

NSA SHEEP EVENT

A 16-page **Farmers Guardian** Official Event Guide



Edited by Katie Jones
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Event aims to provide advice and inspiration

There will be plenty to keep you busy at NSA Sheep this year, including a programme of seminars (see p3), alongside trade stands, workshops and clinics.

The programme of events, which has been put together to offer advice on taking that next step or inspiration for a new idea, includes a series of scheduled workshops, which will run in the Avon Hall, while many of the 254 exhibitor stands will offer informal drop-in clinics and demonstrations.

Among the workshops will be one by Lightsource, a UK solar energy generator, which will provide information on diversifying your land and income through the development of a solar farm. Digby Summerhill, the company's development manager, will take visitors through the business case for solar, funding options, site selection, different agreement structures and choosing the right developer. The floor will then be opened for a question and answer session.

There will also be workshops

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from The Woodland Trust on integrating trees on-farm, a practical workshop on sheep vaccination techniques and equipment from Sterimatic, and the British Wool Marketing Board will be on hand throughout the event to advise you on how to get the greatest return on your fleeces.

Animal health company Novartis will be giving a demonstration on the correct administration of fly strike and worming products, MSD Animal Health will be talking about lameness, and Rumenco will provide a nutrition clinic.

There will also be advice on farm assurance at the SAI Global stand and farmers keen to see a demo of different EID options should visit the Shearwell Data stand.



Visitors can expect a packed programme of seminars, as well as the usual trade stands and workshops.



VIDEO COMPETITION

Five finalists put their experiences in the spotlight

PAGES 6-7



YOUNG SHEPHERD

How one new entrant shaped his farm business

PAGES 8-9

Event information

- **When:** Wednesday, July 30
- **Where:** Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6NW
- **Opening hours:** 9am-5pm
- **Admission:** NSA and Three Counties Agricultural Society members £6 on production of a valid membership card (one

card, one reduced entry); adults: £15; under 16s: Free
 ■ **Dogs:** Only assistance dogs and dogs entered for the sheepdog sale are permitted on the showground
 ■ **Further details:** Visit www.sheepevent.org.uk or call 01684 892 661

NSA Sheep Event main sponsors



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NSA SHEEP EVENT

A welcome from the chief executive

By Phil Stocker,
NSA chief executive

Without wanting to overcook things, there is clearly some optimism and confidence evident in the sheep world, and rightly so. But only a fool would suggest there will not be challenges ahead, or that profitability is secured.

Some of the challenges – such as currency rates and exports, elements of CAP reform and the arrival of the next Schmallenberg equivalent – are outside our control. Others we can do something about, ideally heading them off well in advance of them causing any problems.

Challenges

Promoting our product hard, presenting our industry to the public and politicians in a positive manner, striving for best practice in all we do, addressing average costs of production, tracking and monitoring disease and long-term



planning to overcome CAP changes are all things we can do to strengthen our industry.

Some are individual activities, some are collective industry actions and some are Governmental partnership responsibilities, but it is only by understanding the challenges and doing something about them we will protect sheep farming and not just survive, but thrive.

So far this year, things are looking good.

Time races by and it will not be

long before things are prepared for the next production cycle – and none of us can afford to forget one of the most important times in the sheep calendar is late summer and early autumn. Attention to detail is key; getting things right will be the foundation for the following lambing.

There is never just one angle or answer when it comes to sheep farming, but if there was one message I would like to get out now it would be about the need to know and protect your farm in relation to disease and parasites. If you keep sheep, you already have a spectrum of challenges and hopefully this is known and managed effectively.

What you do not need is to bring any new and unwanted guests onto your farm, such as anthelmintic resistant worms, liver fluke or scab, by not properly quarantining (testing, treating and separating) new stock.

NSA Sheep 2014 will provide information and advice on all these subjects and many more.

