year - five to seven days in spring to 30 days in the winter - and is the reason why rotation length needs to change through the year. The ideal time to graze grass is when it is around the three leaf stage, as earlier can deplete root reserves and later can lead to the build-up of dead grass. Grass is flexible so it can achieve the three leaf stage at around 4cm, compared with around 15cm when grazed by dairy cows.

Maintaining target sward heights is the key to performance off grass. For set stocking think 4-6cm for ewes and lambs, and 6-8 cm for weaned lambs or pre-tupping ewes. For rotational grazing the pre-grazing target is 8-10 cm, with the post-grazing target being around 5-6 cm. If grass is below 4cm for ewes and lambs then supplementary feeding will be needed.

Grazing challenge

The challenge with grazing management is that flexibility and monitoring are needed, as plans will need to adapt as grass growth varies across the season. Stocking rates are very difficult to predict as they will vary depending on the site and season. What we do know if

that a 75kg ewe in early lactation will eat around 2.3kgDM/day (3% of her bodyweight) and grass growth in spring can be 10-60kg/DM/ha. From those pieces of information we can calculate stocking rates (4-27 ewes per hectare). It may be sensible to bank on an average of 30kgDM/ha and around 13 ewes/ha.

For ewes and lambs set stocking can work extremely well and animal performance can be high, as long as sward heights are on target. Rotational grazing can be established once the ewes and lambs have settled down, after around four weeks. The simplest approach to rotational grazing involves a line of electric fence across one field, moving animals back and forth based on sward height or a set number of days.

Rotational grazing

Commonly, producers who rotationally graze ewes and lambs set-stock fields to begin with and wait for them to settle down, then once grass starts to grow well they begin to merge groups. If the grass starts to get away (greater than 8cm) a field or part of a field can be shut up for silage or hay to increase stock density.

It is important to monitor sward heights at least every fortnight once it starts to grow well, to allow decisions to be made around rotation length, moving animals, shutting up areas and weaning. Unfortunately the only way to really learn about rotational grazing is to 'have a go', bearing in mind grass growth, stocking rates and sward heights. But remember that set stocking can work extremely well too.



Tracesure-bolused ewes produce strong and fit lambs

A sheep farmer who boluses his ewes with the Tracesure traffic lights system says lambs are born stronger and fitter.

Aled Jones (pictured) runs 1,500 ewes on a low-input system at Tregeiriog Farm, near Llangollen.

He winters sheep on deferred grazing and boluses with Tracesure to ensure good utilisation of energy and protein in the grass.

"We bolus at scanning in preparation for lambing to ensure we get the best colostrum for the lambs. We find that they thrive well when they are a month old and they don't have a growth check, they seem to keep going," says Aled, who farms in a contract partnership with Rupert Greenwell.

The flock grazes on land that rises



to 1500 feet, land that is deficient in cobalt and selenium. "Grazing at this altitude, we know there is a deficiency in the grass therefore by bolusing we know the sheep have the correct trace elements in their system for up to six months," Aled explains.

The ewes produce more colostrum and that benefit passes to the lambs. They are born with more vigour and grow rapidly in the spring, achieving high weaning weights which means they can be sold earlier, says Aled.

He has been using Tracesure traffic lights for three years. "Once you start using a product and it works you never want to stop."



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Avoiding the pitfalls to give lambs the best start in life

By Josh Batterham, Fenton Veterinary Practice, South West Wales.

A great deal of care and effort goes into successfully rearing a healthy lamb from birth to slaughter. In order for this to happen as economically as possible, there are a number of potential pitfalls that must be avoided along the way. Since prevention is almost always cheaper than treatment, the wise man will focus on getting husbandry, nutrition and biosecurity sorted as a matter of urgency.

The strength and viability of a new-born lamb will be determined by the health of the ewe during pregnancy. It is essential that the ewes nutrition (especially in the latter third of pregnancy) is carefully calculated to provide the adequate energy, protein and trace elements required to support the growing foetus and maintain the ewe in reasonable condition. Scanning ewes to enable managing singles and triplets in separate groups will not only help minimise twin lamb disease but also avoid the overfeeding of singles (and barreners).

