

CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

by Peter Myles, NSA Scotland Chair

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As we get closer to another new year, one never quite knows what's around the corner. On early morning rounds after a storm, I was confronted by an empty field. The sheep were here yesterday? All sorts of worries come into your head. I found a large limb from a tree had been blown onto my electric fence and evidence showed my sheep had escaped over the newly flattened exit. This was bad enough, but of major concern, was my proximity to the dual carriageway! A terrifying time of searching and then coaxing the escapee's away from thundering traffic I realised how vulnerable we are to the rest of the population. Fortunately, I have friends on the ground who watch out for me, their frantic phone messages went unanswered as my mobile was innocently charging back at home. All told we got them back and a chainsaw fixed the problem. I repeated this story to some NSA members and they said, "don't worry we all have days like that sometimes." This reassurance made me feel good to be a member of the NSA.

I feel lucky and privileged to be part of an organisation that has our backs and are highly respected in government circles. NSA is an advocate for the sheep industry and I feel we try our best for sheep farmers not only in Scotland but across the UK. It has given me the opportunity to speak directly with the First Minister and Cabinet Secretary on separate occasions highlighting the many problems facing us, pointing out the importance of keeping sheep and cattle in the hills, islands, and glens not only essential for biodiversity but also for keeping the social fabric of remote rural communities

together, not to forget producing the food on our plates.

Recently representatives from NSA Scotland were co-signatories to a letter to the First Minister making him aware of the difficulties caused by white tailed eagles and the severe predation they have caused to sheep farmers in the west. Another example of the work NSA does, is being a partner of the Food and Agriculture Stakeholders Taskforce (FAST) whereby round table discussions are held with Government officials and many others regarding the new Ag Bill. It cannot be under estimated the vital input of practical farmers to ensure future policy is going to work.

NSA has an important informative role and members have access to the resources of the wonderful Moredun livestock diseases and research facility where great strides have been made over their 100 years for a healthier national flock. Added to that, the NSA Next Generation Programme, that gives young people great opportunities to learn and hone their shepherding skills from the very best in the business, is kicking off for another intake of ambassadors next year.

We in Scotland have had a successful year despite the fluctuating weather. Our stand at the Royal Highland Show covered its ever-increasing costs this year but proves to be a challenge in years ahead. We held a post-mortem day at Glasgow Vet School where common sheep ailments were explored and discussed and

certainly gave interesting discussion points. An NSA Scotland Field Day was also held in the autumn in the Highlands by kind permission of the Scott Family, Fearn, and proved popular with attendees. Rounding off we held our now established Lamb for St Andrew's Day dinner in the Borders, alongside the wider national campaign to get lamb into schools.

Next year we look forward to heading to Aikengall Farm, East Lothian by kind permission of the Hamilton Family and look forward to another successful NSA Scot Sheep 2024 in early June. We are eternally grateful to our supporters and sponsors throughout the year who will no doubt be gearing up for the event and another fantastic showcase of the Scottish sheep industry.

In closing, if your mobile is resting on the charge at home, pick it up and take a look at the NSA messages. As for sheep farmers, we will always have your backs when the thundering traffic of the rest of the population certainly do not, you never know what's round the corner!



For more information, please click here

WEDNESDAY 10TH JANUARY 2023

NSA Breakfast Club webinar

FRIDAY 2ND FEBRUARY 2024

NSA Scotland Annual Regional Member's Meeting (ARMM) and tour of British Wool, Selkirk Depot

WEDNESDAY 5TH JUNE 2024

NSA Scotland Field Day, Fearn Farm, Fearn IV20 1TL, Register here

THURSDAY 30TH NOVEMBER

NSA Scotsheep, by kind permission of the Hamilton Family, Aikengall Dunbar, East Lothian



NSA Scotland Field day success

NSA Scotland provided attendees at its first ever Field Day with an engaging day of activity at the end of October as they welcomed members and others to Fearn Farm on the Easter Ross Peninsula, Scottish Highlands by kind permission of the Scott family.

