

# SHEEP FARMER

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2019

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

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# More work needed to refute anti-livestock debate

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



**INSIDEYOUR  
SHEEPFARMER**  
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## NSA NEWS

- 03 News round-up
- 04 George Hedley award winner
- 04 NSA - Moredun agreement
- 05 Regional reports
- 06 Early Gathering report
- 08 Regional events coming up

## REGULAR FEATURES

- 09 NSA policy update
- 20 NSA Next Generation
- 22 Farm Feature: John Lloyd
- 27 NSA contributors' technical advice
- 42 Business comment and advice
- 44 Following the flock

## SPECIAL FEATURES

- 16 What's the future for the stratified sheep sector?
- 18 Partnership working in the Welsh uplands
- 24 Improved measure of livestock carbon footprint



26 Reducing neonatal lamb losses



34 Driving productivity from grass



42 Post-Brexit meat standards

The festive period gave us all a huge treat – two weeks with Brexit hardly mentioned. Life continued happily, the weather was great with ground conditions perfect, lamb prices were respectable, and much BPS was paid.

However, reality returned with the Oxford Farming Conference and the Oxford Real Farming Conference getting things back into gear. Secretary of State Michael Gove, typically optimistic about future possibilities yet still unwilling to legislate for ongoing funding commitments, made his position very clear regarding the risks of a no deal. In his words, the Prime Minister's deal is not perfect but the risks to our industry of a no deal with combinations of tariffs and border controls would be devastating, particularly for the sheep sector and smaller farmers.

He announced a new food strategy group that will explore the subject of food security and domestic production. However, reservations remain that the Environment Plan, the Agriculture Bill and a UK food strategy remain disconnected, and that we are still lacking any overall vision for what we are trying to achieve and how this relates to the UK's health and economic agendas.

## Disconnection

Veganuary is a good example of the confusion. Driven in part by climate change arguments and in part by human and health arguments (all quite legitimate concerns), it risks achieving exactly the opposite of its aims.

The climate change arguments against red meat, and British lamb in particular, are flawed and incomplete, and the environmental, health and social effects of highly processed and industrial plant-based ingredients from wherever in the world is completely untested. Suggestions of a meat tax would be likely to increase the costs of high-quality meat and drive people towards buying cheaper lower standard products - the law of unintended consequences.

This is something I see as a big battle ground for 2019. We must step up and make the case for sheep farming in relation to red meat, climate change,

human health and animal welfare; and the case for sheep and land use, the environment and ecology. If we are not prepared to try to lead the debate in an honest and considered way then the rewilders, the animal welfare campaigners and the vegans will take ownership of all these agendas and that is something we cannot allow to happen.

We have made progress but now is the time to do more and not the time to be complacent. In late 2018 Mr Gove made the decision not to grant a licence to release lynx into the Kielder Forest – a huge relief to many farmers in that region and a just reward for all the effort NSA and others have made. But this is unlikely to be a permanent victory. One of the keys to our success was to take ownership of the environmental and social agenda – an incredible achievement that we must build on, engage more deeply, and really deliver on practical and multiple outcomes from our role in managing the landscape.

We are farmers and producers first and foremost, but we should also be proud of our role as landscape managers and not see this as an insult.

## Rewilding

In 2019, on top of everything else that will be thrown at us, the rewilding movement will step up its efforts to 're-wild Britain' and it will use the arguments of species loss and climate change – again two things that most NSA members will have a keen interest in. Late in 2018 I read my local Wildlife Trust magazine and was somewhat surprised to read that they have plans to 're-wild' Gloucestershire (at a time when half of it seems to be being built on).

The article identified a problem that 'people had misinterpreted what re-wilding meant'. In my response to the article, I suggested someone had chosen the wrong word and that all they were describing was a different sort of interventionist management, and in choosing the wrong word they had alienated themselves from a lot of farmers. What is being proposed is not 'wild' at all, in fact most of Wildlife Trust land is managed by people and machines and often by traditional farming and woodland activities. I've said it before, British sheep farming has a very good story to tell and we need to make sure it remains that way.



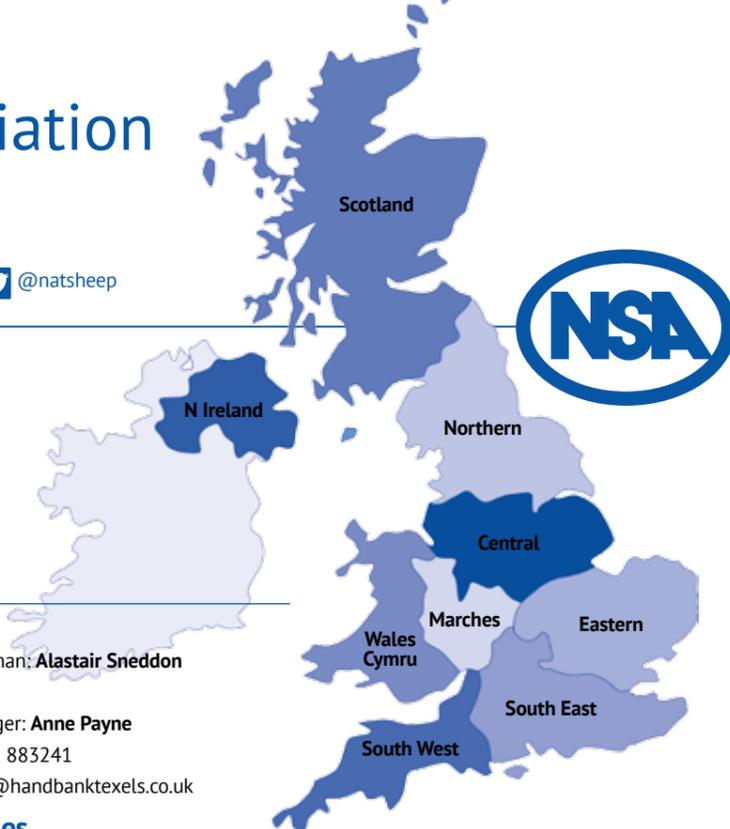
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### South West



Chairman: **Peter Derryman**



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## Final NSA-Tornado winner of 2018

Following a recommendation from an existing member last year, new sheep farmer Ed Stubbs decided to join NSA. He has now been announced as the lucky, final winner of the NSA prize giveaway receiving a Tornado Wire fencing kit.



NSA and Tornado gave away four fencing packages in 2018, as part of a prize draw incentivising new members to join up and existing members to make referrals.

Ed signed up as a new member having returned to farming after time working in banking and purchasing a smallholding in the Staffordshire moorlands. Having grown up on a farm he had long intended to return to agriculture when money allowed. In 2017, alongside fiancé Liane, Ed was able to achieve this goal. They started with just eight breeding ewes, but two years on will lamb 60-head.

Ed does this alongside his day job as an NFU Group Secretary, and while his plan is to expand the flock further, he is following prices and land

values with Brexit approaching.

He comments: "I recognise the benefits NSA membership can offer us, as well as the help and support from the network of other sheep farmers involved. I am looking forward to using the prize to complete the fencing needed around the farm."

### Top prize

As part of his prize, provided by long standing supporters of NSA, Tornado Wire, Ed receives a set of stock fencing wire and fixings worth more than £450. NSA congratulates Ed on his win and hopes it will help him further establish his young business.

## NSA launches 2019 membership prize

Following the success of 2018's membership prize draw with Tornado Wire, NSA is pleased to announce its 2019 prize of a JFC-Agri foam footbath.

By signing up to join NSA this year new members will automatically be entered into a prize draw for a chance to win one of four sets of a footbath and 20 litres of hoof solution. Each of the four prize packages is worth £1,100.

Existing members are also in with a chance of winning by recommending a friend, family member or neighbour to sign up too. There is no limit to the number of draw entries an existing member can have, so the more people you recommend to join NSA, the higher your chance of winning a prize.

Every membership subscription supports NSA's work to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector, which is particularly vital given the current political landscape.

Full details and terms and conditions at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/org.uk/draw)



## #ColostrumIsGold 2019 campaign begins

NSA is pleased to support the 2019 #ColostrumIsGold campaign, spearheaded by the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance.

The campaign highlights the importance of colostrum in a healthy lamb and the role it plays in removing the need to routinely give all neonatal lambs a dose of antibiotics – a practice that is no longer recommended by the veterinary profession due to its potential to speed up the development of resistance to antibiotics.

More on the benefits of colostrum on pages 26-28, and more online at [www.colostrumisgold.org](http://www.colostrumisgold.org)



## NSA Chairman returned for second year

The first Board Meeting of 2019 saw the Trustees that manage the governance of NSA confirm Bryan Griffiths in his role as NSA Chairman. Bryan is now in the second year of a three-year term and continues to lead the Board and represent NSA at a national level. Bryan is a sheep farmer from North Devon and has also agreed, along with his wife Liz, to host the NSA Sheep South West event in June this year. As well as providing visitors with a wealth of technical content, the event will include a tour of the commercial sheep flock and the approach taken by Bryan and Liz to its management.

NSA Sheep South West is one of five regional sheep events running this summer. Details at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).

## Lambing list still open

The NSA Lambing List of 2018/19 is still open for members in search of a lambing student this season. Simply submit details of your flock set-up and lambing dates to advertise an opportunity to willing youngsters. Many members have already had their match made, but more vet students and young people are still looking for placements.

Visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list) to join up now, or call NSA Head Office if you do not have internet access.

## NSA officeholders



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Honorary President



**Bryan Griffiths**  
Chair of the Board



**David Gregory**  
Honorary Treasurer



**Eddie Eastham**  
UK Policy & Technical Chairman



**Kevin Harrison**  
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# Recognition for top sheep consultant

NSA is pleased to recognise highly regarded sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings with its prestigious George Hedley Memorial Award for outstanding contribution to the sheep sector

For nearly 40 years, Lesley has been a leading figure in the UK sheep sector, gaining a UK-wide reputation for her outstanding knowledge and expertise in all aspects of the industry and particularly sheep nutrition and parasite control.

Lesley graduated from Nottingham University with a degree in animal production in 1979 and joined ADAS, quickly working her up to become its principle sheep consultant. She became an independent consultant in 1997, developing a wide client base within the industry, advising farmers, Defra, organisations such as NSA and

many more. In addition, she is a life member of the Sheep Veterinary Society and the leading figure in the SCOPS industry group, a world leader in integrated parasite control in sheep.

Lesley says: "To be recognised by my peers in the sheep industry in this way is a great honour. I have been very fortunate to have worked in such a vibrant sector over my career. In accepting this award, I want to acknowledge the efforts of many people who have supported and encouraged me over the years, and I hope to be able to continue to support the next generation of sheep advisers as we move into a new phase for our industry."

## Value of service

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "The value of the service Lesley has given to the UK sheep industry is really immeasurable. Thanks to Lesley, I believe UK sheep farmers are currently far more aware of the challenges they face due to anthelmintic resistance and are taking steps



Lesley Stubbings, winner of the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award.

to counteract this and improve the health and welfare status of their livestock."

## Enthusiasm

NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths adds: "Anyone who has ever worked with Lesley cannot have failed to be impressed by her knowledge and enthusiasm for sheep farming, and we enjoy a particularly close working relationship with her at NSA. I believe this award to be very well deserved – congratulations to her."

Lesley is the 2018 recipient of the NSA award; nominations for the 2019 winner will be invited from across the sheep sector this autumn.

# Long standing relationship renewed



NSA is delighted to announce its long-standing relationship with Moredun is being renewed from this January, meaning NSA members in the UK will continue to automatically hold associate membership of Moredun.

Joanne Briggs, NSA Operations Director, explains: "NSA has made a financial contribution to Moredun for a number of years, in recognition of the invaluable scientific work it does for the sheep sector. We are incredibly lucky to have a research body such as Moredun operating

within the UK, with globally recognised vaccines, diagnostic tests and treatment protocols being developed on our doorstep. "In previous years our financial contribution has facilitated the distribution of Moredun Livestock Health factsheets to NSA members,

which you will be familiar with receiving a couple of times a year when your Sheep Farmer polybag arrives in the post."

NSA members can now access these resources through the Moredun Members' Portal on the Moredun website. Newly granted permission to access this portal means NSA members will be able to utilise the entire archive of factsheets plus other resources as they are added.

Mrs Briggs continues: "At the same time as making this change, NSA is really thrilled to be increasing joint NSA-Moredun activity to disseminate key technical messages in a way that is relevant to practical sheep farmers. This will be via our NSA sheep events but also additional regional activities currently being planned."

More information will be shared with members over the coming months, as well as instructions on how to access the Moredun Members' Portal with an NSA membership number. NSA members without internet access who are concerned by this change are encouraged to contact NSA Head Office using the contact details on page 2.



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# Reports from the NSA regions

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

At the end of January, NSA Northern Ireland Region ran a series of four meetings for sheep farmers.



Members in Northern Ireland attended meetings on antimicrobial resistance.

These meetings focused on antimicrobial resistance and the ways to reduce antibiotic use in the sheep sector. We teamed up with Parklands Vet Group and MSD Animal Health, who generously sponsored the meetings. The speakers explained the causes and reasons of these problems and suggested actions we should take to help reduce or prevent antibiotic use. Cleanliness and attention to detail are always the best approach, but vaccines are the preferred option to help combat disease.

## Marches

By Lorna Davies, Secretary

In light of all the chatter about Brexit, NSA Marches Region felt a pre-Christmas committee meeting and talk might help to lighten the mood.



Nuffield scholar Geraint Powell spoke about sustainable grazing strategies.

