



National Sheep Association 'Make More of Mutton'

PRESS RELEASE – Friday 16th October 2015 – No embargo

Emphasis on whole supply chain quality for mutton

There is significant potential for increasing the size of the quality mutton market, but producing quality mutton requires care and attention across the supply chain. These were two of the main conclusions from second of the National Sheep Association's (NSA's) 'Make More of Mutton' initiative, held at Rhug Estate, north Wales on Friday (9th October).

In welcoming visitors Lord Newborough, of the Rhug Estate, stressed the importance of 'telling the story' of meat. The mutton sold at the Rhug Estate is solely from its own flock, slaughtered in mid-Wales, hung, butchered and packed on the estate, so the quality is controlled from the live animal to the consumer.

Welsh mutton has a long and excellent reputation for quality, according to Bob Kennard, NSA's 'Make More of Mutton' initiative Manager. Praise for the flavour and overall eating quality of Welsh mutton dates back to at least the 16th Century, and includes a description by 19th century travel writer George Borrow, he wrote *"Let anyone who wishes to eat leg of mutton in perfection go to Wales"*.

Nigel Elgar, currently a farm advisor in Wales has produced Welsh upland sheep specifically for the quality mutton market in Montgomeryshire for almost 20 years. He said how important it was to separate quality mutton animals from standard cull ewes, which meant farming them specifically for the purpose, ensuring continuity of supply, and producing to the quality which the specific supply chain required.

Gary Jones, Production Manager at Rhug Estate, explained how products have changed and adapted in the light of customers' reactions and opinions. For slow cooking joints of the best quality mutton, the butchery practiced seam cutting, isolating individual muscle blocks from the leg in particular, ensures a consistent cut of meat which will cook evenly. Such joints are ideal for smaller families, and easy to cook for two or three people.

The Rhug Estate's butchery are currently assessing the optimum period of dry-aging of mutton to maximise flavour and texture. A problem in marketing quality mutton was the psychological barrier some people have to buying the meat, said Jon Edwards, Managing Director of Rhug Estate Farm Shop. Many of his customers said they didn't like the idea of eating mutton but most had never tried it, and were virtually always pleasantly surprised when they tasted a sample.

The final stage along the quality mutton supply chain is the cooking. Chef/Patron of the Wynnstay Arms in Machynlleth and Master Chef of Great Britain, Gareth Johns, is a self-confessed fan of quality Welsh mutton in particular, and has been cooking it for over 20 years.

He emphasised the importance of ensuring quality all along the supply chain and said mutton should be considered a completely separate meat to lamb, as both its flavour, texture and cooking requirements were different.

There followed a mutton buffet, prepared by the resident Rhug Estate chefs, showcasing the great versatility of the meat.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, said afterwards: *“It is said that back in Victorian times, mutton was a more popular meat than beef. We are not thinking that we will ever return to anything near that, but there is no doubt in my mind that quality mutton has the potential to add more value and increase interest in the product. Today’s event highlighted the need to finish mutton ewes to a high standard, hang and butcher them correctly and produce a final product in line with those that present the product well. Of course cooking it right is essential too.”*

Notes for Editors

- For photographs of the event and more information, please contact **NSA Make More of Mutton** | Bob Kennard, Project Manager | 07415 855530 | mutton@nationalsheep.org.uk | www.nsamutton.org.uk.
- Other useful contacts:-
 - **Rhug Estate:** | A5, Corwen, Denbighshire LL21 0EH | 01490 412203 | www.rhug.co.uk |
 - **Nigel Elgar:** | 07506 010123 | nigelelgar196@btinternet.com |
 - **Gareth Johns:** | The Wynnstay Hotel, Maengwyn Street, Machynlleth, Powys, Wales, SY20 8AE | 01654 702 941 | gareth@wynnstay-hotel.com |
- The National Sheep Association is an organisation that represents the views and interests of sheep producers throughout the UK. It is funded by its membership of sheep farmers and its activities involve it in every aspect of the sheep industry.