NSA Scotland Chair Peter Myles says: "The future of farming depends on the sharing of good advice and best practices, with an in service day for sheep farmers and young people in the industry. It was important to cater for those in the north with the absence of NSA Highland Sheep this year and our Field Day was a great chance to hear from some of the best in the business. Amongst the varied and talented speakers, my particular highlight was the skilled butchery demonstration by QMS's Gordon Newlands, where he explained the various joints and cuts to the group. Participants were then able to purchase their choice cuts

of lamb at the end of the day, with the proceeds going towards the Lamb for St Andrews Day initiative, where school children across the country are given the opportunity to savour the very best of Scotch lamb produce, with thousands of portions being served to young people throughout November. A good and informative day was had by all."

Particular thanks must go to the Scott Family for hosting, the many speakers of the day, attendees, sponsors Elanco and to Charlie Munro of Dingwall and QMS for donating a lamb carcase each.

NSA Scotland celebrates Lamb for St Andrew's day, at home and abroad

There was an air of celebration among NSA Scotland members at the end of November with many years of effort to drive 'Lamb for St Andrew's Day' culminating in a traditional dinner in Lauder, Scottish Borders, at the same time as an international event in Dubai opened the door to Scottish Lamb sales in the Middle East.

Around 70 sheep farmers sat down to a delicious meal of Scotch Lamb at Carfraemill, Lauder, just hours after a constructive NSA Scotland committee meeting that included presentations from Awal Fuseini of AHDB and Sarah Millar of QMS. The updates from the two levy bodies gave a huge boost to St Andrew's Day, sharing the culmination of months of hard work to get the first Scottish abattoir processing lamb to halal certified standards, and Scottish Minister Humza Yousaf sitting down for a Lamb for St Andrew's Day dinner with international guests in Dubai.

From a traditional dinner in Lauder to a diplomatic meal nearly 5,000 miles away in the United Arab Emirates, NSA Scotland could not be more pleased about the boost St Andrew's Day now gives to Scotch Lamb sales – or the exciting opportunities for Scotch Lamb export sales now stunned halal is available. NSA Scotland members attending the meeting and following dinner commented that they hoped other processors would follow Woodhead Brothers, Aberdeenshire, in offering halal lamb products.

Peter Myles, NSA Scotland Chair, said: "If the guests at the St Andrew's Day meal in Dubai enjoyed their Scotch Lamb as much as we all did at Lauder, I have no doubt they'll be regular customers going forward. Consumers of lamb from Muslim communities are growing in number and spending power, so we must cater for their requirements. The more doors we can open for Scotch Lamb, both domestically and internationally, the better for all Scottish sheep farmers.

"NSA Scotland, QMS, butchers, auctioneers and many others in the Scottish sheep sector have all worked so hard to promote the Lamb

for St Andrew's Day concept, from high level gala dinners to children getting Scotch Lamb for their school dinner, and it is hugely gratifying to see it now making a real difference. We must and will keep up our efforts and have much to feel proud about."

Highlights of the NSA Scotland dinner included speeches from auctioneer George Purves, who was a co-founder of Lamb for St Andrew's Day, and also Alec Telfer, past President of the Blackface Sheep Breeders' Association. Both kept their audience rapt ahead of a well-supported raffle and auction.

In addition to organising the dinner for its own members, NSA Scotland also donated 10.5kg mince and 4kg leg steaks for pupils at Mearns Academy, Laurencekirk, Aberdeenshire, to enjoy Scotch Lamb on St Andrew's Day. NSA Scotland look forward to supporting the wider campaign in 2024.





Youngsters at LiveScot

NSA Scotland was pleased to witness a positive future for its sheep sector from capable young handlers demonstrating their knowledge and skills at last weekend's LiveScot event – Scotland's National Winter Fair.

Taking place last Friday 24th and Saturday 25th November at Lanark Agricultural Centre, NSA Scotland was delighted to attend and show its support for the event by sponsoring the National Fat Stock Club 2023 young handlers classes – A highlight of the event for many.

Ably handling her texel ewe lamb, Jenna Johnstone from South Lanarkshire (pictured), took the title of Champion Young Handler and was presented with the Walkerdyke Cup for her efforts. Picking up the reserve title was Alexander Clark from Stranraer.

Attending on behalf of NSA Scottish Region was NSA Scotland Chair Peter Myles. He comments: "Congratulations to the winners and well done to all competitors for taking part. It is fantastic to see a great show of sheep and enthusiasm coming from the younger generations of avid stock keepers. We look forward to seeing you again in future years!"