Geraint Powell, a 2017 Nuffield Scholar, led a talk on farm 'technology' sheep and how it converts inedible cellulose into mineral rich proteins that improve soils and draw carbon down from the atmosphere. Interestingly as we race through January covering topics such as Veganuary and air quality bills, I think back to Geraint's talk on regenerative agriculture and how it proved refreshing and thought provoking, demonstrating how agriculture provides solutions on so many levels to our human problems.

## South East

By Susie Parish, South East Region Committee Member

NSA South East Region recently sponsored a sheepdog training day for young shepherds, hosted by Mathew Blyth at Didling Farms, West Sussex, with tuition expertly provided by sheepdog trainer and 2017 England team captain Jed Watson from Dartmoor. A very successful day was had by all who attended, with the course tailored towards practical shepherding to send everyone home with new skills to use on their own flocks. The dogs ranged from a six-month old having its first introduction to sheep right through to an eight-year-old experienced farm dog. Didling Farms has fantastic facilities for training dogs at every stage which, combined with Jed Watson's experience, meant shepherds and their dogs quickly progressed over the course of the day.



NSA South East Region sponsored the sheepdog training day for young shepherds at Didling Farms, West Sussex.



## Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

Our regional Chairman Eddie Eastham has been busy attending events on the behalf of members.

Firstly, he attended the Results-Based Agri-Environment Schemes Conference at Leyburn where a pilot scheme has been running.

The participating farmers receive payments on the outcome of their environmental work, which Eddie reports as positive in terms of its flexibility, but not for everyone due to payment levels being unknown until the end. The pilots will continue for now. Eddie also attended the NSA meeting about the future of the UK sheep stratified system (report on page 16), saying it was good to get a mix of people in the room to discuss issues that were also aired further at the recent NSA Northern Region committee meeting.

Should you have any thoughts please contact your local representative or NSA Head Office, as this does relate to Northern England hill farming immensely and it would be good to hear your ideas and comments.

In mid-January we had our last committee meeting before lambing time kicks in. With a strong turnout, updates were given from the NSA Board and UK Policy & Technical committee.

## Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

We have now completed our second NSA Central Region Early Gathering at Bakewell Market (full report on page 6) and we need to thank all our sponsors, major (Shearwell), mainline (AHDB, British Wool, MSD Animal Health and Bimeda) and local. Thanks also to Derbyshire Dales, all standholders and, in particular, to Bagshaws and NSA Head Office staff for all their help, and to all the stewards and volunteers – we couldn't have managed without any of you.

# Producers urged to prepare for an uncertain future

Following the successful format launched in 2017, the NSA Central Region Early Gathering once again provided a mix of seminars, workshops and trade stand exhibits.

The importance of the sheep sector being part of the solution when fighting the resistance threat in antibiotics was one example of the practical information provided during the day.

Jonathan Statham of Bishopton Vets said the loss of antibiotics was a 'big threat to civilisation', as routine surgery and infections could become life threatening. He explained: "Antimicrobials should be used only as necessary and as little as possible. Exposing bugs to low levels of antimicrobials promotes resistance so farmers should look to infection control by increasing immunity through good nutrition, colostrum and better hygiene."

## Blanket use

Fiona Lovatt of Flock Health acknowledged the sheep industry uses less antibiotics than other livestock sectors, but pointed to the more widespread prophylactic treatment of sheep as a major concern. She said: "The use in a large number of neonatal lambs to protect against the perceived risk of joint ill or watery mouth is perhaps the worst case. Additionally, some farmers are still using antibiotics to prevent enzootic abortion, and this is not acceptable as they should be vaccinating. The same is true of lameness, as it is correct to treat lame sheep but

we need to better prevent them occurring."

Dr Lovatt continued: "Challenge yourself. See how far you can get through lambing without opening a bottle of antibiotics. Every dose you do not give means the antibiotic will keep working a little longer."

Elsewhere at the event Anna Farrell of AHDB spoke about the need to appeal to the younger generation by promoting quick and easy recipes for lamb and highlighting its environmental credentials.

## 'Social licence'

Jim Beary, an upland, tenant farmer from near Sheffield, suggested farmers needed to do more to 'secure the social licence to produce meat'. He said: "We need to win public approval for what we do and a cheap food policy in the UK makes it very difficult for livestock farmers. We need to improve consumer confidence by engaging with the public, for example by talking to walkers who come through our farms and portraying our message on social media."

As well as providing the event venue, Bagshaws sponsored a warming lamb curry for visitors to sample. This was to complement a presentation by Liz Ford of AHDB about the importance of the ethnic market to sheepmeat, pointing out that while white British consumers eat on average just 4.5kg of sheepmeat per head per year, Asian Muslims eat 30kg.

Ms Ford comments: "It is a very important market and mutton sold to Muslim consumers underpins the value of the cull ewe trade. It also has a young population that is increasingly seeking a higher quality product."

## Event Fact File

Event: NSA Central Region Early Gathering.

Venue: Bakewell Market, Derbyshire.

Date: Thursday 24th January 2019.

Competition winners:

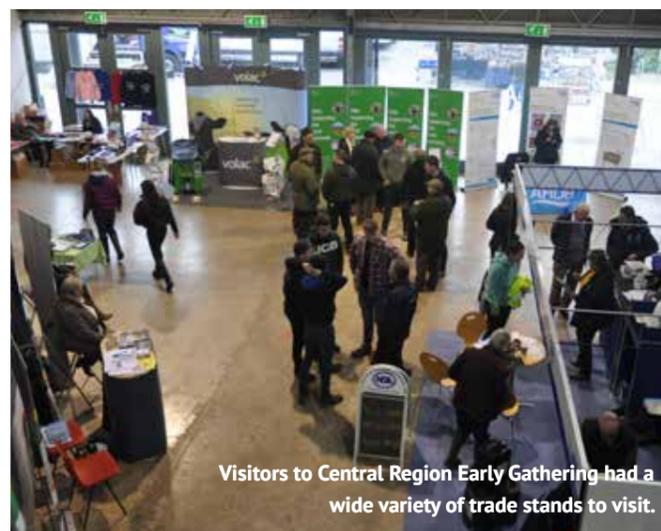
- **NSA Next Generation Shepherd:** Jack Charleton, Derbyshire.
- **Junior Shepherds:** Queen Elizabeth School, Derbyshire.
- **Best trade stand:** Shearwell Data.

## Superb shepherds

A very strong entry in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions gave a boost to the event, with 12 competitors in the main section and an additional 36 school children in the junior section. The overall victor was Jack Charleton, originally from Northumberland but now a trainee farm manager at Chatsworth Estate, Derbyshire. NSA thanks the Texel Sheep Society for sponsoring and Reaseheath College and DART for running the competitions, as well as various other supporters. More at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events).



Jack Charleton, winner of the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competition, with NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths.



Visitors to Central Region Early Gathering had a wide variety of trade stands to visit.

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# NSA activity coming up in your region

## Marches

By Lorna Davies, Secretary

**NSA Marches Region Annual Members' Meeting is on Monday 11th February, 6pm at Hereford Market.** We are looking forward to a talk by Nuffield Scholar Alex Brewster on 'Powering pasture and the relevance of red meat in the 21st century'. This will be followed by a talk from NSA Communications Officer Katie James for an update on NSA's work and the benefits of using social media.

Our Next Generation event will be in May - if you're under 27 and keen on sheep this event provides an excellent opportunity to test your sheep farming skills, such as ATV handling and sheep selection and handling. It's a great day for young and old alike, with an opportunity to travel if you prove successful.

## Scotland

**NSA Scottish Region's Annual Regional Members' Meeting is on Wednesday 13th February, 3pm at Airth Castle Hotel and Spa, FK2 8JF.** For those not able to attend, proxy voting forms are available on the NSA website.

Planning is underway for NSA Highland Sheep 2019, which will be taking place on Wednesday 12th June 2019 at Sibmister Farm, KW14 8SW, kindly hosted by the Sutherland family.

The farming unit of Sibmister and the nearby farm of Stainland is one of the best-known sheep and beef enterprises in the north of Scotland.

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

**As spring and summer approach, NSA Northern Ireland Region is preparing the NSA Sheep Centre at the Royal Ulster Show, Balmoral (Wednesday 15th - Saturday 18th May).** As well as planning for NSA Sheep NI on Monday 1st July at Ballymena Market. Anyone wishing to take a trade stand at either event should contact me as soon as possible.

## Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

**Our Annual Regional Members' Meeting will take place on Wednesday 20th February, 2pm on the Royal Welsh Showground.**

Full details are included on a flyer within this magazine for NSA Cymru/Wales members, but the event is also open to non-members and anyone coming from further afield.

Our speakers will include Bleddyn Davies, NSA Next Generation Ambassador, as well as John Richards of HCC, and vet and Farmers Weekly Farm Advisor of the Year Ollie Hodgkinson. David Ashford from Welsh Government will join us so he and Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, can debate the future farming, food and land management policy for Wales.

If you would like to attend, please let me know for catering purposes as a hot meal will be served at lunchtime.

## College venue to bring extra wow-factor to NSA Welsh Sheep 2019

**A 280ha lowland farm will host NSA Welsh Sheep 2019 on Tuesday 21st May, but the fact the commercially-run enterprise is also a teaching resource for the 500 students at Glynllifon College will bring an added dimension to the event as it updates visitors on the latest news, views and technical innovation.**

The Glynllifon site at Caernarfon is owned by Grwp Llandrillo Menai College. Farm Manager Rhodri Manod Owen says: "We've always been supportive of NSA Welsh Sheep and our students have been competing in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd competitions for over 20 years. We've always thought it's important for Wales, because it showcases our sheep industry at its best. Visitors will see a beautiful historic estate alongside an intensively run farm, based on grass and forage. They will also see Glastir agri-environmental work and some innovations, such as the 'techno-grazing' and our various farm enterprises."

The traditional flying Mule flock at Glynllifon has been replaced by a closed flock of Lleyne ewes, to allow full control of biosecurity and selection of replacement genetics. There are 40 continental purebred ewes crossed with high index rams to produce grass-reared breeding rams. The main flock is crossed with Texel Charollais crossbreds, and Charmoise rams are also used on the ewe lambs to produce quality butchers' lambs. A proportion of the best Lleyne ewes are bred pure to provide replacements for the flock, with only twin ewe lambs from unassisted lambings retained.

Event organiser Helen Roberts says: "My challenge is to get the students all involved. It ties in with the NSA Next Generation project we've been running for a few years now."

For further details and trade stand applications visit [www.welshsheep.org.uk](http://www.welshsheep.org.uk) or contact Helen Roberts.

Sheep South West is to be hosted by NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths and wife Liz.

## Central

By Anne Payne, Manager

**Before everyone gets into the thick of lambing, our next event will be our Annual Regional Members' Meeting at Bakewell Market on Wednesday 20th February, at 7pm.** It will be preceded at 6.20pm by a wash-up meeting for the NSA Central Region Early Gathering, where we will welcome feedback on the event, and followed by a talk from Nicola Noble, NSA Livestock Researcher. Afterwards there will be a pea and pie supper. All are welcome but please RSVP to me for catering purposes.

## South West

By Ian May, Manager

**Our NSA South West Region Annual Members' Meeting is now booked for Tuesday 19th February, 7.30pm at the Stockman's Restaurant in the Exeter Livestock Centre, EX2 8FD.**

We have two interesting and forward-looking speakers. Kevin Harrison, NSA English Committee Chairman and J.T. Baylis Farm Manager, will be talking about his recent visits to China to promote the British sheep industry, and Eleanor Phipps, NSA Communications Officer, will be discussing the facts and possibilities out of what we know about Brexit, followed by a buffet.

Arrangements are advancing for NSA Sheep South West 2019, Tuesday 18th June at Southcott, Devon, EX37 9LF. Please add the date to your diaries and visit [www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk](http://www.sheepsouthwest.org.uk) for stand applications and further information.

## Eastern

By Jonathan Barber, Manager

**This year's farm walk will be Thursday 16th May at 2pm.** Thank you to our host John Pawsey, a fourth-generation farmer and a Director of Shimpling Park Farms, Suffolk.

The mixed farm runs 1,000 New Zealand Romney breeding ewes on Hanslope series chalky boulder clay. John also farms an additional 980ha for neighbouring farmers, with NSA Next Generation Ambassador Robert Spink managing the sheep.

On Saturday 8th June by kind permission of Godolphin Stud, Newmarket, CB8 9RS, the region's Next Generation event will take place. This biennial event will see NSA Eastern Region's Next Generation Shepherd of the Year competition. The winner from the day will go forward to the national final at NSA Sheep 2020. Please let me know if you plan to attend the events or wish to enter the competition.

## South East

By Bob Blanden, Manager

**Please join us at the NSA South East Regional Members Meeting, Tuesday 12th February, 6pm at the Angel Hotel, Privett, Alton, Hampshire, GU34 3NN.** There will be industry updates from Dr Kenton Hart of Scotmin, Matt Van der Borgh of the British Sheep Dairying Association and Joanne Briggs from NSA Head Office. We are also hopeful Sergeant Tom Carter of Sussex Police will join us to talk about sheep worrying by dogs and what farmers can do to reduce incidents and how to deal with them. There will be a lamb-based meal afterwards, kindly sponsored again by James Farm & Country Supplies. Please RSVP to me.

## Northern

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Manager

**The NSA Northern Region Annual Members' Meeting is being held at the Hired Lad, Penrith, on Wednesday 13th February at 7.30pm.**

The evening will include a presentation by Sarah Baker, AHDB, on a new impact assessment for grazing livestock. Eleanor Phipps from NSA Head Office will be giving an update on key NSA activity. The T.I. Allison Award for outstanding contribution to the Northern sheep industry will also be presented.