NSA Sheep Event timetable

TIME	EVENT
9am	Gates open Drop-in clinics and demonstrations begin Judging of best exhibitor stands Public vote for NSA Sheep 2014 video competition (NSA stand) Asda cookery demonstrations begin, to be held every 45 minutes through the day (Avon Hall, stand 162) NSA Young Shepherd of the Year final begins (2.30pm finish) Texel Society stockjudging competition begins (Wye Hall 4, stand 90 - 4pm finish)
10am	Opening Ceremony: George Eustace MP, followed by presentations (NSA stand) English shearer of the year award and NSA open competition (shearing shed - 3pm finish) BWMB fleece competition judging (Wye Hall 4, stand 119) National lamb carcase selection competition opens (Eblex stand - 3pm finish)
10.30am	Seminar programme begins Workshop programme begins: Workshop 1: Lightsource and solar panels Wire fencer of the year competition (1.30pm finish) Working sheepdog sale begins (4pm finish)
10.45am	Ready Steady Cook - Heat 1 (Avon Hall, stand 162)
11am	Presentation of stand competition winners on respective stands
11.15am	Workshop 2: Woodland Trust and integrating trees on farmland
11.45am	Ready Steady Cook - Heat 2
12 noon	Workshop 3: Sterimatic and vaccination techniques and equipment
12.30pm	The Big Debate: Balancing red meat supply with environmental impact
1.30pm	Workshop 4: Lightsource and solar panels
2pm	Ready Steady Cook - The final NSA open shearing competition commences (shearing shed; 3pm finish)
2.15pm	Workshop 5: Woodland Trust and integrating trees on farmland
3pm	Workshop 6: Sterimatic and vaccination techniques and equipment NSA and Clark Wilmott legal helpline launch (NSA stand)
3.15pm	Presentation of the video competition winner (NSA stand)
3.30pm	BWMB fleece competition awards presentation (Wye Hall 4, stand 119) English Shearer of the Year awards presentation (shearing Shed) National lamb carcase selection awards presentation (Eblex stand)
4pm	NSA Young Shepherd of the Year award presentations (MSD stand)
5pm	Event closes

See us at NSA Sheep Event, Malvern, Stand No. 100

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Flock management tools and live demos

Find out more about culling ewes and other flock management tools in the Eblex area. A key message will be an initiative to encourage all flock masters to take stock of

their flock this August and ensure they are not carrying ewes likely to cause problems or take up time and money over the next 12 months. Eblex experts will consider the numerous reasons for

culling and how to use year-round records and body condition scoring (BCS) to identify problem ewes. **AVON HALL 148**

■ As part of live demonstra-

tions, Ritchey will showcase a complete flock management solution to show how using EID technology in conjunction with a handling system, electronic weighing and reliable data collection can make handling a

flock easier and save valuable time, while closely monitoring weight gain can also lead to several advantages. **STAND 196**, between the Avon and Wye halls, near the seminar marquee.



Sheep EID will be demonstrated.

Seminar timetable

Time	Title	Chairman	Speakers
10.30am	Liver fluke - adapting control according to threat	Sybil Macpherson, NSA Scottish region chairman	Philip Skuce, Moredun; George Milne, NSA Scottish region development officer; Frances Jones, veterinary; Margaret Dalton, NSA Welsh region trustee
11.30am	Young blood needed to sustain the future of the sheep industry	Jonathan Barber, NSA Next Generation steering group chairman	Joanne Briggs, NSA communications manager Case study 1: Oliver McEntyre, Barclays Bank, and Andrew Prentice, NSA ambassador Case study 2: Robert Addison, Hexham and Northern Marts, and James Hamilton, NSA ambassador Case study 3: Kevin Harrison, NSA Marches region chairman, and Kate Robinson, NSA ambassador
12.30pm	The big debate: Balancing red meat supply with environmental impact	Tom Heap, BBC Countryfile	Phil Stocker, NSA chief executive; Philip Walling, author of Counting Sheep; Alan Alderson, Cumbrian farmer and chairman of Swaledale Sheep Breeders Association; Andrew Walker, Yorkshire Water; Dr Pat Thompson, RSPB
2pm	Reporting and recording sheep movements - how to stay compliant	Bob Payne, NSA central region chairman	Terry Gurnhill, Defra; John Carroll, SouthWestern; Spencer Conlon, Welsh Government
2.40pm	Outlook for the sheep industry - visions for the future	Adam Watson, NSA northern region chairman	Charles Sercombe, NFU livestock board chairman; Phil Stocker, NSA chief executive; Nick Allen, Eblex sector director
3.20pm	Tackling sheep scab, a collaborative approach	Bryan Griffiths, NSA south west regional chairman	Kate Philips, ADAS; Andy Offer, Whyte House Lamb; Sion Aron Jones, Meat Promotion Wales (HCC)



This year the seminars will focus on a range of topics, from tackling liver fluke to new entrants.