Upcoming Events



NSA Scotland ARMM

Notice is hereby given that the Annual Regional Members' meeting for NSA Scotland will be held on Friday 2nd February 2024, 2pm at Ettrick Riverside, Dunsdale Rd, Selkirk TD7 5EB. Members residing in NSA Scottish Region are eligible to appoint a proxy on their behalf if they cannot attend the meeting, but this must be done in advance with NSA Head Office. Meeting papers will be available closer to the time.

Ahead of the ARMM NSA Scotland will be hosting a tour at the British Wool Selkirk depot. Please note, numbers for the tour are limited and will be allocated on a first come first served basis by contacting NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid, grace@nationalsheep. org.uk / 07787142858.

NSA Scotsheep 2024

Plans are progressing well for NSA Scotsheep 2024 which is being held on Wednesday 5th June 2024, at Aikengall Farm, Innerwick, Dunbar, East Lothian by kind permission of the Hamilton family.

One of Scotland's most progressive agricultural banks, Virgin Money, has committed to be the major sponsor of the event in June. Along with others, it will play a major role in being one of the lead sponsors supporting the activities that make NSA Scotsheep a showcase for the industry and a magnet for sheep farming families from across the country.

Popular past and new activities are being planned by the organising committee for visitors and include a guided farm tour on tractors and trailers of part of the Hamilton's 1900-acre Aikengall Farm on the edge of the Lammermuir Hills, where they will see both sheep and beef from this leading Scottish livestock enterprise.

It is anticipated that up to two hundred commercial, educational, sheep breed and individual breeders' exhibitors will attend with trade stands and other features are Show and sale of pair of ewe hoggs; Invitational sheep dog trial; Seminars and workshops covering a range of industry topics; Educational and working farm demonstrations; Butchery and cookery demonstrations and fencing, shearing and stock judging competitions to name a few.

Children from East Lothian and Borders schools are being invited to attend which is being organised in conjunction with the Royal Highland Educational Trust and will be a key event in their Journey of Food – Sheep and Wool Calendar.

On the day before the main event, youngsters aged up to 26 will have the opportunity to test their stockmanship skills in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd of The Year competition, to be held at Thurston Mains, Innerwick, Dunbar.

More detailed information on the event, sponsorship opportunities, trade stand bookings, and competition entry forms are available from the NSA Scotsheep website. Visitors can buy their tickets online from the website from February 2024, or on the gate – Adults £20, NSA Members £10 and international visitors and children under 16 are free.





COMMITTEE INSIGHT

Debs Colley

Meet NSA Scotland's Membership and Promotions Sub-Committee (MPSC) Chair, Debs Colley, from Crawford in South Lanarkshire. Debs originally joined NSA Scotland as a committee member in 2020 before becoming Chair of the newly formed sub-committee in early 2023 which was tasked at looking at the events organised by NSA Scotland and overall membership activities.

Debs got involved with NSA as she wanted to help influence upcoming changes to policy in Scotland, the Ag Bill and Animal Health and Welfare bill. She would also like to see NSA Scotland improving its support to members and community.

As chair of the NSA Scotland MPSC she hopes to bring more events to Scotland for everyone to enjoy and benefit from. Currently, Debs is an Agricultural Officer in the Animal Identification and Traceability team within Scottish Government and has been doing this for the last five and half years. She is a person with great influence and knowledge within the sheep industry having grown up on a sheep farm, completed many lambings across the country and being highly driven in her main employment.

Debs was interested in working for Rural Payments and Inspections Division (RPID) as it is a good way to help support farmers and keep up to date with agriculture and its policy. She hopes farmers will overcome the fear of contacting the area offices for support as this does not mean they end up getting an inspection.

In the past, Debs has kept a flock of 600 ewes comprising of a mixture of Scotch Mules, South Country Cheviots and Texels alongside a smaller pedigree flock of 50 Texels, producing a decent lamb finished carcase. She often assists the family on their Blackie hill farm in Thornhill with lambing and other key events which play an integral role in her annual calendar.

Her experience both at home and in her main employments means Debs has learnt the bets ways of managing business. She comments: "My top tip is to always plan ahead and know what needs to be done at certain times I'd also encourage others to try and attend as many events like shows and stock judging etc as they can to keep in the loop. Hopefully my role on the new sub-committee will mean there are plentiful NSA Scotland events to enjoy in the near future."

Debs has just completed her Honours degree in Natural Sciences (Biology) through the Open University, and she is also a keen photographer.