The organising of NSA North Sheep 2019 is well underway. Please remember to go online and make your trade stand booking at [www.northsheep.org.uk](http://www.northsheep.org.uk) or contact me with any enquiries.



## YOUR NSA REGION

To register to attend an upcoming event, enquire about other things going on or raise a sheep farming issue you want discussed at a regional committee meeting, your regional representative is waiting to hear from you. Find contact details on page 2.



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The show ring at Balmoral 2018.

# NSA puts itself at the forefront of the debate against veganism

Since the last edition of Sheep Farmer, NSA has been working hard to counter the claims of a range of different camps posturing to encourage meat free diets and veganism by spreading misleading information about agriculture and farming systems.

This work kicked off in early-January as 'Veganuary' began, a campaign encouraging people to stop eating animal products for the first month of the year. Far from a harmless trend, producers find themselves arguing against a torrent of false claims of crimes against animal welfare, the environment and human health, which the media is quick to promote.

## False claims

However, this year, NSA has been fighting back with reasoned arguments to counter the false and damning claims of some groups. NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker says: "Make no doubt about it, behind the 'positive' messages about Veganuary lies a well-co-ordinated campaign against livestock farming. Our concern is that our unique grass-based method of sheep production in Britain, that has so many positive attributes, is hidden within more global and general statistics that include meat produced in a very different way."

Sheep farmers are facing increased criticisms, but these are connected and ignore the fact that UK sheep farming works in harmony with our environment, our landscapes and our human ecology – creating a countryside the majority of the public love and producing a food product that is healthy and nutritious within a well

## Concerns over future of migrant labour

Following the release of the Government's white paper on migration in late 2018, NSA expressed its concerns at the potential impact on migrant labour in UK abattoirs.

The paper sets out a £30,000 minimum wage for skilled workers to enter the UK, a wage most abattoir workers and abattoir vets do not reach. With UK abattoirs highly reliant on migrant labour and foreign veterinary cover, NSA is calling on the Government to make considerations for the industry as it is concerned that not enough thought and preparation is being put into ensuring staff at abattoirs will be maintained post Brexit. Many plants are already reporting working below peak efficiency because of labour shortages. However, it seems there is an inaccurate assumption by policy makers that if conditions are better the sector will attract British workers, or that technology will replace people.

balanced and nutritional diet.

Mr Stocker continues: "The climate change arguments that have been buoyed by the recent Paris Climate Change Summit ignore the fact red meat from livestock reared in a grass-based system is different from that raised in feedlot situations and highly dependent on fossil fuels.

Even more misleading is that the carbon footprinting tools available do not consider whole life cycles and ignore the role of grasslands and grazing animals in storing carbon and organic matter in our soils, and even in the wool they produce. As we start to demonstrate on page 24, we should consider methane from grazed ruminants separately from gas emissions derived from fossil fuels. It shouldn't be ignored but it's not the same as other greenhouse gases".

## Pro sheep

NSA says the UK should be seeking to strategically maintain or even increase sheep numbers here in the UK, related to market



Photo credit: Mark Dixon, Wikimedia Commons

demand, but further encourage the distribution into areas that are devoid of livestock in order to provide the multi-functional outcomes that people are interested in today.

NSA has been involved in a number of high-profile interviews on this issue recently, including on Farming Today, BBC2's the Victoria Derbyshire Show, and ITV's Good Morning Britain where Mr Stocker discussed NSA's position with the deputy leader of the Green Party, Amelia Womack.



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# Little movement in Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



In my role, I would prefer for NSA in Northern Ireland to be able to focus our work on technology and knowledge transfer - the things that we as sheep farmers control within our own businesses.

Unfortunately, the decisions made by politicians greatly influence the sustainability of our businesses and as a body representing sheep farmers the NSA must engage and express opinions on the effects their decisions will have on our farms.

I'm sure most of our readers are familiar with the situation in Northern Ireland, where our politicians have refused to work together now for two years, meaning Northern Ireland does not have a working agriculture committee or a minister in place to approve any new amendments to legislation.

A year ago, we had a change of Secretary of State for NI in Westminster with a renewed focus on getting our politicians together, or threat of direct rule. At time of writing we still have seen no movement in repairing the broken-down process of government in Northern Ireland at all, with little mention of it anywhere. Brexit has taken over all the headlines demonstrating that many politicians have forgotten they should be acting in such a way that is best for our country rather than trying to force their own individual views and opinions on the people.

## NI stalemate

The upshot of this situation is that over the last two years in Northern Ireland agricultural representatives have been talking with civil servants who were working on implementing decisions already made - but now most of their work is completed with nothing new coming forward. We are in the frustrating position where no matter what work civil servants do it is pointless, as it cannot be implemented without politicians' approval. An example is that our civil servants put together their vision for 'The Future for Agriculture in Northern Ireland' after consultation with the industry, but it is now sitting on a shelf somewhere gathering dust.

NSA will continue where possible to represent our sheep farmers in Northern Ireland and hope that soon things will start moving in a more positive direction. All is not lost as some decisions made by Defra are all encompassing and cover all regions in the UK.

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## Celebrations at NSA following lynx decision

As the last edition of Sheep Farmer went to press, NSA was informed of a decision by Secretary of State for Defra Michael Gove to reject the application by Lynx UK Trust to release lynx into the Kielder forest. After more than four years of campaigning and pointing out the dangers and risks the animals would bring, NSA was delighted to hear the news. However, NSA remains acutely aware of other rewilding calls and is aware of the Lynx Trust's intentions to put in a new application.

## NSA submits response to NZ trade consultation

NSA has submitted a response to a New Zealand trade consultation appealing for the New Zealand Government to respect UK farmers during what could be a very damaging few years for our industry. While NSA respects and understands free trade agreements, it is concerned a free trade deal with New Zealand could see UK markets overrun with imported lamb, with prices undercutting the UK production and driving home further difficulties for our sector.

## Welcome news for Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer

In late-November NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and I met with Welsh Government Cabinet Secretary Lesley Griffiths, Welsh Chief vet Christianne Glossop, and Welsh Government Rural Director Gary Haggarty.



The meeting saw us outline the sheep industry's needs if no Brexit deal is achieved. We also discussed post-Brexit farm support options and, with so many movements across borders, NSA's interest in having common regulatory and policy frameworks across the UK. We further discussed the 'Brexit and our land' consultation and the direction of traceability in coming years. I was pleased to hear the Welsh Governments enthusiastic response to invitations to two key NSA events later in the year.

Ms Griffiths recently announced Wales' first multispecies traceability system for livestock. The Welsh Government say it will improve traceability in the event of a disease outbreak and deliver significant opportunity for the Welsh red meat industry to use the improved data and will work alongside Defra and other UK administrations to ensure data exchange is efficient.

We later received further welcome news from Welsh Government that £5million of funding will be used to help eradicate sheep scab in Wales, following the submission of a cross-industry strategy that included NSA.

Having campaigned hard for a review, we also welcome the proposed changes to quarantine units in Wales that will ensure agriculture shows, an integral part of rural communities, are not undermined. We will keep up our work in this area.

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# Brexit preparations underway in Scotland

By George Milne, Regional Development Officer



While the chaos in Westminster continues, we as a sheep industry try to work, feed and maintain our flocks prior to lambing with no idea where we will be when we come to sell our lamb crop.

UK Livestock Brexit Group meetings continue regularly, as do agriculture and rural development stakeholder meetings in Scotland. Representation

on these groups will continue and we will do what we can to ensure the best outcome for the sheep industry.

## LFASS

Recently, Scottish government announced hill farmers and crofters in Scotland's most remote areas will continue to receive assistance under the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) into 2020. Rural Economy Secretary Fergus Ewing said Scotland would not allow the payment to drop below 80% in both years and Scottish Government would find a way to ensure the proposed reduction to 40% in 2020 would remain at the 80% level. NSA Scottish Region has repeatedly emphasised the importance of LFASS for the hill sector and will continue to do so. In no way do we support any reduction in payments.

## Agriculture Bill

Mr Ewing has also announced the Scottish Government's intention to introduce an Agriculture Bill in the Scottish Parliament. The Bill will deliver the powers needed to enable the Scottish Government to implement its 'Stability and Simplicity' proposals for rural financial support up to 2024. Our Government will not be seeking to take a 'schedule of powers' in the UK

Government's Agriculture Bill but will continue to seek amendments to ensure decisions are not taken away from Scotland.

In late 2018 I requested and attended a meeting in Brussels with the EU Commission. The meeting was arranged by Alyn Smith MEP to discuss concerns around planned changes to sheep tagging under the Animal Health Law. The changes would have had a significant impact on our current movement system, as we would only have been allowed to use a slaughter tag when moving direct to an abattoir. I put forward a robust case for both Scotland and the UK in defence of our current EID and traceability system. We were told to amend the wording in way that would allow us to operate and submit it through our member state. After several emails and discussions with both the Scottish Government and Defra the amendments were made and submitted.

Currently we are in the process of preparing written evidence to questions requested by the UK Parliament Scottish Affairs Committee on future agricultural support of Scotland, looking at why Scotland is different from other parts of the UK, and how support can be delivered under UK frameworks. This is vitally important for sheep farmers post Brexit.

## Keeping ahead of 2019's trials

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive



Aside from the Christmas break, things have been busy with policy and development meetings.

The UK Livestock Brexit Group continues to meet monthly. This group of more than 20 livestock farming organisations is highly effective and has proved its worth time and again. One of its efficiencies is in the relationship we have with Government, who use the group as a formal consultative/informative group. The meeting in December included a presentation on plans and pilots for the new Environmental Land Management Scheme, while January's was timed to be a few days after the Commons vote on Theresa May's deal.

## Shearing

With PETA continuing its campaign against shearing, claiming it's a cruel practice, industry bodies pulled together a meeting in December to start work on a code of practice for shearers and farmers preparing sheep for shearing. Once this work is complete NSA will communicate this as widely as possible with the aim of demonstrating good responsibility.

The Traceability Design Users Group held a learning session for HM Treasury staff in December

and visited Hereford Market along with two farm visits. The aim was to see the challenges faced today with sheep identification and movements reporting with the intention of securing Treasury funding commitment.

The sheep Antimicrobial use task force group met in January to discuss plans for 2019 and to consider how to deliver to calls for statistics and data on antibiotics use.

It became apparent very early in the New Year that there was confusion about the implementation of the change from toothing to a date of 30th June in relation to carcase splitting. As a result, Food Standards Agency hosted a meeting in January to iron out the finer detail for implementation. Ministers have signed this change off and Defra has announced it will operate for the 2019 season – there has been an assumption that we have time before sheep are seen with teeth up and before the changes are communicated to abattoirs and markets but the industry and the enforcement officers needs to know now in preparation and it won't be long before we see an odd lamb coming through with no one quite sure what to do with it.

## Certainty demanded for sheep farmers

As events unfold around us, NSA is calling for assurances from policy makers.

NSA is clear, the Prime Minister's proposed deal would provide a much better transition for UK sheep farmers, where a no deal could be seriously damaging. With Brexit now just two months away, it remains unclear what we will be facing. However, NSA has been given verbal assurances of two things: firstly, we will have third country status immediately so will not lose our ability to trade with the EU (although border controls are another issue), and secondly the UK Government will not charge tariffs on food and drink coming into the UK from the EU.

While this aims to avoid food price hikes and to keep our manufacturing industry going with raw product, NSA cannot see how this could be done without a reciprocal agreement for our exports to the EU to also be tariff free. With so much uncertainty over what is facing us we are now awaiting a Defra, devolved administration and industry meeting to discuss contingency planning. NSA talked openly about the need for this many months ago where we talked of covering tariff costs to enable trade to function, forms of deficiency payments, and using public procurement markets.

Will Theresa May be able to secure a much-needed Brexit deal?



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# Discussions around UK stratification help preparations for the future

NSA kicked off 2019 by hosting a meeting looking at the current challenges facing the UK stratified sheep system and what lies in the future for this decades-old farming practice.

Held at the NSA Sheep Centre in Worcestershire, the day saw relevant sheep breed societies, respected sheep farming practitioners, vets and representatives from sheep farming organisations, as well as Defra staff members, come together to hear from a number of key speakers before breaking off into smaller focus groups to build on the key themes highlighted in the talks.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker explains: "The thinking behind the meeting was to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders to discuss the changes being experienced within the stratified breeding structure involving uplands and lowlands, the importance of this to the hill farming sector, and to identify what the industry thinks should be done about it.

"Not surprisingly this led to some very interesting conversations and we managed to identify some key areas that came up repeatedly and that we can now explore further when considering the future of the stratified system and its importance within hill farming."

## Different views

Following an introduction to the background of the stratified system, attendees heard three key speakers who approached stratification with three different lenses, that of animal health, that of the producer and that of policy. NSA Livestock Researcher Nicola Noble comments: "It was clear from the offset, there is no one size fits all miracle cure to resolve the challenges raised in our discussion."

The room was then divided into smaller breakout groups to discuss these topics focusing on three questions (see panel).

## Future development

After consolidating answers from each of the discussion groups, five main points were identified for further consideration and future development. These were:-

1. Concern over flock health status, particularly resistance issues, is resulting in more farmers choosing to run closed flocks.
2. There is a lack of understanding in the value of upland breed traits within the crossbred ewe, and concern that some of these traits (such as hardiness and mothering ability) may be becoming weakened.
3. Selling crossbred breeding sheep is a highly important part of hill farming economics and hill farming would struggle to survive without access to breeding stock markets.
4. While stratified breeding and hill farming may be traditional practices there is a lot that can be done to make use of technology and innovation – tradition and innovation can complement each other.
5. The environment and public goods agenda will be a very important part of the economics of hill farming, but it is important the sheep farming that delivers this is commercial and productive – commercial sheep farming can deliver conservation objectives, but few farmers want to be conservation graziers.