Abortion in ewes

Several diseases that classically cause abortion in ewes are also capable of causing the birth of weak or still born lambs. One such disease would be borders disease, which classically is seen as 'hairy shaker' lambs. Advice should be sought from your vet if you see



Josh Batterham

these for the first time, as it can quickly become endemic within a flock. Lambs born weak due to disease/malnutrition of the ewe will struggle right the way through to slaughter, so looking after your ewes pre lambing is essential.

At lambing time, husbandry practices are key to preventing disease outbreaks. Simple measures such as keeping pens clean and ensuring adequate colostrum intakes will all help to boost lamb immunity and reduce the inevitable disease challenge around them. Both watery mouth and navel ill are diseases associated with inadequate colostrum intake, poor hygiene and/or high stocking density.

The importance of early and adequate colostrum intake should never be underestimated. Every lamb should receive two pints (one litre) of colostrum in the first 18 hours. Half of this (one pint) should be in the first six hours of life, split between two feeds. All navels should be dipped in an iodine based solution as soon as possible after birth, and ideally again at 24-48 hours. Stress also causes a drop in immunity so docking, castration, vaccination and turnout all at the same time should be avoided if possible.

After turnout, clostridial disease can be an issue on some farms, with pulpy kidney and lamb dysentery claiming a few lambs each year on many unvaccinated farms. Ewe vaccination with a combination clostridia/pasteurella vaccine four to six weeks prior to lambing will protect the ewe for 12 months and her lambs for 12 weeks from clostridial diseases and four weeks from pasteurella – but only if the lambs receive colostrum from the ewe! It is recommended that lambs be vaccinated from 12 weeks for continued protection.

Assuming all has gone well at lambing and a healthy lamb flock has been turned out, the two main problems seen in growing lambs are parasite burdens and nutritional deficits.

Souring lambs

Nematodirus battus is high on the list of suspects when it comes to scouring lambs, alongside high trichostrongyle counts and coccidia. *Nematodirus* has a direct lifecycle from one year's lamb crop to the next via weather resistant eggs that remain on the pasture over winter. Lambs should not be turned out onto pasture grazed by last year's lamb flock if possible and regular faecal worm egg counting should be performed to assess worm burden and monitor wormer efficacy. A free parasite forecast is available on the NADIS website (www.nadis.org.uk) and is well worth reading while you have lambs at pasture.

Coccidiosis is a significant disease that is often overlooked on smaller sheep units but is well worth considering when dealing with scouring lambs. It is usually seen in four to six-week-old lambs, often in groups of later lambs and particularly if stocking density is high or hygiene in the shed (or around feeders in the field) is poor. Coccidiosis is caused by two



A pint of colostrum in the first six hours of life and another pint within 18 hours of birth will get lambs to a good start.

specific strains of eimeria species, which are parasites that live inside cells in the lamb's gut. They multiply within the lining of the gut and cause considerable damage to the intestine. This loss of gut lining causes a profuse diarrhoea and affected lambs will often look dull and anorexic, often with abdominal pain and straining. Severely affected cases may have secondary bacterial infection in the intestine and there may be blood in the diarrhoea.

Adult sheep are unaffected by coccidia, as immunity is strong, however they are the main reservoir of infection to lambs, shedding higher numbers of coccidial oocysts in their faeces around lambing. Early lambs will only be exposed to low numbers and will gain strong immunity by eight weeks, however coccidia numbers will multiply up, leaving large numbers on the ground for the naïve later-born lambs, which may succumb to disease.

Concurrent infection with nematodirus is often seen and may mean that only low levels of coccidia are needed to cause clinical disease. Treatment of severely affected lambs includes administering anti-coccidial drugs, injectable sulphonamides (off license) and fluid therapy as directed by your vet.