The Swaledale Sheep Breeders' Association

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT
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NSA SHEEP EVENT

The inaugural NSA and NFU 'Sheep Vision' report is not due to be published for another few weeks. However, **Farmers Guardian** offer some insight into the main points, ahead of its official launch at the NSA Sheep Event.

Stay focused with Sheep Vision report

The two main organisations representing sheep farmers have joined forces for the first time to produce the Sheep Vision report, which has been described as 'ground-breaking'.

NSA chief executive Phil Stocker says it contains a thorough analysis of the needs of the sheep sector and is a crucial step towards driving the industry forward.

Mr Stocker says: "We are proud of the report. It would have been madness for us to be pulling in opposite directions.

"While it contains no major surprises, we have pooled our resources to produce a document to identify where the industry should be going.

"The report includes clear, consistent messages, which can be sent out to relevant organisations and businesses along the supply chain.

"It will also provide a framework to keep us focused on our main goal, which is to help sheep producers make the most

“
We want a progressive industry with a bright outlook and the report is part of this goal

CHARLES SERCOMBE

of opportunities which will strengthen their businesses in times ahead."

No vision of the future would be complete without a plan to encourage new entrants, he adds.

"Sheep keeping has several advantages over other farming enterprises. It requires comparatively low start-up costs and is therefore more accessible to new entrants than dairy farming, for example.

"In addition, sheep are not



The published Sheep Vision report will be distributed to all involved in the sheep sector to highlight where efforts should be focused.

simply producers of meat. They also have an influential role to play in maintaining the landscape and creating the right conditions for wildlife."

NFU livestock board chairman Charles Sercombe says the report emphasises the need for the industry to react quickly to market signals, both at home and abroad. It highlights the need to maintain, and hopefully expand, the current domestic market, as well as to seek fresh export opportunities abroad.

Mr Sercombe says: "There is considerable potential to develop new outlets in regions such as the

Far East and we must create an industry which can take advantage of this.

"It is vital producers do not have too many unnecessary constraints imposed on them.

Transparency

"We are also pressing for increased transparency further along the supply chain. Producers need precise details of the specifications and weights the processors require and there must be no 'rounding down' of payment figures.

"The auction market system gives instant feedback on prices,

but deadweight selling is not so clear-cut and we will be lobbying to rectify this situation."

Mr Sercombe says while the report recognises there may only be limited opportunities for increasing the general demand for sheepmeat, it identifies areas for the potential improvement of flock performance.

"Our national flock is associated with very high standards of production, but adopting best practice measures to enhance performance indicators, such as lambing percentages and carcase weights, can lead to greater profitability.

"This is also true in terms of the genetic advancement of breeding animals. The development of new technologies, such as genomics, is great news for sheep farmers.

"We also need to ensure supply matches demand; the effect of an imbalance was evident 18 months ago, when prices plummeted.

"Another issue under scrutiny is adding value to sheepmeat, both at individual farmer level and within our levy body. We want a progressive industry with a bright outlook and the report is part of this goal."

Report facts

- The published report will be distributed to all involved in the sheep sector, including the Government and levy bodies, to highlight where efforts should be focused to benefit the industry in future
- Information will be

- disseminated to NSA and NFU members and made available to others online
- The report is to be revisited at regular intervals in the future, so pressure is maintained to move the sector forward

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This year *Farmers Guardian* and the National Sheep Association (NSA) have teamed up to run the first Sheep Event video competition. The five shortlisted entrants were interviewed by **Wendy Short**.

Five finalists for first Sheep Event video competition

Kath Birkinshaw, Derbyshire

KATH Birkinshaw farms 600 hectares (1,500 acres) with her sister, Andrea Jolly, who features in the video she has put together. A keen photographer, Kath jumped at the chance of spreading the word about the beautiful landscape in which she lives and works.

It has taken Kath quite some time to achieve her ambition to become a full-time sheep farmer, but it has been worth the wait, she says.

