



**P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

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## **NSA North Sheep 2017 Firmly Looked to the Future**

**North of England's foremost sheep event encourages farmers to focus on quality and remain optimistic.**

The National Sheep Association's northern showcase, NSA North Sheep 2017, held at West Shields Farm, Tow Law in County Durham, has been hailed a huge success. The sun shone and over 7,000 visitors flocked to the event to glean the latest information about the sheep industry and what its future holds.

The aim of the day was to provide a platform for knowledge sharing and involving many industry professionals this was more than successfully achieved. NSA North Sheep has been, and always will be, about education and knowledge transfer. This year the main topic of discussion focused specifically on the future of the sheep industry and what it holds for both today's sheep farmers and the next generation. Brexit was naturally a hot topic in many forums.

In officially opening the event, His Grace the Duke of Montrose, President of the NSA, emphasised the contribution that sheep farming makes to the ecology and economy of the countryside. He talked about the uncertain times that lay ahead, and that the key to managing this is to understand how to avoid disruption to sheep export markets.

The association's chief executive, Phil Stocker, speaking at the opening ceremony said: "This is a very important industry event. It is not just about sheep, it is about technology, research and best practice. With huge global and political change, turbulent times are ahead, so to get through this we all need to remain optimistic."

One highlight of the event was the 'Next Generation Shepherd' competition, which offered aspiring young shepherds and shepherdesses the chance to demonstrate their shepherding skills in five areas. Sponsored by Rumenco and Nettex, this multi-skilled competition challenged entrants to two compulsory and three chosen tasks. First prize was awarded to Rob Walker from Dunsop Bridge, Clitheroe, who received the Ali Johnson Perpetual Trophy; second place went to Matthew Emmott from Cockermouth.

For the sheep farming community across Northern England, gathering information was fundamental at this year's event in the form of the seminars which were specifically chosen to address key issues which farmers will need to consider going forward. Evidence of the importance of the seminars at this time of uncertainty was a packed marquee throughout the day and almost full to bursting during the 'Balancing Upland Farming and the Environment' seminar.

In this seminar, Patrick Begg, Rural Enterprises Director for the National Trust said: "The biggest problem for the industry is that we just don't eat as much lamb as we used to, particularly the under 30's. Trends are also favouring higher welfare standards.

"Upland farmers play a vital role in looking after public needs and goods such as water, carbon capture and emission, keystone species and habitats, and the landscape for recreation and tourism. The landscape needs people and animals in it, however change is inevitable. So as an industry, we shouldn't be thinking about how we can keep the subsidies we have now, we should have the confidence to do something different, maybe improve our business skills, to increase sustainability."

In his presentation Adrian Shepherd, Head of Land Management at the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority discussed how upland farming is not only about what farmers produce, it's also the link to tourism; people want to visit these places on holiday or for recreation.

"Management by prescription hasn't always worked," said Adrian. "We should be empowering farmers to deliver the desired environmental outcomes. The focus shouldn't be about reducing risk, it should be about delivering what needs to be delivered and the National Park Authority is eager to work with farmers and farming groups to achieve this."

In the 'Sheep Meat Exports Post Brexit' seminar, Remi Fourier of AHDB's French office informed the audience that: "When the UK is out of the EU it will give us flexibility to control our market and standards. When you look at the EU, there is no other country that does things better than the UK in terms of welfare and product quality. For example, French lamb is poor quality and usually a by-product of the sheep dairy industry. These lambs are reared indoors and as such butchers do not like them. It is important to remember that UK lamb has a strong brand and quality standard across EU and worldwide."

In chairing 'The Next Generation, Next Chapter' seminar, Thomas Carrick, a former NSA ambassador and vice chairman of NSA North Sheep, was keen to highlight that the sheep industry needs "New ideas and energy coming into the industry." The young farmers presenting were all eager to stress that although the future is uncertain, there are opportunities. Determination, a willingness to learn and flexibility are key to being successful within the industry.

A first-ever for NSA North Sheep was the 'Festival of Lamb' which celebrated the extremely high quality and diversity of British Lamb. Visitors were given an insight into what today's consumer is looking for when they are buying lamb. 'Jimmy the Lamb Man' held butchery demonstrations and

Australian-born chef, Simon Hicks, Head Chef at the Lord Crewe Arms Hotel, demonstrated alfresco lamb on the BBQ.

Representing all sectors of the sheep industry were over 200 trade stands, in addition to 37 breed society stands. Prizes were awarded to the best stands at the event. Best Breed stand was awarded to James Whiteford and runner up was S & A Reed. Best Breed Society stand went to the Scotch Blackface stand and runner up was the North Country Cheviot stand. The best indoor trade stand went to Hexham and Northern Marts, with Rumenco taking second place. Finally, the best outdoor trade stand was picked up by Vickers & Barrass, with runner-up Mole Valley.

On the tours around West Shields, John Smith, alongside his two sons David and Alan, was proud to show the visitors their 900 acre traditional mixed farm. Visitors viewed their flock of commercial sheep comprising of 1350 Mules and some Texels, with the addition of their 300 commercial suckler cows. Visitors could see how the family has utilised all of the farm's natural resources to produce renewable energy. A 12.5 Kw wind turbine installed in 2012 alongside solar panels and a biomass boiler which feeds three houses.

At the end of a very busy day, Event Organiser, Heather Stoney-Grayshon said: "We have had tremendous day with much being debated and discussed. Everyone was delighted that the sun shone which was definitely a bonus. Today would have not been possible without the tremendous support we have received from the Smith family, the local farming community, the association as a whole, the local young farmers and the sponsors and I would like to thank them all very much indeed."

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