Coccidia are resistant to many commercial disinfectants, however there are several effective products available that clearly state suitability for use against coccidia. Prevention involves improving hygiene and reducing stocking density, as well as turning out later born lambs onto ground not previously grazed

Signs of trace element deficiencies

Cobalt

- Loss of appetite
- Slowed growth
- Watery eyes
- Anemia and anorexia in severe cases

Copper

- Loss of wool crimp
- Swayback in young lambs
- Slowed growth
- Anemia and fragile bones in severe cases

Selenium

- Stiff lamb disease (white muscle disease)
- Sudden death of young healthy lambs
- Slowed growth
- Increased numbers of barren ewes



Lambs suggesting signs of abdominal discomfort should be investigated.

by early born lambs. Anti-coccidia (coccidiostat) medications are available that can be added to creep feed, however they will prevent any natural immunity building up, so that lambs will be fully susceptible as soon as medication is stopped.

Nutrition after turnout

Nutrition of ewes and lambs after turnout is just as important as worming protocols, and simply turning everything out onto 'lush' spring grass invariably doesn't quite cut it! Ewes must be supplemented with sufficient feed to sustain milk production for the growing lamb, whilst creep feed must be available in sufficient amounts to maximise growth rates.

After discounting parasites and under-

nutrition as a cause of poor growth, looking at trace element deficiencies is the next step. The easiest way to do this is by blood sampling a representative group of 10 lambs from the flock to look at blood plasma values for copper, cobalt and selenium/vitamin E as a starting point. As well as hindering growth, trace element deficiencies can predispose lambs to secondary diseases.

There are many ways of supplementing for trace elements, including boluses, licks, injectables and feed additives. It should be pointed out however that a great many farmers are spending huge sums of money on unnecessary supplements, touted by manufacturers as 'essential' and it is well worth knowing what trace elements are required (if any) before blanket supplementation. Boluses and injectable vitamins are the only way of guaranteeing correct dosages are administered if a deficiency is found. It is important to note that sheep (particularly Texels) are susceptible to copper toxicity and care should be taken not to overdose with copper supplements.

As well as the direct benefits of fewer lamb losses, ensuring lambs get off to a healthy start will pay dividends in the longer term. This can be seen as improved feed conversion of growing lambs, decreased time to slaughter weight and improved fertility of replacement ewe lambs, to name but a few. To fully assess the management practices and disease risk on your own farm it is important that you contact your own vet to devise a specific flock health plan, tailored to your own circumstances.



Navels should iodine-dipped as soon as possible after birth and ideally again at 24-48 hours.

Sheepdogs – A friend to shepherds and the environment

By Caroline Woolley, sheepdog trainer at All About Sheepdogs

“Don’t mention those dratted things to me,” says my friend Arthur when you mention quad bikes. “One day I saw this bloke trying unsuccessfully to get a few hundred sheep out of a field with his quad – dogs cheerfully sitting on the back.”

“I said to him, ‘Why not drive the quad into the road, leave the dogs behind and the sheep will follow; you always feed those ewes from the back of the quad and they don’t understand why you are trying to get in behind them’. He said he’d give it a try, as he’d tried everything else, and out streamed the flock with the dogs tidying up the stragglers. Dogs were so used to riding on the back of the bike they had not been interested in shifting the sheep by themselves.”

As Arthur says – he a shepherd of the old style who used to ride his horse to sheep – modern shepherds seem infatuated with the internal combustion engine and speed. And never mind if the job takes twice as long.

Common scenario

Despite the all too common scenario above, many are the arguments against having a working sheepdog. For example, it takes far too long to train them, you need more than one, damned things can go missing if a neighbour’s bitch is in season, they can only do the one job, they have to be fed daily, housed and then add the vet bills – far too much hassle altogether!

The quad is efficient, goes faster than a dog, will turn on a whim, can carry sick sheep and when not working does not need another thought until needed for further use. And they are pretty versatile for farm jobs other than shepherding.

But the quad bike is not very ‘green’. Not much environmental ‘street cred’, so to speak. It cannot work on its own or think for itself while you are completing other tasks and they need fossil fuel to operate. In addition – according to a four-page A4 Health and Safety Executive document published about ATV safety issues – there have been numerous fatalities and hundreds of serious accidents annually. It also seems that a high degree of physical fitness is required to drive a quad as there are no roll bars. Leaping clear of the bike is your only option if it rolls. How safe is that? Not to mention that a bike is noisy.

With your sheepdog, not getting bitten is about the only safety issue that presents!