"My grandfather farmed but my parents didn't, so the interest skipped a generation. I worked my way up by contract shepherding and dry stone

walling. I still supplement my income by public speaking and I have talked to all sorts of groups, including historical societies and Women's Institute branches.

"From the feedback I get, I have realised it is not just town dwellers who lack understanding about farming; people in rural villages can be just as confused. We have a lot of work to do to educate the public about just how hard it is to successfully rear a crop of lambs. We also need to emphasise the contribution sheep make towards maintaining the landscape.



"Farming is a great way to earn a living; working with animals is rewarding and sheep farming taxes your brain and allows you to work outdoors. I would not change a thing."

Kate Robinson, Gloucestershire



KATE Robinson's family have no connection with farming, but she has been fascinated by livestock from an early age. Despite her enthusiasm, she went to university to study criminology and psychology. During her degree, she earned money by working on a large farm close to home, starting off by milking goats and getting involved with lambing.

After she graduated, she began working full-time as a shepherdess on the farm, which has a large arable enterprise, as well as the 1,000-head goat herd, 1,000 breeding ewes and a 150-cow suckler herd.

The video competition appealed to Kate, partly because it offered her the chance to make a record of daily life.

"The video footage has captured some nice memories. I take a lot of photos while I am working and using the video was just an extension of that. It made me realise how lucky I am – not every job would inspire a worker to take photos regularly."

Kate is happy with her change of career. "I intended to give up farming when I got my degree, but I discovered looking after livestock is my vocation. But as much as I enjoy being around sheep, currently I have no ambition to have my own flock."

"I still have a lot to learn and the people I work with are extremely knowledgeable, so I am picking up new information all the time. I would definitely describe farming as a career, rather than a job."



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Stand Number 61
in the Wye Hall



Thomas Gibson, Ballymena

THOMAS Gibson and his family run an 800-ewe flock, which includes Scottish Blackface and Texels. They also have Belclare sheep, which are derived from a mix of breeds including Finnish Landrace, Galway and Lleyn. About half of the lambs produced on the hill unit are finished, with the remainder sold as stores.

Thomas entered the competition because he was keen to pass on his enthusiasm for sheep farming to other young people. The 27-year-old has a degree in rural and countryside management and he plans to use his education to explore a range of opportunities for the business.

"My main ambition is to farm, but I thought the course I chose would offer more options for the future. Environmental support makes a contribution to the farm businesses and we also have three holiday cottages."



While he enjoys all aspects of farming, his favourite task is preparing sheep for the sale ring. It gives him great satisfaction to see them looking their best and hopefully attracting some of the highest bids of the day.

An NSA-sponsored trip to New Zealand inspired him to take a closer look at grassland management.

"I was impressed with the NZ sheep farmers' approach to pasture management; they treat it with just as much care as dairy farmers. I have now adopted surface seeding and only plough if the ground is very compacted."

Thomas says making the video was more difficult than he had expected, but he enjoyed the process. "A lot of it involved balancing the video camera on gateposts and sheep pens, while I filmed myself talking about the way we farm," he says.

James Davison, Ballymena

JAMES Davison works full-time on a local dairy unit, while he builds up his own flock of sheep, which now totals 150. They graze on the family's 14-hectare (35-acre) holding and a number of rented fields nearby.

"My father retired from dairy farming when I was nine years old and while I enjoy milking cows, it would be financially impossible to start off again as a new entrant," says 25-year-old James. "But,

sheep offer great opportunities for anyone wanting to earn money from keeping livestock.

"I started out buying 35 broken-mouthed cross-bred ewes and this year I have reached my fourth crop of lambs. Many of my sheep are older, but I am working towards having a younger, more productive flock.

"I tried to keep the video subject matter general, rather than technical. I wanted it to show what

is involved in the daily life of a shepherd. I explained how my flock was managed and put across the message other people can do the same, if they are really dedicated."

In an ideal world, James says he would like to have 700-800 ewes by the time he is 40, which he hopes would be sufficient to earn him enough money to support himself.

"It is a big ambition, but I think it is good to have a goal in life."



Krista Magee, Isle of Man

KRISTA Magee does not come from a farming background, but neither do two of her uncles and they both now run large sheep flocks.