Mrs Noble adds: "Many of the concerns focused on animal health and the uncertainty that comes with buying in stock. One area that could be taken further is the development of health assurance and/or accreditation schemes for

hill flocks producing crossbred ewes. With a stratified system exclusively reliant on livestock movements, improved and reliable animal health status information, as well as enhanced genetic information would increase buyer confidence, improve relationships and help overcome a lot of the uncertainty that looms over movement of sheep from the hills."

## Complex issues

All concerns raised at this meeting will now be used to help direct NSA policy in order to move forward with implementing change to help this unique system continue as we go through the upheaval we expect in the coming years. Mrs Noble concludes: "Despite not being able to resolve many of the complex issues, at least by kicking off the year with this enthusiastic discussion group, many of the opportunities highlighted are at the forefront of our minds and can be built into our future plans."

The NSA plans to continue this discussion and to broaden it with all sheep breed societies at our annual breed society forum in May.

## Speakers

**Nicola Noble, NSA**  
on evidence of change in stratification.

**Bryan Griffiths, NSA**  
on the future opportunities.

**Amanda Carson, APHA**  
from an animal health perspective.

**Neil Cole, Farmer**  
from an upland stratified farmers perspective.

**Tim Morden, Defra**  
from a policy perspective.

## Breakout questions

During the meeting, attendees were split into four smaller groups to discuss the topic and the perspectives laid out using three questions to help target thoughts.

1. What's wrong with the system?
2. What needs to be done?
3. What are the consequences if we do nothing?

The unique UK stratified system involves the production of Mules to cross with terminal sires for prime lamb production.



The reduction in recent years of hill breeds 'sold down the hill' prompted the NSA meeting about the future of the stratified system.

## What is stratification?

Stratification classically refers (there are always variations on a theme), to the movement of breeding sheep and blended genetics 'down the hill'. This starts with hill breeds moving down the hill to upland farms where they are mated with 'crossing rams' to produce recognised crossbred ewes that are then run on lowland farms and crossed with terminal sires for prime lamb production. This system has been firmly established for 120 - 150 years and is unique to the UK. Done well it is a practical, productive and environmentally sustainable way of making the most of the varied landscape and weather conditions we have in the UK.

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# Black Mountains Land Use Partnership demonstrates future framework

By Phil Stocker, NSA

Although the UK does have some good examples of collaboration, British farmers are not best known for working in partnership, formally at least. If it's hard to get farmers to work together then finding examples of groups of farmers working in partnership with other land management interests is exceptionally rare.

However, talk of the need for partnership working is in vogue, with our next era of agricultural policies likely to be more multi-functional and holistic. Equally as important as we get closer to some huge challenges for British farming post Brexit, is how farming can survive and reduce the risk of losing thousands of small and medium sized family farms.

Sir Don Curry identified it in the early 2000s in his work on the Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming, but it was talked of well before that and, as we prepare to leave the EU, it is being talked of again. As Sir Curry says, if small farms are to thrive in the future they need to 'seek the efficiencies of larger farms by working together, sharing investments, reducing costs and possibly gaining market benefits'. However, saying it is easy, achieving it is another matter.

## NSA involvement

In 2015 I was invited to chair a land management partnership on the Welsh borders. The Black Mountains Land Use Partnership (BMLUP) was already established but in its infancy. I accepted the role for several reasons: I felt this partnership held the promise of being really ground-breaking; it is helpful to have at least one 'on the ground project' to be involved in – it keeps your feet on the ground and you learn things that are applicable elsewhere; and I believe in the principles of collaboration and co-operation as an important means of supporting smaller farms and to help engage farming with wider land use interests.

There is more than one Black Mountains range in Wales – this one lies mainly in Powys between Crickhowell, Talgarth and Hay on Wye, but also extends into the English county of Herefordshire.

It is distinct from the Brecon Beacons but is within the Brecon Beacons National Park. The land area included is some 24,000ha of mainly common land with extensive grazing rights. BMLUP is a partnership that consists of all those with land owning and land management interests and rights, farmers and graziers, private landowners, the Brecon Beacons National Park, Natural Resources Wales, Natural England and Welsh Water.

This partnership aims to bring together grazing, access, wildlife and ecology, field sports, forestry and water management interests, and for the partnership to engage more effectively with other businesses, officials and activities within the area. If that sounds at all straightforward its worth remembering there are around 138 farmers with grazing rights, five main private land owners and four large scale statutory bodies.

## Funding issues

When I became involved in 2015 the partnership was in place and had enjoyed some funding from the Welsh Government Nature Fund that had allowed some habitat work to be done. But it was clear not all partners felt the benefits of this work, it wasn't addressing some of the key partnership issues, and it needed to be expanding its work more broadly. One of the first things completed during 2016 was to work on a 'visioning' document, giving some background to the area and the partnership, and outlining the partnerships aims and work priorities as well as the specific aims of the individual partners.

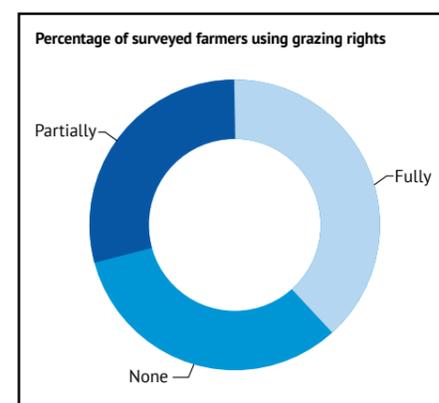
At the same time the partnership started looking at funding opportunities and, after months of planning and discussion, submitted a first phase application to the Welsh Government Sustainable Management Scheme (SMS) fund. Initially the partnership had identified £3m worth of work it wanted to do but, for a number of reasons, scaled the bid back to around £1m.

Money always tests any relationship and it would be true to say this was a tough time for the partnership – identifying areas of work that appealed to all and then scaling it back to a proportionate amount within a target budget. Eventually it was agreed to go for a total of just over £1m and to have three evenly funded work areas:

- Bracken control.
- Peatland restoration and management.
- Visitor management, education and skills development.

The SMS fund is intended to encourage trialling and testing, with learnings being identified and shared. Because of this the partnerships application included a significant level of monitoring and evaluation – another challenging process where it had to identify meaningful ways of capturing and measuring success (or failure).

Now 18 months into a three-year programme of work and it has made some really impressive progress in all areas. More than 300ha of bracken, targeted around sheep turnout points, has been cut/flailed/rolled twice, with a small area of chemical treatment too. Drainage grips have been dammed and wool banded, with damaged areas of peat reseeded, and pathways stoned to prevent erosion by walkers. Additionally, two rangers have been appointed



Above: One example of the wide range of data collected through BMLUP.

As a farmer and a grazier living in the Black Mountains community, which is important to me, BMLUP has been a very worthy project - getting together and understanding each others' problems with each partner bringing a different quality to the partnership. With more funding we hope to carry on the good work and grow the partnership

John Morris, local farmer



One of the targets using the SMS funding was to engage more visitors with the mountains.



With budgets in the public sector under constant pressure year after year, an organisation like Natural Resources Wales cannot afford to undertake its functions in isolation. Engagement at all stages is crucial to help us be efficient and relevant, now and in the future. BMLUP helps us do exactly that. It is a maturing partnership where discussions, compromises and joint actions are taking place, and aspirations are met.

David Letellier, Natural Resources Wales

to help control visitors, reduce illegal raves and off-roading, and encourage dog owners to keep their pets under control. The scheme has further enabled a payment for an ecosystem services portfolio to be developed, six school visits to understand how the hills function, six ambassador events to increase awareness of local hospitality businesses, and a skills survey among local rural communities. The partnership is also about to launch a stipend where it will be inviting applications to study subjects of interest/value to the community.

## Future options

However, I wouldn't want to give the impression the partnership is all about this SMS programme – it has only allowed a small amount of work to be done, it is time limited and BMLUP has already started investigating future options.

I also wouldn't want to give the impression the partnership is where it needs to be. It still has a long way to go and needs to get more

individuals involved – however there is no doubt the work done so far has brought the farmer and grazier community, the landowners and other partners closer together with more understanding of each other's situations, far more than was previously the case, and it has led to some examples of really practical collaboration including stepping up on sheep scab control and resolving problems with feral sheep and broken forestry fencing.

This way of working has much to offer and it is a direction we are all being encouraged towards – not just farmers working together but farmers working together with other stakeholders. Although its hard work with meetings going on into the night there is ultimately a real benefit for the farming community and its role within the rural community, and it is a privilege to be involved.

It's also right that this should be seen as investment by the NSA and in return I'll do all I can to keep readers updated on progress and to use the learnings wherever else its appropriate.



A view of the bracken work the partnership has undertaken to aid graziers with turning out.

## What is BMLUP?

The BMLUP's visioning document opens with: The purpose of the Black Mountains Land Use Partnership (BMLUP) is to promote and effect the restoration and sustainable management of the Black Mountains. This could be seen, and indeed is, a potentially ground-breaking project that will have valuable influence elsewhere. However, it is too important to be seen as simply a project and needs to be recognised as 'real life', affecting lives, businesses and environments long term. The potential is to support the development of a region, a community and an environment that is thriving, successful and balanced, recognising multiple interests and putting those who are in the fortunate position to be responsible for management, in the driving seat.

# Lots to look forward to in 2019 with NSA Next Generation

The first few weeks of each year are usually taken up with selecting the annual intake of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors – but with a year off from the programme, NSA is instead busy planning alternative activities instead.

Joanne Briggs, NSA Operations Director, explains: “With five years of the Ambassadors programme under our belt, this one-year hiatus provides the funding and time to plan some exciting additional content this year. We will continue all our usual NSA Next Generation activity, such as our match-making service and running Next Generation Shepherd competitions around the UK, but have some other bits and pieces in the pipeline too. “We will be offering two-day residential

sessions for up to 50 young sheep farmers per trip to take in technical information, farm tours and a social element. Each session will follow a different theme and be in a different part of the country. They will be subsidised so should be affordable for the majority of people wanting to take part.”

The NSA Samuel Wharry Memorial Award for the Next Generation is also set to launch imminently, having been delayed since its mention in the December/January edition of this magazine.

Mrs Briggs says: “We apologise that applications are not yet open for this award, which will take the form of travel bursaries to support two young people in study trips in 2019. We have attracted additional funding for the bursaries, which is fantastic news but has slightly delayed things.”

Find more at [www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk](http://www.nsanextgeneration.org.uk) or email [enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk) and ask to be added to the NSA Next Generation mailing list.



NSA is looking forward to offering travel bursaries to two young sheep farmers in 2019.

# Top tips from one generation of the show ring to the next



Tilly James of Hanley Swan, Worcestershire, has been showing sheep for most of her life. Now six, Tilly was gifted her first pedigree Ryeland sheep for her first birthday and soon developed a passion for showing.

Tilly says: “My parents used to keep a small commercial flock, but my mum quickly found she liked the Ryeland and so sold the other sheep to buy more. I love them because they are friendly and have cute lambs.”

## Competitions

Tilly competed in her first show when she was just two years old, winning her first young handlers class at the Royal Three Counties show that same year. Recently she led the winning female breed champion at Monmouth Show, her ewe Winnie, which she says is one of her proudest achievements.

To prepare for shows, Tilly spends time familiarising the sheep with her and preparing them to be shown. She says: “Before a show I have to wash them and then brush and

trim them. At the moment, my mum does the trimming, but I help with everything else.” Tilly is already very engaged with managing the flock, having chosen and bought her own ewe lamb last year from the Ryeland Flock Book show and sale in Ludlow, Shropshire. “Belle is my favourite sheep and I am looking forward to showing her as a shearling ewe this year,” she says.

## Aspirations

Like all young people, Tilly has aspirations for the future: “I would like to get more sheep and then hopefully I might be able to win national breed champion and get a big trophy!”

Tilly is supported by her parents Katie and Gareth. Katie says: “No matter the colour of the rosette Tilly, or her brother Seth, win we are always really proud to see them speaking confidently with the judge and interacting well with other breeders at the shows.”



Tilly James with her Ryeland Ewe Winnie after winning female breed champion at the Monmouth Show.



I would like to get more sheep and then hopefully I might be able to win national breed champion and get a big trophy!

Tilly James



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Further along in his showing career is Adam Watson from Slaggyford, Cumbria. An NSA Northern Region Committee member, Adam has been showing sheep for almost 30 years, beginning when he left school in 1990.

Adam says: “I got into showing when we bought a good tup in the late 1980s. He was a natural star and was nicknamed Arnie after the farmer we bought him off. I have shown Mule gimmer lambs and Bluefaced Leicesters, but my real passion is Swaledales, of which we now run 400 purebreds on the farm.”

The highlight in Adams showing career came when he won Swaledale breed champion at the Royal Highland Show in 2011. Adam comments: “My philosophy, which helped me achieve my breed champion title, is if you believe you can

achieve. I think that is really important for young people like Tilly to remember when they're just getting started. I also believe it is important to remember that although showing is fun you should never lose track of the market place; sometime breeds can be driven by fashion instead of commercial aspects. Remember to be happy with what you have as well as getting a financial return. In showing, you learn as you go along. Tilly and other young people getting started will know it's a learning process. The reward for your hard work comes when you start winning and climbing the show ladder - and it's great!”



My philosophy, which helped me achieve my breed champion title, is if you believe you can achieve. I think that is really important for young people like Tilly to remember when they're just getting started.