Ideally, especially on lowland acres, a mixture of both quad and dog is desirable. But the sheepdog is a canny animal and can happily forgo running around after sheep for the comfort and ease of the quad. This is to be avoided.

Buying the farm bike is an investment, as it is with any piece of farm machinery, but so is the purchase of a good working dog. A dog has a productive life of approximately 10 years, runs on little fuel (food), runs faster than a human, can work in adverse weather, can find sheep in snow, can work on steep hills, can do the work of several people, works silently, can select and hold a ewe, is environmentally friendly and is your best friend. I just don’t believe a quad bike can match those positives.

Watching the modern sheepdog at work in harmony with its handler is an uplifting and joyful experience. The dog being central to the interaction between sheep and handler and, if you happen upon a shepherd and dogs working a



A young dog being training.

large flock, it is four legged moving poetry, all looking so easy.

Cutting the workload

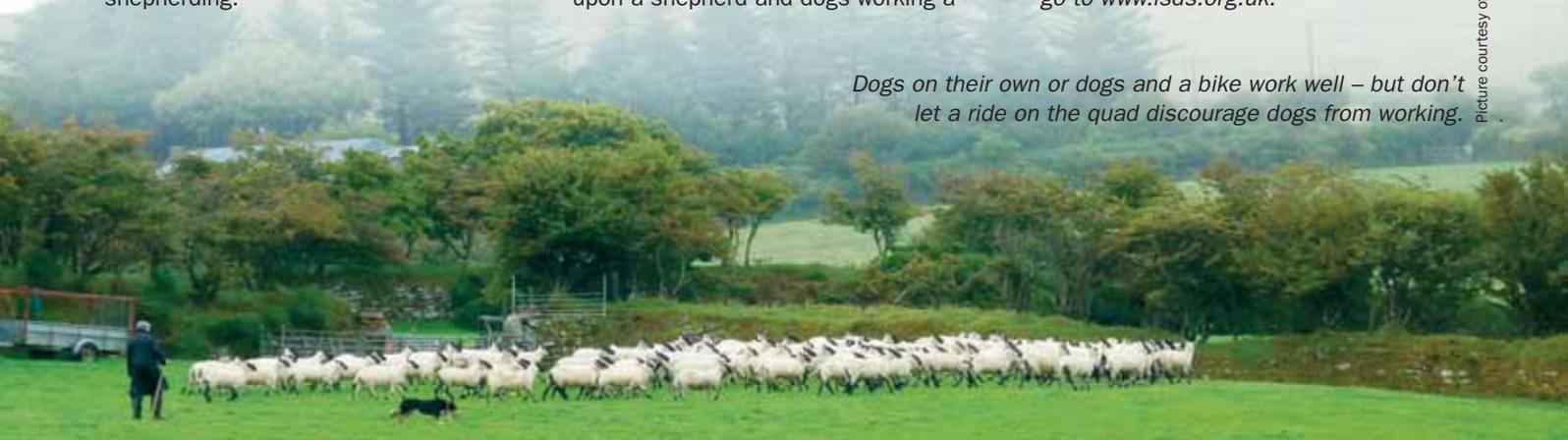
Properly trained, the sheepdog cuts the shepherd’s workload, saving time and money. Good working sheepdogs can think for themselves, frequently before the shepherd has even become aware of a problem. What’s more, the dog has the welfare of the sheep in mind just as much as has the shepherd. And the dog will manage its handler too!

But here’s the thing – training a young dog takes time. A short course in handling skills could make all the difference. And dare I say it, mostly it is the handler that needs the help. And for optimum efficiency you and your dog need to like each other. As sheep farmers do not have much time and time is money, a Training course as an investment and is recommended.

As the saying goes, there is no good flock without a good shepherd and there is no good shepherd without a good dog.

To contact Caroline go to www.allaboutsheatdogs.com. For information about sheepdog trials go to www.isds.org.uk.

Dogs on their own or dogs and a bike work well – but don’t let a ride on the quad discourage dogs from working.



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² Maes L, Vanparijs O., Lauwers H. (1990) Activité douvicide du closantel contre Fasciola hepatica: approche pharmacodynamique. Revue Méd. Vet., 141, 12, 991-995.