With shorter days and reduced exposure to natural daylight, the winter months can be challenging for our mental health. The clocks change and in the height of winter, the sun sets at 3.45pm and rises after 8am. It affects our sleeping patterns and it makes us not want to get out of bed.

Some people develop Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – in fact, approximately two million people in the UK are affected by it. 20% of SAD cases occur in men but could pose a higher risk in women because of its impact on female hormones.

Shorter days, colder months and SAD can all contribute to an isolating effect on individuals and can lead to an increased risk of depressive symptoms such as persistent feelings of sadness and low mood. Focusing on tasks or making decisions can become a real challenge, as heightened irritability, agitation and appetite shifts become prominent.

But the shorter days aren't the only challenge for our mental health. Many underrepresented groups face stigma and discrimination every day across Scotland, particularly those living in rural communities, and it's a still a massive issue that can be compounded during the winter months.

Scotland's land mass is 98% rural, as defined by Scotlish Government, and around one million people live there. More people will experience fuel poverty in rural Scotland compared to those in urban areas, the lowest wage economies are in rural Scotland and digital connectivity is patchy. These problems are often exacerbated by poor transport links in rural areas, where there might be limited or no public transport which makes it difficult to build support networks and access mental health services. This can all further social isolation when infrastructure is poor and cost is a barrier.

When people do have access to mental health services within their community, they can have long waiting lists that could mean there is little chance of early intervention and could lead people to the point of crisis or distress. Some may experience a lack of anonymity due to people knowing each other more, meaning they are reluctant to access mental health services in their community through fear of judgement.

There's a necessity to raise awareness, reduce stigma and build resilience in rural Scotland. People need to be supported within their own communities in low level, non-clinical settings and having bespoke support is required, as individuals need different ways of being supported.

Let's challenge stigma: SAD is not just the 'winter blues' and you're not alone. There are many things you can do to combat the feelings you experience during the winter months. Maintain a consistent routine by sticking to a regular daily schedule of sleeping and meal times. Maximising natural light exposure and staying active are important in boosting your mood but it's important to connect with others with social interactions that reduce feelings of loneliness.

Change Mental Health can help you. Our Advice and Support Service can signpost you to local support that most fits your needs, where advisers provide emotional support to address concerns such as financial stress and emergency situations. It's free to contact, Monday to Friday between 10am and 4pm: call **0808 8010 515**, email us at advice@changemh.org or fill in the enquiry form on the Advice and Support Service webpage.

You can also call Breathing Space on 0800 83 85 87, enabling you to open up when you're feeling down, or call Samaritans 365 days a year, 24 hours a day, on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org.

Change Mental Health is supporting rural communities every single day by raising awareness of rural mental health. This is not just through the 80% of people supported in services across rural Scotland but through the National Rural Mental Health Forum. The Forum is a strong, dedicated network driving change to enable rural people to be open about their mental health. With more than 240 membership organisations from third, private and public sectors, the Forum hosts regular seminars from other organisations and guests across rural Scotland and beyond to discuss key topics and issues related to mental health and wellbeing in rural Scotland. It creates a solid evidence base for what works to improve people's lives while influencing policy.

People living with poor mental health, mental illness or supporting others and loved ones who also might be affected by mental illness deserve access to accurate information and support. It's creating a commitment from everyone that there's a society where mental health isn't just discussed, but it's understood and respected – a society that sees us fighting for a future where no one faces mental illness alone.

Should you wish to learn more about Change Mental Health's vision or to support its work click here.





An update from Sheila Voas

Chief Veterinary Officer, Scotland

As I sit and write this the weather has turned colder and there is a blanket of snow out of my study window. Chilly – yes, definitely - but also good news because I have been concerned about the recent Bluetongue 3 (BTV3) incursions into Kent.

To date infection has been detected in five cattle from three different herds, as a result of active surveillance sampling rather than because of signs of clinical disease, and my colleagues in APHA and Defra are working hard to identify whether more animals may have been infected and if disease has been circulating in the area.

Given the proximity of Kent to affected areas of Europe including the Netherlands and Belgium, and prevailing wind direction in recent weeks, it is plausible that the disease has occurred as a result of infected midgies being blown over to Kent, but other possible routes could be imported animals or midges travelling in vehicles or containers. The virus has a life stage in the midge so it is unlikely to spread at this time of year in Scotland but we must all be on our guard and report possible suspects to APHA quickly to allow investigation and (hopefully) disease to be ruled out.