Krista has always helped out, with an aim of having her own flock. It is part of the reason she has taken a well paid teaching job in Singapore, where she plans to start saving to realise her ambition.

It took Krista three months to film life on her uncles' farms, whose combined flocks total about 1,200-head. Pure-bred Blackface, Charollais and the native Manx Loaghtan are kept in separate groups alongside cross-breeds. Lambs are finished at home, with a percentage sold through a direct sales boxed scheme. To keep the meat cool, the transit boxes are packed using sheep's wool.

She says: "One of my uncles



has four young children who are all keen on the livestock, so they will be second generation farmers. My relatives have started out with nothing and they have built up their flocks steadily."

Krista admits the cash prize offered by the competition was tempting, but she also had another reason for taking part.

"I wanted people to see it is not essential to be born into farming, there are other ways of getting a foot in the door," she says.

Vote now for your favourite video

■ Each video features a sheep farmer explaining what they love about their job and will be used by the NSA to promote the sector as a positive career option for young people

■ The top three will share a £700 prize fund

■ The three most popular will be screened live at NSA Sheep 2014 with a final vote on the day determining the winner

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NSA SHEEP EVENT

Rhydian Thomas is the current European Young Shepherd of the Year and member of the National Sheep Association's (NSA) Young Ambassador Group. Together with his father, he has made some interesting management changes. **Louise Hartley** reports.

Young Shepherd of the Year win leads to on-farm changes

Since leaving university three years ago, Rhydian Thomas has become the European Young Shepherd of the Year, and this September he will be competing against top young shepherds from across the globe for world title.

Farming at Llethr Bledrig, Carmarthenshire, with his father Geraint and brother Aled, the 24-year-old is also a member of the NSA's Young Ambassador Group and chairman of Cothi Shears, a shearing competition based in Carmarthen attracting entrants from across the world.

Mr Thomas was awarded the Welsh Young Shepherd of the Year title last year and from there he travelled to France, along with seven other top young shepherds from Scotland, England and Northern Ireland, to compete at the European championships.

The competitors had to complete a general examination paper, a test on sheep breeds, two ATV courses, and a lamb selection test, guessing the weight on grade and demonstrating their handling ability and use of an EID system.

Natural ability

His skills and natural ability shone through during the European finals, and he went on to win the competition. This July he will be representing Wales in the UK Young Shepherd finals and in September will travel back to France for the World Shepherd of the Year against the best from New Zealand, Australia, America and Europe.

After returning home from the European finals, he was shortlisted for the NSA's Next Generation Ambassador Group. Out of 40 candidates, Mr Thomas was one of 11 young

people, aged between 20 and 33 years old, chosen to sit on the committee.

Mr Thomas says: "I have already learned a lot, and have implemented a rotational grazing system after a talk we had on utilising grazing more efficiently.

"Previously we ran the flock on a ranch system over the whole farm, but now have split the fields into separate, smaller blocks and rotationally graze ewes and lambs. I hope to see some performance differences – perhaps improved lamb performance, a reduced worm burden and/or a reduction in lameness.

The Thomas' flock at Llethr Bledrig comprises 550 Beulah Speckled Face ewes and 100 Mules. Of the Beulah ewes, 350 are bred pure and the remaining 200 are tupped with Bluefaced Leicesters.

Mr Thomas and his father usually retain about 150 pure ewe



Rhydian Thomas (centre) with his grandfather Iwan and father Geraint. PICTURES: Arvid Parry Jones

lambs, but will now select 200 replacements to increase the flock size.

"We have taken on more land this year and have also stopped tupping ewe lambs to make lambing time more compact and give a more even spread of finished lambs throughout summer.

Lambing

"Originally ewe lambs would start lambing at the beginning of April, but this could drag on, leaving us with small lambs at Christ-

mas, which then needed to be housed to finish.

"Ewe lambs are now kept higher on rough grazing until they are brought down for tupping as shearlings. Since leaving them to grow naturally and tupping them later we have bigger, stronger hoggs joining the flock," he says.

The aim is to lamb 750 to 800 breeding ewes, taking the total flock, including hoggs, to 950.