Adam Watson

# Diversification and preserving tradition are key to adapting upland farming

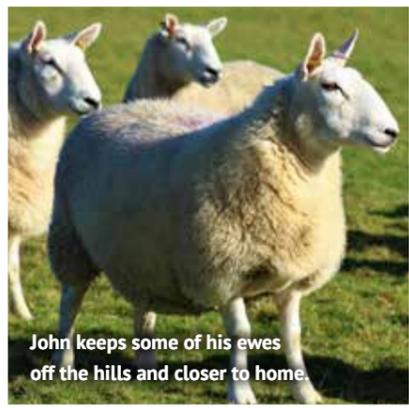
By Eleanor Phipps, NSA

Sheep are as central to John Lloyd's farming business now as they were when his family came to Cynghordy, Llandovery, Carmarthenshire, 100 years ago – but as times have changed, so too has the farm.

"Diversification is the key to survival these days," says John, who also represents NSA Cymru/ Wales Region on the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee. "The sheep will always be at the heart of the farm, that is my philosophy and belief, but its not always going to be possible to make a living solely off sheep, especially in the uplands."

The farm runs from 120m (400ft) to its highest point of more than 400m (1,300ft) and John is determined to keep the hill landscapes well managed with sheep. He currently runs 160 North Country Cheviot ewes, which he lambs pure, and says these fit in well across both the level parkland and undulating hills of the farm.

John lambs his ewes inside from mid-March but



John keeps some of his ewes off the hills and closer to home.

keeps them out for as long as possible beforehand. He says: "I believe in starting to feed my ewes a couple of months before lambing, but in keeping them out and active until they're ready to come into the shed.

"I also use boluses in them, as keeping the trace elements correct means I can maximise their natural immunity and their resistance to diseases and infections.

## Lambing time

The ewes are kept inside with their lambs until the lambs begin to 'round out', usually at about three days. However, John will keep them inside if the weather requires. Indoors lambing is a system he uses for both ease of labour and for protection.

"I work alone so it is important for the ewes and lambs to be somewhere easily accessible for me to monitor, but also as I can have a problem with foxes," he says, adding that lambing indoors means lambs are physically bigger and stronger before faced with predators, and the fields are kept clean. "Lambing outside means afterbirth is left around, which attracts both foxes and ravens. We have a lot of these in this area, due to the large amount of woodland we are surrounded by. Keeping them in gives the lambs a much higher chance of survival. It doesn't happen all the time, but I'm proud to say last lambing I lost just one lamb between turnout and weaning."

The lambs, which John tags as he turns out, are then grass-reared and grouped at weaning. John keeps some ewe lambs on as replacements and sells the rest, as well as the rams, to private buyers. He aims to finish prime lambs on grass, but the few that need it will be finished on concentrates. Due to the nature of the land, there is always a risk of liver fluke. John takes this very seriously and also runs a full vaccination programme for his stock. He comments: "I'm a great believer in vaccination and believe its always better to prevent than to treat. I also treat for fluke in spring to break the cycle and this system always works well for me."

## Breeding aims

John's aim is to run a largely homebred flock, however many of his hill ewes were brought in over the past few years to build up numbers following his move from a Scottish Blackface flock to Cheviots, meaning around one-third of his ewes are currently homebred. Additionally, John has had to buy in some gimmers this year as 23 of his homebred ewe lambs were stolen.

The move to the Cheviots was because he finds them easier to run and fit in better with the mix of upland and parkland ground on his farm. He explains: "The Cheviots are a family tradition which also came from in my wife's family. Her grandfather used to run a great many Cheviots and brought around 1,000 ewes down from Scotland

"My woodland is run alongside the sheep, utilising the many benefits trees and sheep can bring one another."

John Lloyd



"Sheep really are the heart of my farm, and I hope always will be. However, I have had to find other sources of income to make this sustainable."

John Lloyd

The Cheviot ewes are lambed pure in early-March.

to Northampton and used to sell them round the country from there. They're an easy breed to like, they are happy on my land and mother their lambs well, so I have enjoyed keeping them so far."

However, John says, the upland and hill areas he farms are not capable of providing a living just off sheep. "Sheep really are the heart of my farm, and I hope always will be. However, I have had to find other sources of income to make this sustainable."

In 2012 John and wife Lucy converted five old barns into holiday cottages in order to support their income. The cottages enjoy a remote and tranquil location near John's home, and, he says, are almost always booked up.

"We nearly always have people staying in the cottages," he says. "We have a couple of long-term business bookings at the moment but have visitors at all times of year, even in winter. Having these cottages allows us a solid and consistent income allowing me to focus more on the sheep."

John was careful not to allow the cottages to impact on his sheep enterprise and took some land back in hand to allow him to maintain his sheep numbers despite the expansion of the business.

## Sheep and trees

John also owns eight hectares (20 acres) of commercial woodland, down from 40ha (100 acres) in the past, which he has recently harvested timber from. However, he is clear that woodland should be run in a way that is complementary to the sheep. He says: "There are several large conifer forests in the area, each of 20-30 square miles in extent and another 400 acres have been sold for planting in the parish in the past few years. This is driving sheep off the hills and is a monoculture of exotic species. My woodland is run alongside the sheep, utilising the many benefits trees and sheep can bring one another."

John believes it is important for farmers in

upland areas to embrace woodland more. He comments: "If farmers were more involved in planting and owning trees, the forestry companies wouldn't have such a hold on our area. We as sheep producers have a responsibility to show how well sheep and woodland can go together."

## Farm support

With Brexit fast approaching, John believes it is vital for upland and hill farms to prepare for the future and find ways to adapt their businesses to be able to survive without support payments.

He says: "I understand why farming currently needs to be supported, but I am concerned support, at least at its current level, is going to disappear and it is essential for upland and hill farmers to be prepared for this." It is this belief that has led John to make the investments he has beyond just his sheep.

John has been involved with NSA for a number of years, first joining in the late 1970s and serving as Vice Chairman and Chairman in 2008-2012. He now represents Cymru/ Wales Region on the NSA UK Policy & Technical Committee, a role he sees as very valuable.

"It is important to have a range of voices feeding into NSA policy and I appreciate the opportunity to do so," he says. "However, I would also like to see the next generation of Welsh farmers coming through and, in time, to pass on the mantle to someone with fresh ideas."

John is a big supporter of the NSA Next Generation programme and believes the future of farming must be directed by younger farmers coming through. He concludes: "I hope to see my children come home and take over my farm in time, just as I hope to see the next generation of young farmers, like those who have been through the NSA Next Generation programme, come forward and direct farming into the future."

## Farm facts

- 109ha (270-acre) hill and upland farm.
- 160 Cheviot breeding ewes.
- 8ha (20 acres) of commercial woodland, as well as 8ha of broadleaf non-commercial woodland.
- Lambing starts in early March.
- Hay or silage (weather permitting) made on farm during summer months.

John Lloyd.



John is concerned sheep are being driven off the hills by tree plantations.

# New definition of methane should change global warming debate

One of the issues that has plagued the UK ruminant sector since global warming and greenhouse gases became linked with climate change is that of methane production from farmed livestock.

The ambiguity of the science behind carbon footprinting and other measures of environmental impact seems to have been largely ignored within this debate, with the recent increased media interest in veganism leading to a public acceptance that moving to a meat-free diet is better for the environment.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, says: "I remember first being exposed to this work about 10 years ago and feeling uneasy that it suggested lamb had a significantly higher carbon footprint than pork or chicken, and lamb produced in an upland low-input system had a greater footprint than lowland lamb production.

"At the time it was suggested we shouldn't worry about the actual measure, as this was a way of helping farmers reduce their footprint overall and we should ignore the starting point. Of course that never happened, the campaigners got hold of it and red meat became vilified."

## Incomplete measures

The incompleteness of the analysis work was due to an inability to offset the carbon storage functions of soil and grassland, and also because the (whole life) carbon footprint of feed stuffs going into the more intensive/hard feed reliant systems was not measured.

Mr Stocker continues: "We shouldn't dismiss that

methane is a potent warming gas and aiming to reduce its output is the right thing to do, or that many of the things that reduce methane output relative to productivity also improve efficiency, resource use and profitability.

"But what many farmers have thought for a long time and what has been difficult to evidence is that methane, although 30 times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), acts very differently to other greenhouse gases and should be considered differently to gases related to the use of fossil fuels."

## Methane v carbon

Roland Bonney is an agriculturalist with a keen interest in this area. He was working with FAI Farms in Oxfordshire around the time carbon footprinting began and has since moved into international food chain consultancy, co-founding Benchmark Holdings to drive progress on sustainability.

He argues we don't need to give up eating meat to stabilise global temperatures, saying: "The most important gas in global warming is CO<sub>2</sub> and so the original climate change models and measures quantified other warming gases as CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents. The problem with that is it assumes a short-lived gas like methane behaves like CO<sub>2</sub> – but it doesn't.

"The model mistakenly represents continuous methane emissions from ruminants as being equivalent to continuous emissions of CO<sub>2</sub>, a long-lived gas, even when the methane is causing no warming at all. It was the ancestors of today's farmers who pushed up atmospheric methane levels when they were first building up flocks and herds. So long as cattle and sheep numbers remain steady, or dwindle slightly, there is little or no further warming from methane."

A paper published in June 2018 by a leading climate research group, based at Oxford University and led by Professor Myles Allen, has addressed this anomaly by introducing a metric that more accurately reflects methane's true warming impact – see panel.

Mr Bonney concludes: "It is critical that actions taken to stop warming of the planet are based on the most accurate data available. The impact of ruminants is being assessed inaccurately and needs to change."



CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are different to methane emissions.

## New research

'A solution to the misrepresentations of CO<sub>2</sub>-equivalent emissions of short-lived climate pollutants under ambitious mitigation' is a peer-reviewed paper published in June 2018. On publication, the researchers made these comments about the two distinct types of emissions.

- Dr Michelle Cain, Oxford University Programme on Climate Pollutants: "Long-lived pollutants like carbon dioxide persist in the atmosphere, building up over centuries. The CO<sub>2</sub> created by burning coal in the 18th century is still affecting the climate today ... Short-lived pollutants, like methane, disappear within a few years. Their effect on the climate is important, but very different."
- Professor Myles Allen, Oxford University: "We don't actually need to give up eating meat to stabilise global temperatures. We just need to stop increasing our collective meat consumption. But we do need to give up dumping CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere. Every tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted is equivalent to a permanent increase in the methane emission rate. Climate policies could be designed to reflect this."

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# Plan and protect your flock by remembering that #ColostrumIsGold

By Phillipa Page and Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

Lambing is approaching and preparing now will bring health, productivity and profitability benefits.

Write down a list of common lambing problems you face and check your list. Assess if it is the same year on year and if it contains any of the following – watery mouth, navel ill, scour, joint ill, hypothermia, weak lambs or small lambs – consider the practical steps you can take to minimise these losses.

It is essential to plan ahead with your vet to prevent infection and ensure lambs are protected from disease challenge. Colostrum is key to this. It initially involves an important focus on your ewes and their potential to produce quality colostrum of sufficient quantity to protect the newborn lamb.

Colostrum is a natural substance produced by the ewe. With a fat content of 15% it is essential for the newborn lamb as a source of energy to prevent hypothermia and protein for growth. It also supplies vitamins, minerals and, most crucially, antibodies. With no transfer of immunity across the ruminant placenta, lambs and calves

are essentially born with a distinct disadvantage compared to other mammal species. For disease protection in the first 48 hours and beyond, it is essential they receive adequate colostrum.

In the later stages of pregnancy, the udder develops and is primed to produce colostrum. Ewes at optimum body condition score and receiving good nutrition have the potential to produce optimum volume of colostrum. Ewes in lower body condition produce lower quality and quantity of colostrum. A balanced diet at the end of pregnancy is crucial – both energy supply to maximise the rumen microbe production of protein and protein itself.

## Ewe diet

Look at the diet you are feeding to your ewes and ensure it is of performance standard – especially if their body condition score is not optimum (3-3.5 for lowland ewes and 2.5 for hill ewes) which is when you should seek advice and check how you feed the ewes.

In the final days of pregnancy, cells within the udder take antibodies (IgG) out of the ewe's blood and secrete them into her colostrum.

These antibodies will provide protection from clostridial and pasturella diseases if the ewe

has been correctly vaccinated and will also provide protective antibodies to the myriad of micro-organisms found in the farm environment, including coliforms or streps (joint ill).

## Quality and quantity

Quality colostrum contains approximately 50g/litre of IgG antibodies, though this content declines within 24 hours. A ewe in good body condition score should produce two litres of colostrum within the first 18 hours after birth.

Lambs require colostrum as soon as possible after birth. A 5kg lamb requires one litre of colostrum within the first 24 hours of its life. But the first feed should be within the first two hours.



A refractometer tests colostrum - essential for anyone harvesting colostrum for other lambs.



Photo credit: Kirsty Sutherland

A 5kg lamb must have at least one litre of colostrum within its first 24 hours.

The antibodies contained in the colostrum are large protein molecules. The gut of the newborn lamb is adapted to accept large molecules in the first few hours of life. After this time (by 24-36 hrs old) the gut has 'closed' to large molecules so no further absorption can happen.

The problem with this system is that the 'open' gut also allows the entry of bacteria such as E.coli or streptococcus. The gut environment in these early few hours is at a neutral pH, to prevent the destruction of antibody proteins, but this means any bacteria are also not destroyed. After 24-36 hours the gut environment becomes more acidic which helps to minimise bacterial growth. There is quite literally a race to ensure that sufficient colostrum reaches the gut before any bacteria.