³ Res Vet Sci. 1988 Mar;44(2):229-32. Flukicidal action of closantel against immature and mature Fasciola hepatica in experimentally infected rats and sheep. Maes L, Lauwers H, Deckers W, Vanparijs O

⁴ Coles, G. C., Rhodes, A. C., Stafford, K. A. (2000) Activity of closantel against adult triclabendazole-resistant Fasciola hepatica. Veterinary Record 146, 504.

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Shearing – a skill for life

By British Wool Marketing Board



The depths of a wet and windy winter may have only just passed and spring is barely begun, but already sheep farmers' minds will be turning to the summer ahead. And with summer comes the need to shear flocks and ensure wool is presented in the best possible manner for sale.



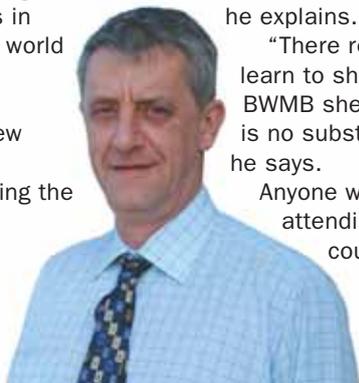
More than 1,200 people have attended British Wool Marketing Board training courses in recent years.

While in the past the UK has welcomed gangs of skilled overseas shearers every summer, now the likelihood is that most shearers in the UK will be home grown. This is thanks to shearing, a skill learnt for life, enjoying something of a revival among the younger generation of the farming community, says BWMB Shearing Training Manager Colin MacGregor.

“For the last few years more than 1,200 people a year have attended British Wool Marketing Board shearing courses across the UK, either to learn afresh or update and perfect their technique. We’ve seen a significant resurgence in young people wanting to learn to shear in recent years and this is being showcased by young British shearers enjoying success in shearing competitions the world over,” he explains.

“In January there were several competitions in New Zealand where British competitors were dominating the standings, with one competition at Taihape featuring no fewer than four British shearers in the final.”

Mr MacGregor says



Colin MacGregor

that while New Zealand used to lead the world when it came to shearing there is no doubt British shearers are now among the best around.

“This is in no small part down to the excellent training they’re receiving at BWMB training courses,” he says. “These courses are run by instructors with 20 to 25 years’ experience, and while experience is one commodity you can’t buy, it is a huge benefit to be trained by someone with a depth of experience. Passing those years of knowledge on to 17 and 18 year olds means the younger generation of shearers coming through are learning a lot very quickly.”

Competition shearing is of course the pinnacle of the industry, but it provides a great opportunity for young shearers from the UK to meet shearers from across the world and again gives them great opportunities to learn from their experience, adds Mr MacGregor.

“Shearing and socialising alongside some of the world’s leading shearers exposes young UK shearers to the opportunities that exist worldwide,” he says.

Universal skill

“Shearing is a truly universal skill and once you learn it you never forget. You can go pretty much anywhere in the world and get a job if you can shear, and it provides a great route to travel.”

However, Mr MacGregor says anyone considering shearing overseas should ensure they have the correct visas first. “There have been a number of incidents recently of people travelling without work permits and being turned away from countries such as New Zealand as a result,” he says.

Training courses for the 2014 season start at Nottingham on 24th-25th April and run through to the end of August, with all parts of the UK being covered and courses covering both adult sheep and lamb shearing, he explains.

“There really is no better way to learn to shear than to attend a BWMB shearing course and there is no substitute for good tuition,” he says.

Anyone wanting to see just what attending a BWMB shearing course could do for them



BWMB shearing instructors typically have 20-25 years experience.

should take a trip to the World Championships at Gorey in the Republic of Ireland from 23th -25th May where they’ll have a chance to see the top British shearers in action, including reigning champion Gavin Mutch from Scotland, his countryman Hamish Mitchell, Welshmen Gareth Daniels and Richard Jones and Englishman Adam Berry.