About 15 pure lamb rams are selected and the best six are sold at a society sale in Llandovery

mart at the end of September.

The rest of the pure ram lambs, as well as the surplus pure ewe lambs and Mule lambs, are finished and sent to Dunbia from the end of August through to November. They are drafted off at about 43-44kg, usually between 20 and 30 weeks, killing-out at 20-21kg. Some of the lighter shaped lambs were sent at 12 weeks this year, due to the higher market prices.

Mr Thomas says they have previously sent lambs to auction marts and other slaughter houses, but Dunbia is undoubt-



The flock used to run on a ranch system but Mr Thomas has implemented a rotational grazing system.



The farm is home to 30 mostly Limousin cross Friesian suckler cows which are useful for grazing.



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I have already learned a lot, and have implemented a rotational grazing system after a talk we had on utilising grazing more efficiently

RHYDIAN THOMAS

next day to watch every single lamb being killed and graded.

Although not a usual practise undertaken by sheep farmers, the family believe watching their lambs being graded helps them select the right lambs for slaughter and keep a close eye on fluke.

Mr Thomas says: "We are in a unique situation with Dunbia so close to our farm and it is therefore very handy for us to watch every batch of lambs go through from live to dead. We have never disputed the grading of the lambs, but watching the process helps us identify which of the lambs we sent were slightly too fat, too thin, or perfectly timed to be sent off-farm.

"We also stand right next to the man who checks the livers for fluke. He can tell us if there is a fluke problem in that batch, and if there is we can go straight back to the farm and fluke the rest, if there is not a problem, we can save money on the drench."

Mule lambs usually grade out at a mixture of Rs and Us and the Speckled Faced lambs are expected to consistently grade at R, with the odd U.

edly the best option for them.

He says: "Speckled Faced lambs do not sell well in the auction because buyers sometimes think they wont kill-out well and have a high amount of waste and fat."

But this is certainly not the case for the Thomas family's lambs, which have been consistently bred to be lean, with rams selected on good conformation and growth rates.

"We don't just concentrate on the markings and ear settings when buying rams," says Mr Thomas.

"Although breed characteristics are important, mothering instincts and good teeth are also taken in to consideration, with bone and body the most important selection criteria," he adds.

Dunbia is just 4.5 miles away from Llethr Bledrig. Lambs are taken in at night and one member of the Thomas family returns the

Rearing good quality lambs to the correct specification is a management focus on the farm, and the Thomas' aim to boost profits by controlling costs.

"Making sure we only spend money on products and equipment which will give us a return is really important. We never invest in something just because it is a good thing to do - it has to be a tangible cost benefit.

"The same applies to machinery on the farm. We do not invest in big modern tractors because often a cheap, second-hand machine will do the job just as well. We aim to keep away from machinery dealers," he adds.

Mineral drench

While he was studying for a degree in agriculture at Aberystwyth University he undertook a dissertation project looking at the effect of mineral and vitamin drench on lamb growth after weaning.

At the beginning of the experiment, which he conducted at home, he weighed and tagged 200 lambs and divided them into two equal groups of similar ages

and weights. One-hundred lambs received a mineral and vitamin drench, with the remaining 100 acting as a control group. All lambs were managed as one single mob, receiving the same worm and fluke drench and clostridial vaccination and running on exactly the same grazing.

Lambs were weighed and drafted when finished, with Mr Thomas expecting the lambs which had received the vitamin and mineral drench to perform better, either by finishing sooner, and achieving higher liveweights or killing-out percentages.

He says: "We measured every parameter we possibly could, including days to weaning, finishing weight, fat classification - but found absolutely no difference between the two groups.

"I was quite shocked at the results, but my lecturer was not at all. Before the experiment we had been using a lot of drench on-farm, spending more than £1,000 per season, and believed it was doing a miracle job."

On realising it had no effect on the lambs, Mr Thomas no longer uses mineral and vitamin drenches on-farm and says he



The Thomas' keep away from machinery dealers, believing second-hand ones do the job just as well.

Llethr Bledrig

- 650 breeding ewes (550 Beulah Speckled Faces and 100 Mules start lambing in March)
- 30 Limousin cross Holstein Friesian and the odd British Blue cross breeding cows
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147 TheSheepSite.com

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