## Avoiding antibiotics

It is easy to measure the quality of colostrum with a hand-held refractometer. One drop of colostrum is needed to check the levels of protein IgG. It is especially useful to check quality from any ewe that you may want to harvest spare colostrum from for other lambs.

The use of an oral antibiotic treatment for newborn lambs has become part of the lambing routine on some farms with some using it as an alternative to good #PlanPreventProtect measures (see diagram).

However, the routine antibiotic exposure of many healthy lambs has led to a situation where the coliforms that cause watery mouth and scour are resistant to commonly used drugs in 50% of cases. It's so important to understand that even when these treatments work their effect is short-term. The absolute key to healthy lambs comes down to quality colostrum of sufficient quantity and given quickly enough.



Graphic credit: Flock Health Ltd

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# Identifying and treating hypogammaglobulinemia in neonatal lambs

Analysis of Veterinary Investigation Diagnosis and Analysis (VIDA) data for the years 2014 to 2018 show hypogammaglobulinemia is the second most common diagnosis for neonatal death in lambs.

It is seen most frequently in neonatal lambs (one to seven days) that have received inadequate colostrum. Lack of colostrum can predispose lambs to many of the infectious causes of

neonatal death, including colisepticaemia and watery mouth.

Watery mouth is an endotoxaemia caused by multiplication of E.coli within the gastrointestinal tract with the release of endotoxins from the cell wall of dead bacteria. There is often no evidence of diarrhoea and frequently it is secondary to hypogammaglobulinaemia. The VIDA diagnostic criteria for watery mouth require supportive postmortem evidence, which may include dehydration, excessive salivation, distended abomasum and small intestine without inflammation, and retained meconium. Watery mouth usually affects lambs within 72 hours of birth.

Colisepticaemia is defined as a systemic E.coli infection in which lambs less than seven days old have a terminal bacteraemia (bacteria multiplying in the bloodstream, leading to death) and again it is often predisposed to by hypogammaglobulinemia. Confirmation is by positive pure culture of E.coli from blood or tissues.

## Colostrum

Each spring the Responsible Use of Medicines in Agriculture (RUMA) Alliance coordinates a cross-sector #ColostrumIsGold initiative highlighting how the 'liquid gold' properties of colostrum can play a key role in reducing the need for antibiotics in farm animals and improving their lifetime performance. It promotes best practice, mainly based around achieving the three Qs – quality, quantity and quickness – of colostrum delivery, and uses social media to help deliver the messages.

**Lack of colostrum is a common cause of death in newborn lambs, and can be confirmed by postmortem.**



## Case study

The importance of a full postmortem examination.

A lowland farm of 1,000 ewes experienced a disease outbreak in a group of 475 two to three-day-old neonatal lambs. About 75% of newborn lambs were affected and described as being born alive and well but then developing signs of bloat and salivation, with many lambs dying. All the lambs had received spectinomycin oral solution and oxytetracycline navel spray as soon as possible after birth. The affected lambs were treated with a trimethoprim/sulfadiazine antibiotic injection.

Three dead lambs were submitted for postmortem examination, which revealed dry subcutaneous tissues (indicating dehydration) in all three, with evidence of enteritis in two lambs and severe acute pneumonia in the third. A blood sample obtained from this lamb revealed a low gamma globulin level indicating hypogammaglobulinemia. A heavy pure growth of E.coli was isolated from the intestinal contents and the livers of the lambs. Antimicrobial sensitivity testing showed resistance to spectinomycin, trimethoprim/sulphamethoxazole, ampicillin and tetracycline. The VIDA diagnosis was hypogammaglobulinemia and colisepticaemia.

This case highlights the importance of having an accurate diagnosis, which can inform appropriate management practices including attention to ensuring the lambs receive good quality colostrum at birth and demonstrates that over-reliance on prophylactic antimicrobials could increase selection for resistance in bacteria.

By Amanda Carson, APHA



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# Understanding the threat posed by border disease to flock health

By Emily Gascoigne, Synergy Farm Health



Border disease is an often-forgotten infectious disease of sheep, but I have been lucky to be involved in recently published research that has renewed focus on the disease.

Border disease is the name given to infection in sheep by a family of viruses known as pestiviruses. More familiar pestiviruses include bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) in cattle and classical swine fever in pigs.

Similarly to BVD in cattle, border disease in sheep can cause a range of signs, depending on when infection occurs. Infection of non-pregnant adult sheep is often missed, as the only sign might be a transient elevated temperature. Infection of the ewe during early pregnancy can cause embryo death, with high barren rates resulting.

Infection later in pregnancy can cause stillbirths and the birth of weak lambs. The virus temporarily damages the immune system so infected animals, especially lambs, are at greater risk of other infections such as bacterial and viral pneumonias with exposed lambs more than twice as likely to develop pneumonia.

## PI lambs

Infection of the ewe during pregnancy prior to day 80 of gestation can lead to the development of 'persistently infected' (PI) lambs - similar to the production of PI calves in BVD infection. At this stage of development, the foetus' immune system is learning what is 'self', and so is to be tolerated,

and what is 'non-self', and so requires an immune response. If the virus infects the foetus prior to this point the immune system considers it part of the lamb and so the animal will remain infected for the whole of its life, shedding virus and never mounting an immune response.

Infection at this point can also damage the developing skin, skeleton and nervous system. The most commonly seen congenital abnormalities resulting from border disease infection during pregnancy are a hairy coat and damage to the nerves leading to a tremor. Affected lambs are often referred to as 'hairy shakers' or can be born visually normal.

## Research

There have been no recent studies on the impact of border disease in UK flocks, but work in the 1980s found the lambing percentage of one flock increased from 100% to 129% with the removal of PIs from the flock. Losses are not just due to reproductive losses, with the immunosuppressive effects increasing losses and decreasing productivity throughout the production cycle. The total reduction in income in one infected sub-flock compared to the other, uninfected sub-flock was greater than 20%.

Signs of border disease in a flock will include increased barren rate, reduced scanning percentage and higher abortion or stillbirth rate. Increased levels of lamb mortality, especially if due to infectious diseases, may be due to border disease, especially if other causes, like poor hygiene or poor colostrum quality or uptake, have been eliminated.

Aborted or barren ewes can be tested for exposure to the viruses that cause border disease by a blood test. The viruses themselves can be detected in the blood and tissues of infected and PI animals, so samples should be submitted from suspected PI animals, or animals suspected to have died as a consequence of border disease.

## Screening

Unlike with BVD infection in cattle, there is no agreed screening protocol for flocks. However, blood sampling several homebred lambs and testing for antibodies to border disease virus/BVD virus is a relatively easy way of screening most flocks. Your vet can discuss with you further how many lambs need to be sampled as this will vary with flock management and how certain you wish to be that border disease is not present in the flock.

Continued on page 32



A high mortality rate in neonatal lambs could be a sign of border disease.

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1. Kerr et al 2017 A practical farm-based trial to compare ewe nematode control strategies in periparturient ewes. Presented at Sheep Veterinary Society, Spring meeting Aberystwyth. Monday 21st - Wednesday 23rd May 2018. CYDECTIN 20 MG/ML LA SOLUTION FOR INJECTION FOR SHEEP contains moxidectin, POM-VPS. For further information please see the product's SPC or contact Zoetis UK Limited, Walton Oaks, Dorking Road, Tadworth, Surrey, KT20 7NS. [www.zoetis.co.uk](http://www.zoetis.co.uk). Customer Support: 0845 300 8034. Use medicines responsibly ([www.noah.co.uk/responsible](http://www.noah.co.uk/responsible)). MM-04049

Flocks can be screened for presence of border disease by blood testing lambs and/or aborted and barren ewes.



Infection is transferable between cattle and sheep that are PI.

▶ The viruses, and antibodies to them, can be detected in milk, so bulk tank screening is a possibility for milking sheep flocks, but your vet will need to discuss this testing approach with the laboratory first.

The prolonged persistence of border disease within a flock is thought to depend on the presence of PIs, so screening the flock for PIs and culling these animals will eliminate border disease from the flock. If the likely date of introduction is known then only animals entering the flock at this point, and animals born after the date of introduction, need to be screened. If there is any uncertainty, however, then all animals should

be screened. Animals going for slaughter prior to the next mating period need not be screened.

Animals which have been exposed to the border disease virus or BVD virus and have recovered are then immune and should not be removed from the flock.

### Biosecurity

The fewer animals that enter the flock, the lower the risk of border disease introduction. As it is possible to test animals for the presence of virus, flocks buying in small numbers of animals, e.g. tups only, can realistically test all incoming animals at the same time as testing for maedi visna, CLA and Johne's disease. Testing for pestivirus infection is offered by some labs as part of a quarantine screening package. You should discuss this with your vet. Some producers of breeding rams are now testing for virus before offering them for sale, to ensure they are not PIs.

If you buy in female replacements, the cost of testing all incoming animals can seem prohibitive. If you buy from a single-source, you could either negotiate with them to perform a screening test (prior to purchase) or you could perform the test on arrival. Only then, if antibodies are detected in the test group, suggesting border disease is present in the flock of origin, need all the bought-in animals be tested.

This is not a possibility if female replacements are purchased from multiple sources. The options then are to test all incoming animals for virus, or to isolate them for a prolonged period and then test for the presence of antibodies in a subsection. If antibodies are present, the whole group should be screened.

It is known close contact between cattle and PI sheep can result in transmission of border disease virus from sheep to cattle. Similarly, it is known the BVD virus can be transmitted from cattle to sheep. In light of this, it is recommended

## Prevalence

A recent study found evidence of exposure to border disease virus or BVD virus in 13/34 flocks in Great Britain (38%). This is similar to older studies from Northern Ireland (30%) and the Republic of Ireland (46%). The percentage of PIs in the sheep population in the UK is unknown, but in Austria PI sheep was estimated to be 0.3-0.6%.

that contact with sheep of unknown status be regarded as a potential risk for BVD transmission for cattle and vice-versa as regards border disease and sheep flocks.

### Mixed holdings

There is evidence of high levels of border disease within the national sheep flock population and, given the implications for BVD-Free with cattle, those with mixed holdings should consider the impact of the sheep flock on cattle health and vice versa.

Risk should be assessed with your vet and screening considered. Flocks finding low or no evidence of border disease should up the ante for border disease testing at quarantine given the potential implications of introduction of the virus to a naïve flock. Ram breeders should consider testing prior to sale as additional valuable health information available at sale. Ewe lamb breeders may wish to consider having screening available for prospective buyers. The implications of border disease affect all stages of production and can be costly for flocks.

## Facts

- Border disease is a virus of sheep causing infertility, abortions, increased lamb mortality and persistently infected animals.
- Border disease can infect cattle due to its close family relationship with the Bovine Viral Diarrhoea virus.
- In a recent survey, 38% of flocks had evidence of disease.
- Testing of animals at purchase is an important opportunity to reduce the impact of disease and protect your flock.
- There is unfortunately no vaccine currently available for sheep.

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# Preparing a grazing plan early will help reduce grass wastage

Planning your grazing strategy at the start of the year could help you to make better returns for your business and utilise the grass grown on farm, says Katie Thorley, AHDB Senior Knowledge Transfer Manager.

Grass can provide around 85% of the energy requirements needed on a sheep system, yet it rarely earns the respect it deserves as a potentially high-quality, natural feed. Half of the grass usually grown on farms is wasted but this could be reduced by forward planning via considering supply and demand.

Mrs Thorley explains: "Grazed grass is the cheapest feed on the farm and, if managed properly, has the potential to reduce input costs significantly, in particular when compared to the cost of bought-in feed. Lambs can be finished off on pasture in a very efficient manner, but this needs to be managed for the quality and quantity to be available to them. To take advantage of this, farmers need to be planning grazing strategies now," explains AHDB Senior Knowledge Transfer Manager, Katie Thorley.

## Growth

The first step to greater utilisation is to understand how grass grows across the different fields on the farm. To do this you need to start measuring how much is available in the fields and how fast it is growing. It is then possible to balance feed supply with demand and make informed decisions on stocking levels and future management.

"There are many ways to achieve sward height or pasture cover targets. One strategy does not fit every farm and there is always a need to be flexible, depending on the year. It may be that continuous grazing is practised early in the year, then a paddock

system once it starts to grow better. Optimising production from grassland is a balance between utilisation, yield and management input," says Mrs Thorley.

The key is to understand how the amount of available grass changes from week to week. Adjusting the grazing area, either by closing or opening up fields, or part fields, is a useful step to improve utilisation.

## Infrastructure

"Farmers always ask if the hassle of moving fences and updating the infrastructure is worth it in the end. Generally, with a strategy that gives the grass a rest, the yield will go up by around 20%. If grazing pressure is then tightened by erecting temporary fences, utilisation will increase," explains Mrs Thorley.

"Data suggests moving from set stocking to paddock grazing can almost double grass yield. If the cost of buying in an extra 3.9t DM/ha of feed is

compared with buying some fencing and troughs that will last five years or more, the answer is yes," she continues.

There are a number of different strategies for grazing, however, the three main types are paddock grazing, rotational grazing and continuous grazing. It's important to look at the pros and cons of each ahead of planning your strategy.

## Flexibility

"The challenge with a grazing plan is it will change – grass may not grow as predicted or the weather might become a factor. The key is flexibility and reacting to the circumstances, with the overall aims of improving grass utilisation and performance," concludes Mrs Thorley.