World title

“It should come as no surprise that any one of these shearers could, on the right day, be a challenger for the world title,” he says. “They all began their shearing careers at BWMB training courses and the fundamental lessons they’ve learnt have stood them in good stead throughout their careers.” Alongside shearing courses the BWMB is this year also supporting the British wool handling competitors at the World Championships. Mr MacGregor says: “While shearing may be seen as the key job, having the wool presented correctly for grading can make a big difference too. Well presented fleeces are worth substantially more than poorly rolled or badly presented fleeces.”

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On My Farm – The Next Generation

In the second article of our new series meeting young people active in the sheep industry, we hear from James Davidson of Ballymena, County Antrim, Northern Ireland. James (20) is the youngest person to be selected for the 2014 NSA Next Generation Ambassador Group (see page 12) and a 're-starter' rather than a 'new starter', having established a sheep enterprise from scratch after his father exited the dairy sector nearly a decade ago.

Our family farm is situated above Glenarm village at the top of Glenarm Glen, the first of the Glens of Antrim. This is in the east coast of County Antrim and was one of the worst hit areas with the late snow last spring – we're all hoping that will remain a distant memory!

Growing up on a dairy farm I always had a keen interest in farming, but after my father left the industry when I was 12 the ground was let. When I left school I was very keen to take the ground back, to farm it myself. I always had a keen



James housed his ewes in early February, one month before lambing.

interest in sheep and sheep farming, and with the low start up cost, it was a simple decision – sheep farming was for me. It also fits in well, as I work full-time on a local dairy farm.

February housing

With the last of my 150 ewes housed during the first week of February and udders starting to show on them, it brings the anticipation of spring, especially with a relatively mild winter so far. I have had most of the fields around the yard shut off since the first week of December so it's looking like there should be a nice bite of grass for the ewes and lambs to be turned out onto in early March when they start to lamb. I've been sheep farming in my own right



now for four years and since the beginning I've always used Belclare rams. I started off using them on cast Blackface ewes, which I sourced privately from a local farmer. These made an ideal starter flock, as during the first lambing the blackface ewes had more experience and probably knew more about what was happening than I did! Their cross-bred Belclare daughters are lambing down as three year olds with their second crop of lambs this year.

To date they have performed very well with a scanning percentage of 175% this year. My aim is to scan at 185-190% within the next two years. For me it is kilos of lamb sold per ewe that is the important figure, but I think scanning percentage is a good place to start to achieve this. The ewes have done their part and I suppose it is now up to me to keep as many alive to sale time as possible.

Hybrid vigour

I decided to introduce New Zealand Texel blood into my ewes to try and benefit from hybrid vigour and improve the carcass of my lambs whilst maintaining mothering ability. I use a NZ Suftex S (75% Suffolk 25% Texel) as a terminal sire for its easy lambing traits and ability to thrive well from grass. This is essential, as I aim to have all lambs, except replacements, finished off grass and off the farm by the beginning of September. The farm is all permanent pasture laid out in manageable sized fields which are well fenced. This is a great help in my aim of good grazing management. I think that as sheep farmers we have a lot to learn about growing

and utilising grass from our dairy farming neighbours.

Looking onwards and upwards, my plan is to increase my flock over the next five years to obtain a full-time wage from the farm. I plan to breed my own ewes to increase the flock size. This means I will know exactly what I'm working with. I select my replacement breeding stock

using the Hillsborough performance recording scheme. This gives me an index for all my ewe lambs and lets me select the lambs with the specific traits I'm looking for. It also gives me an index on all the ewes, based on how they performed at lambing time and the weaning weights of the lambs. This helps me identify the best performing ewes to breed my replacements from, and the poorer performing ewes can be crossed to a terminal sire. Longer term I intend to cull the underperforming ewes, but at the moment I am focussing on trying to build up flock numbers.

Bright future

I think the sheep industry has such a bright future in the UK and is an excellent industry for young people like myself with a keen interest in farming to get into. As the New Zealand-style share farming also becomes a more popular topic within the sheep sector, this could help with the biggest problem facing anyone trying to enter the sheep sector – land availability! An open-minded forward-thinking approach to share farming and long term contracts on rented ground would give young sheep farmers stability and allow them to set clear aims for the future, with a realistic chance of achieving them.



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