For more information view the manual Planning Grazing Strategies for Better Returns at [www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/planning-grazing-strategies-for-better-returns](http://www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/planning-grazing-strategies-for-better-returns)



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## Paddock grazing

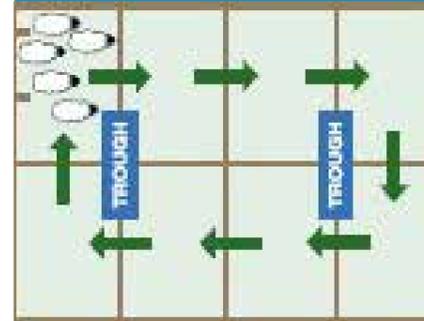
Stock is moved frequently through a series of smaller paddocks based on measured grazing heights or pasture covers.

### PROS:

- Highest forage production/use.
- Very high-quality feed: 11 – 12MJ ME.
- Allows higher stocking rates.
- More even manure distribution.
- Weed control through grazing.
- Less need for conserved forage as longer grazing season.

### CONS:

- Forage requires monitoring.
- Initial costs may be high.
- Intensive management.



## Rotational grazing

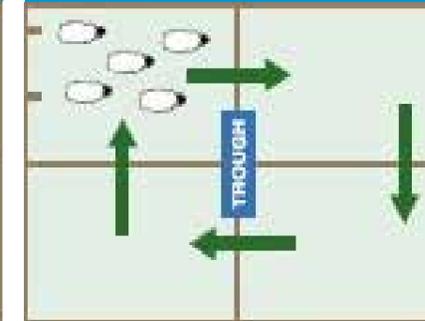
Stock is moved around a small number of fields based on sward height or pasture cover targets, or after several days.

### PROS:

- Higher productivity than continuous grazing.
- Allows the pasture to rest and regrow.
- Can extend the grazing season.
- More even manure distribution.

### CONS:

- More fencing required and water provision increases cost.
- Forage production and pasture utilisation is suboptimal.



## Continuous (variable)

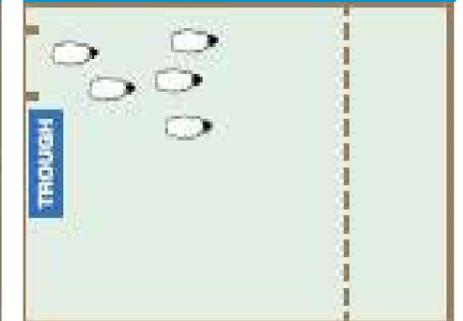
Stock graze a particular area throughout the season and, generally, no fields are left ungrazed for more than a few days.

### PROS:

- Low management input.
- Low capital costs.
- Can work well if sward height targets are maintained.

### CONS:

- Lower forage yield.
- Can be difficult to maintain grass quality and even sward height.
- Uneven manure distribution.
- Lower utilisation caused by trampling.



Strategy	Annual yield (t DM/ha)	Utilisation (%)	Useable yield (t DM/ha)	Percentage increase (%)
Set stocking	6.0	50	4.3	
Continuous (variable)	8.5	60	5.1	20
Rotational	10.2	65	6.6	56
Paddock	10.2	80	8.2	92



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# Rotational grazing techniques helps Welsh farmers to boost profitability

Former MasterGrass graduate Dafydd Jones from Llys Dinmael, Corwen, has set about making changes to his ewe flock grazing strategy by installing and implementing a rotational grazing system that includes splitting fields and piping water to parts of his farm that were previously set stocked.

Mr Jones says: "I have always been interested in growing more grass through using the latest leys within optimised soil conditions but the Farming Connect MasterGrass workshop motivated me further and gave me confidence in what was possible with effective rotational grazing".

During the following weeks, Mr Jones

borrowed a plate meter to measure how his farm's grass growth rates compared to other similar farms on the Welsh Pasture Project. Using the potential growth rate from his initial experiment he created a spreadsheet to calculate possible feed allocation, stocking rate and rotation length, all based on the knowledge gained during MasterGrass.

## Management

Mr Jones went on to divide paddocks and started to manage the ewes and lambs in mobs, moving them on and taking them off according to grass height and rotation length rather than the previous 'gut instinct' of set stocking. Initially this was done with existing electric fencing equipment available on the farm with

**Dafydd Jones runs 900 pure North Country Cheviots crossed with Charolais, Texel and Beltex rams over 263ha.**

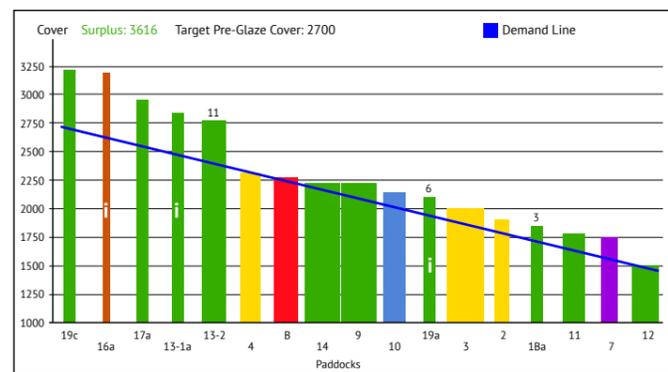


further specialised infrastructure added to help speed up the process of erecting and reeling in the electric fencing wires.

One key aspect of measuring grass is the interpretation of the data and Mr Jones initially subscribed to web-based Agrinet to help with data recording and decision making.

In time Mr Jones intends to look into the use of specialised beef and sheep grazing management software that can handle various mobs and livestock types along with their growth rates on multiple grazing platforms.

As an example of how Mr Jones now works, the graph and table below show data collected in the week beginning 15th September 2018. At that point a total of 1,021kg liveweight was



Some of the data captured by Dafydd using Agrinet, allowing him to make more precise decisions.

Code	Name	Area	Cover	Growth	Grow/Day	Feed	Days	Comment	Mob
19c	Ffridd Uchaf c	0.722	3215	188	26.9	1238	2.2		Mob 1
16a	Ffridd Pwll	0.488	3200	48	6.9	830	1.5	split for grazing	Mob 2
17a	Ffridd Carreg Ateb a	0.580	2965	365	52.1	850	1.5		Mob 1
13-1a	Ffridd Carreg Ddeg 1a	0.790	2852			1068	1.9	split for grazing	Mob 1
13-2	Ffridd Carreg Ddeg 2	1.580	2777	777	111.0	2018	3.6		Mob 1
4	Cae Dan Groesffordd	1.400	2315			1141	2.0		Mob 3
8	Cae Dan Ty	1.730	2277	200	28.6	1344	2.4		Mob 5
14	Ffridd Canol Uchaf	2.660	2227	187	26.7	1934	3.4		Mob 1

Paddock details for 15th September 2018 measurements, including the number of days grazing available.



Dafydd Jones.

on the grazing platform which included 320 ewes and 70 March-born lambs. This initial 14Ha grazing platform was split into 10 two to three-day paddocks using a combination of temporary and permanent fencing. A specialised three wire reel system was used to speed up fence setting and pulling down, allowing one man to move large mobs of sheep to fresh pastures quickly and easily. Mr Jones aimed for a target pre-graze cover of 2,700kgDM/ha and a residual of 1,500kgDM/ha. Where there was surplus grass, paddocks were cut for silage.

## Preparation

As he extends his rotational grazing platform to a total of 45ha in preparation for the 2019 growing season, Dafydd explains that one of the key aspects of planning effective grazing infrastructure is access to water and ease of sheep movement between paddocks.

He says: "Some fields were small enough and had access to water already but investing in equipment and infrastructure was needed on larger fields. So far, I have spent £45/ha to set it up, however I hope to keep more stock on less ground and explore other options on land now freed up, especially with Brexit around the corner."

MasterGrass is a grass management workshop run by Farming Connect. More information at [www.businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/wales-master-grass](http://www.businesswales.gov.wales/farmingconnect/wales-master-grass).



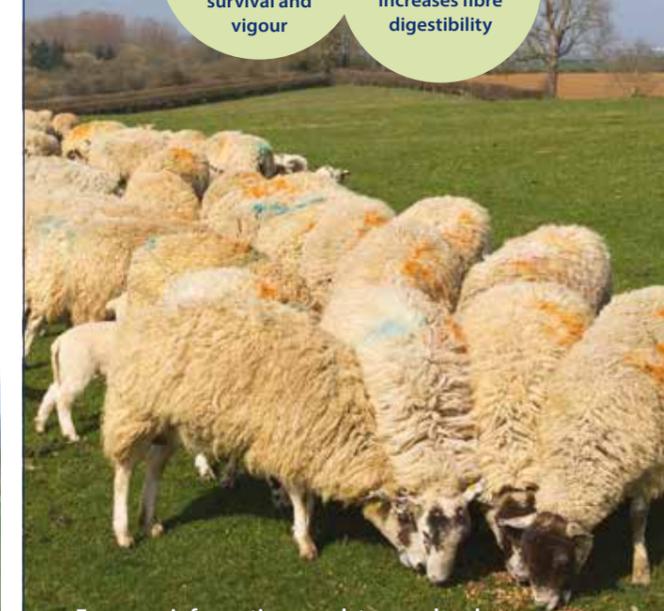
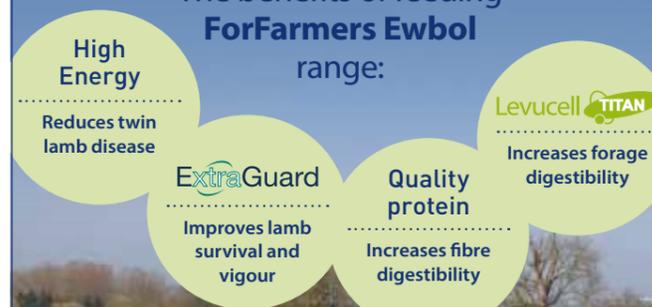
Mr Jones has added specialised infrastructure to help speed up erecting and removing electric fencing.

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# Carefully timed treatments and wise purchases are essential in 2019

By Lesley Stubbings, SCOPS



There can be little doubt 2019 is going to be challenging for sheep farmers. The UK sheep industry is extremely reliant on a fine balance of exports, mainly to France, and of imports, mainly from New Zealand.

A shift of just 2,000 tonnes either way, or a change in exchange rate between the pound and euro, could significantly impact market prices and profitability. As individuals we cannot control trade deals or currency fluctuations, but there are other things we can do to ensure we get the most from the money we spend, and putting us in a stronger position to weather any storms heading our way.

When things get tight, we tend to look to cost cutting to try to maintain margins. In a sector such as sheep farming, there is often scant detailed information on costs, cost benefit and profitability, so it is tempting to grab 'low hanging fruit,' resulting in arbitrary cost cutting. Historically, veterinary and medicine inputs have been seen as easy targets. Unfortunately, by the time we realise this as a false economy, output has dropped and margins have fallen even further. It's not chance that some of the most profitable flocks have relatively high veterinary and medicine costs. However, the key is to spend wisely, avoid unnecessary treatments and to take full account of the cost benefit when selecting products.

Using parasite control as an example, here are five key steps to ensure you get the most from the money you spend.

## 1. Make treatments effective – get it right first time.

Parasites will only be partially killed if the dose rate is incorrect or the wrong technique is used. Having to re-treat is expensive, time consuming and speeds up the development of resistance. Yet time and time again we still guess the weight of the sheep to be treated, don't calibrate the gun and then fail to administer the drench or injection correctly. Even small errors at each stage can add up to serious underdosing. You may also be able to save money if you split a group to avoid overdosing on lighter sheep.

## 2. Check the treatment has worked.

Using products that are simply not effective due to resistance is wasting money and can seriously reduce performance. Drench tests following treatment are an essential tool. They demonstrate how a product (group) is performing and enable you to choose an effective wormer group in consultation with your vet or adviser.

## 3. Choose the right product for the parasite(s).

Monitoring and diagnosis are the keys to success. Without knowing the target parasite how can you know which product is the best for the job? An injectable 3-ML will not treat lice, so why use one until you confirm the target is sheep scab? In

addition to the skin scrape diagnosis there is now a simple blood test that can confirm sheep scab much earlier avoiding unnecessary 'insurance' use of the injectables. Ask your vet for details.

## 4. Avoid 'just in case' treatments – listen to forecasts and updates.

For years we have indulged in trying to do more than one job at once when sheep are handled. Unfortunately, with parasites, the number of occasions when this works effectively are limited.

At best they waste money. At worst they lull you into a false sense of security and this catches you out later in the year. Take for example liver fluke, where many people used a combination product last autumn. However, for most flocks there was no challenge from acute liver fluke disease at that time. As the treatment has no protective benefit, you may well be caught out if liver fluke levels suddenly increase early in 2019.

## 5. Maintain your biosecurity

This is your first line of defence. Always assume any sheep coming back to the holding may be a threat. Sheep scab is an obvious concern, along with lice, liver fluke and the haemonchus worm. You do not want to risk importing these worms with incoming sheep. Anthelmintic resistant worms of all types, of course, are always a threat.

Visit [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk) for updates on liver fluke and advice on quarantine treatments.

Treating your flock with measured doses at the right time will help cut costs.



# Controlling scab on commons following the discovery of resistance

Amanda Carson, Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association

Following the discovery of sheep scab mites becoming resistant to the macrocyclic lactone (ML) moxidectin last year, this winter the Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association initiated a project to investigate the presence of sheep scab in Herdwick sheep grazing on common land.

The aim of the project was to develop a more coordinated approach to the control of sheep scab.

Using the sheep scab ELISA test, flocks from three different commons were tested for the presence of antibodies to sheep scab. None of these flocks had any overt evidence of sheep scab, the sheep were all in good condition and showed no signs of itching or pulling wool. These hill sheep are routinely given either a prophylactic ML injection or dipped with

an organophosphate (OP) to protect them against potential infection. However, while one flock showed no evidence of antibodies to sheep scab mites, antibodies to sheep scab were detected in some of the sheep tested in the other two, suggesting subclinical infection was present.

## Screenings

The fell shepherds from one of the commons agreed to submit their flocks for antibody sampling when the sheep were gathered off the fell during October. As per guidance on flock screening, 12 sheep from each flock were sampled and marked for reference. The shepherds also agreed to complete a questionnaire providing information on their normal management practices. Seven flocks, all grazing on the same area of common land, were tested for sheep scab antibodies in late October and early

November. The farmers then agreed to dip all their sheep with an OP dip. Not all of these farms had access to dipping tubs on their farms and contracted mobile dippers were used on those farms. In late December the same sheep from the seven flocks were tested again and the results were made available to the fell shepherds and their vets in January 2019.

Already some interesting observations are coming to light. But most importantly is the shared, better understanding of sheep scab and that a cooperative approach is paramount in the control of sheep scab.

The Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association is grateful for the funding supplied by Wools of Cumbria Carpets, Bimeda and the National Trust, and the support of Biobest laboratories and APHA.

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Herdwicks from three different commons were tested for resistance using the ELISA blood test.

# Enhancing carcass traits using scanning and genetic selection through Signet

By Samuel Boon, Signet Breeding Services

Terminal sire ram breeders and the buyers of their rams are living in exciting times, with the relaunch of Signet's terminal sire breeding programme. The National Terminal Sire Evaluation, as it will become known, will incorporate years of research to produce a single multi-breed analysis that will be delivered on a monthly basis.

The relaunch of Signet's recording service is the biggest change to influence UK breeding programmes since the development of multi-flock analyses back in the 1990s. The new analysis draws on a far wider pool of data, enabling breeders to record crossbred animals for the first time and allowing for the incorporation of commercial records from industry projects like RamCompare, the UK's national progeny test.

Historically, estimated breeding values (EBVs) for traits like muscle depth and fat depth have told us about the carcass characteristics of a ram's progeny at a given age. However, commercial producers really want to know about these attributes as they draw lambs for slaughter – which is typically focussed on a specific liveweight and level of finish.

muscle depth and fat depth will be expressed independently of growth, highlighting those animals with the best yield of meat at a given liveweight.

This isn't a step away from enhancing lamb growth rate – growth rate is still a key driver of profitability – but it does give commercial farmers much better tools to select rams with the optimum muscling, carcass shape and finish at commercial slaughter weights.

The changes will see a degree of re-ranking of Signet recorded animals, but the new approach has been shown to produce EBVs that are more accurate and robust.

## CT-derived EBVs

Studies using commercial datasets have also confirmed the new approach shows a better relationship between the new EBVs and traits of economic importance such as carcass weight, conformation and fat class.

The new analysis includes more than 10,000 CT scanning records, one of the best datasets of its kind anywhere in the world. Weight-adjusted CT traits now show the true full value of CT scanning, with the new CT-derived EBVs evolving to provide a better indication of overall carcass yield.

CT records have been used to produce a new EBV for muscle area across the loin – to compliment the long standing EBV for muscle

depth. Six new EBVs are available for spinal traits, including total spine length and breeding values for the number of vertebrae in the lumbar and thoracic regions of the spine. The UK's first breeding value for meat eating quality will also be produced, with a new EBV for intra-muscular fat percentage.

CT scanning is proven to lift genetic gain in terminal sire flocks. The release of new CT-derived breeding values can only enhance this return on investment from CT scanning and add value to lambs entering the supply chain.

An EBV is always expressed relative to a base population. As part of this update the base population will be updated and EBVs will now relate to the average genetic merit of lambs within the breed that were born in 2010.

## Range

The range and scale of EBVs will change and they shouldn't be directly compared between breeds, as they are expressed on different scales. Commercial buyers will be provided with new breed benchmarks to show where rams sit within a breed based on their latest EBVs.

These updates come at an exciting time for the industry, with commercial producers showing renewed interest in the exploitation of sheep with superior genetics. The changes to the analysis are a win-win, giving ram breeders better tools to make selection decisions and giving commercial

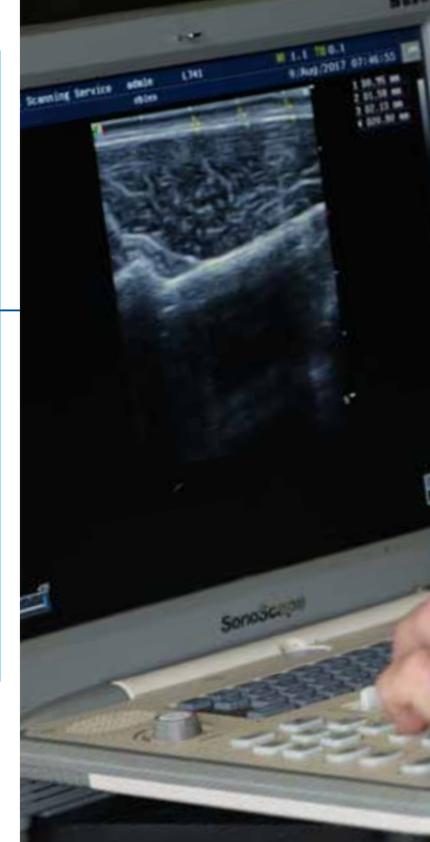
## Changes to Signet

The three main changes breeders and ram buyers will see

1. Carcass traits expressed on a weight-adjusted basis.
2. Eight new EBVs for traits derived from CT scanning.
3. Every EBV expressed relative to a 2010 base.

sheep producers more accurate, more robust and more commercially relevant breeding values to select the most profitable rams.

More information is available in a booklet published by Signet, 'The national terminal sire evaluation', with further information available on the Signet Breeding Services website.



Weight-adjusted CT traits show the value of CT scanning, as new CT derived EBVs provide a better indication of overall carcass yield.

The number of vertebrae in the lumbar and thoracic regions show the length of the spine and, accordingly, breeding values.

## Carcass traits

The scan weight EBV already provides an excellent indication of a lamb's potential for growth, so in future EBVs for carcass traits like

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# Food production standards and regulations in a post Brexit Britain

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes  ROYTHORNES solicitors

Many farmers are, understandably, hot under the collar about food production standards in global trade.

On the one hand Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Defra, makes no secret of his ambition for world-beating British produce, saying UK farmers will succeed in the global marketplace because we are 'competing at the top of the value chain not trying to win a race to the bottom'. UK Farmers themselves are proud to have some of the highest levels of animal welfare and environmental protection in the world.

On the other hand, it is difficult to see how that sits with the threat of lower quality imports post Brexit. As Professor Dieter Helm explained at the Oxford Farming Conference a year ago, the mismatch between high domestic standards of production and lower standards of imports must be addressed by a border adjustment (tariffs). Otherwise markets simply arbitrage the rules and you end up with lower standards than you started with as more and more low-cost products are imported. In other words, free trade is not workable. We need trade on a fair basis of common rules, with no artificial distortions.

## Common rules

But how do we achieve that fair basis of common rules? We have UK trade ministers assuring us the Government will maintain our high standards on food safety and environmental protection as part of any future trade deals, and Michael Gove saying it would be foolish for us to lower animal welfare or environmental standards in those deals. Farming representatives, including NSA, are calling for that commitment to be written into the Agriculture Bill so warm words become hard law.

When it comes to action, however, the Government has been reluctant to incorporate

any such safety net into legislation. Proposed amendments that would have required imported food products to meet domestic standards on food safety, animal welfare and the environment were voted down during the Agriculture Bill Committee proceedings. The Government's argument is Parliament will have the right to block ratification of any international trade agreement if MPs are not happy with its provisions.

## Agriculture Bill

The battle is not over yet. There is significant support for the level playing field clause among MPs, and amendments can still be made to the Agriculture Bill during its report stage in the Commons.

The real question is to what extent the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and other WTO agreements allow a member country like the UK to restrict trade for food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection reasons.

This is a complex, multi-layered issue and far from straight forward. In short, the 'General Exceptions' article of the GATT allows WTO members to impose trade restrictions on the grounds of protection of public morals or human, animal or plant life or health, or even conservation objectives. That makes it sound easy, but WTO case-law is a mixed bag, with successful challenges against countries that have tried to restrict imports on these grounds. That said, in the EU seals regime case, the WTO Appellate Body ruled the EU's animal-welfare related restriction on imports of seal products was justified under the GATT public morals exception (the EU's defence failed on other grounds).

Care is needed, though. The UK cannot simply close its door to goods produced to lower welfare or environmental standards as a purely protectionist measure without risking a challenge from an affected country; that is an

explicit qualification to the GATT general exceptions. Ironically, the more we talk about protecting domestic producers from low cost imports, the more we may be laying a trail for a future challenge if we try to restrict imports on, for example, welfare grounds, while trading under general WTO terms.

However, it is certainly possible within formal trade deals to agree objective standards that should be met by trading partners. The EU-Chile bilateral agreement includes animal welfare provisions and the EU-Ukraine agreement requires Ukraine to 'approximate' its animal welfare rules with those of the EU.

## Lobbying

There is everything to play for in this corner of the post-Brexit debate, and Parliament is unlikely to have had its last word on the matter. Farmers and their representatives made their views known loudly and clearly at this year's Oxford Farming Conference and are not about to let this critical issue drop; they are continuing to press for the Government to be bold enough to impose standards across the board and not just on UK farmers.



The UK Government must ensure a balance between import standards and domestic standards in sheepmeat production post Brexit.

# Ensure your insurance policy offers you the best protection

By Paige Dalby, Farmers & Mercantile

As we come into a new year, many of us have started lambing or will be preparing to do so. At this busy time many tasks become less of a priority, including reviewing your insurances.

However, it is essential to make sure you are prepared for challenges you may face and to ensure your insurance is up to scratch.

Farmers & Mercantile Insurance Brokers has seen the number of incidents relating to theft, dog attacks and worrying drastically increase, with 2018 having the highest number of incidents for a number of years.

It is important to make sure your sums insured listed on your insurance policy for your sheep include that of any newborn lambs.

Traditionally, ewes and lambs have been insured together under the livestock section of

your insurance policy where they are covered on the basis should something happen to them, you would be reimbursed their worth on the date of the loss.

Farmers & Mercantile recommend insuring your lambs under the business interruptions section of your insurance policy. This covers you for your loss of projected income in the event of a claim, meaning in the instance you had a lamb die at a week old, you would be reimbursed for what the lamb would have been worth at the time you would have chosen for it to go to slaughter or be sold.

## Preventing losses

Insuring on this loss of income basis provides a wider level of protection should your business suffer a loss. This is available for all aspects of your business, including store cattle, arable or root crops and diversifications.



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# Following the flock

Welcome to a new feature for NSA Sheep Farmer magazine, one that will provide snapshots into what's happening on the farms of various NSA officeholders around the UK. For this inaugural edition, we travel to Devon, Suffolk and Aberdeenshire – and you can find longer versions of each at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/about).

## John Fyall

NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Aberdeenshire

The cattle fill our ground at home and the majority of my farm where sheep are kept is seasonal, some week to week, so a lambing flock is not possible when holding down a full-time job and constantly moving sheep.

This year I have 1,600 lambs bought in from throughout the Highlands and Islands. I will keep around 600 North Country Cheviot hill lambs separate to pick out breeding gimmers. Our first draw of lambs went on Boxing Day to a flying trade which has since eased, as has our weight gain now the weather has turned.

Stubble turnips didn't fill well in the drought, so we are stretching lambs round the grazing with block supplementation. We have put 400 on hoppers and wholecrop silage, which has been doing okay, but the driving rain soon chokes the hoppers so it has become a time consuming job. We will now start drawing out with the bulk to go after the NSA Scottish Region Annual Members' Meeting, when I should find myself with more time on my hands.



Bryan Griffiths and wife Liz run 420 Mules, as well as Suffolk crosses.

## Bryan Griffiths

NSA Chairman, Devon

Liz and I began housing the flock before Christmas with the last brought in in mid-January.

We introduced 0.5kg/day of concentrates to the 320 Suffolk cross ewes four weeks before their due date in February. Not the cheapest ration but one containing over 9% hi-pro soya. Our 420 late lambing Mules are looking well on chopped bale silage which, while not too plentiful, is of good quality. The 170 ewe lambs are on hay in accordance with this year's new (untested) theory that it will reduce the risk of listeria infection during teeth eruption.

All ewes scanned at 200% with only 1% barren and 80% of ewe lambs in lamb. I remain convinced our perseverance with the increasingly maligned practice of offering concentrates to finishing lambs in the summer is the first step towards a good lamb crop the following year.

We administer a range of post-housing treatments including a fluke drench and footrot vaccine and, six to eight weeks before lambing, a clostridial vaccine. All ewes are vaccinated against enzootic abortion and toxoplasmosis.



## Dan Phipps NSA Eastern Region Chairman, Suffolk

Lambing has begun for us and, luckily, the run in was uneventful with very few issues.

We have 1,746 ewes lambing between mid-January and early-March. We scanned in well with the ewes carrying 3,407 lambs, meaning 1.95% including 277 triplets and six quads. This early flock contains 400 shearlings, which keeps the lambing percentage below 200%.

Ewes that are three or four weeks from lambing are brought into emptied hay and straw barns, before moving into the lambing unit. By the time we start lambing, ewes are used to the dietary change having come off grass and onto haylage. An issue we occasionally see is hypocalcemia when bringing sheep off pastures. Almost all sheep affected by this can be managed with the use of 40% calcium and CMD.

After turn-out, fodder beet is the key to our ewes and lambs thriving. All beet goes out onto pastures through a muck spreader, breaking the beet in to pieces, which critical for intake and minimises wastage. Good luck and happy lambing to all this season.



The lambing sheds are already full for flock manager Dan Phipps.

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