Thankfully there are no human health concerns about the disease and food safety is not affected, however there are implications for the trade in live animals and germinal products to both EU and more widely, and these are on a country wide basis initially.

A temporary control zone is in place in the area around the farms where infection was found and this means animal movements must be licensed, and the use of appropriate insecticides is required. There is no vaccine currently produced against this strain of BTV and so I urge everyone to do all they can to make sure it doesn't establish in either our cattle or sheep populations. This includes the safe sourcing of live animals and products such as semen or embryos, following the requirements on health certificates and reporting suspicions promptly. If in doubt speak to your vet – who may suggest some additional pre export testing.

Veterinary Attestations

I had a useful meeting recently about the Annual Vet Visits now required for the export of animal products to the EU going forwards. This requirement is as a result of the UK leaving the EU and now needing to comply with third country import requirements for goods being consigned to the EU, the upshot of which is that all farms supplying animals which may be exported will have to have had an annual vet visit to consider disease prevention, control and biosecurity. ScotEID have set up a system where your private vet can enter the dates of visits to your farm onto the system (Veterinary Attestation) which will make it easy for buyers to monitor stock to see if they are eligible. It is intended that we will run a four

month implementation starting on 13th December 2023, so this is a reminder that if you supply a slaughterhouse which exports meat or products to the EU, and are not in a Farm Assurance Scheme (which requires an annual vet visit and therefore means you are automatically compliant) then you should speak to your private vet about having their most recent visit recorded on the system.

Support for disease control

On a more positive note, the Scottish Government is providing some financial support to the sheep industry through two disease control projects.

The first is on Lewis and Harris and uses recent developments to guide target treatments to reduce the incidence of sheep scab in hot spot areas. More then 30,000 sheep have been treated to date which equates to around 90% of the total sheep population on Lewis and Harris, and has brought different generations of the farming community together reigniting the more traditional ways of working by building a stronger community through co-operative working.

And in October we announced financial support to develop a control programme to help control Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA). In the absence of a true diagnostic test in live animals, the programme will aim to put in place vital infrastructure and training needed to tackle this disease within the national flock. Sheep keepers will benefit through earlier diagnosis and interventions, and it will allow affected animals to be culled and removed from flocks at an earlier stage.

Preparing for Sustainable Farming

Finally, a reminder that between now and the end of next year, there is £1,250 funding per farm available for sheep health and welfare as part of Scottish Government's "Preparing for Sustainable Farming" initiative.

Sheep farmers who are registered with Scottish Government Rural Payments (i.e. those who have a Business Registration Number (BRN)) can claim money back for doing 'health and welfare interventions'. There are five sheep interventions that attract a standard payment outlined in the table. (On the next page)

Scotland's farm vets are very supportive of these important preventive health measures. Following feedback, the liver fluke intervention has been broadened to include all investigations, ask your vet for advice specific to your flock.

If you have carried out one or two of the interventions during 2023, you can claim via the online platform Preparing for Sustainable Farming full guidance (ruralpayments.org). Each intervention attracts £250 of funding, you can make one claim for the year for a maximum of two different interventions. Proof that the intervention has been completed



Interventions for which farmers can claim payments a s part of SFI.

Intervention	Summary of investigation options For more detail, see online guidance	Outline of actions that may be required For more detail, see online guidance
5. Sheep scab	Screen 12 sheep per management group (or all animals in group of less than 12) to determine sheep scab status of whole flock	Implement sustainable prevention and control plan that avoids unnecessary treatment, including biosecurity measures where relevant, using appropriate expert advice
6. Sheep iceberg diseases	Targeted disease investigation (options: Maedi Visna, Johnes, Border Disease, Contagious Lymphadenitis, lung scanning for OPA). Screen cull ewes.	Implement sustainable prevention and control plan, including biosecurity measures for screening and/ or isolating purchased and returning stock, using appropriate expert advice
7. Sheep lameness	Flock lameness assessment by vet: identify conditions and their prevalence within the flock	Implement sustainable prevention and control plan, including biosecurity measures where relevant, using appropriate expert advice
8. Sheep: liver fluke	Liver fluke investigation	Implement sustainable prevention and control plan, including biosecurity measures where relevant, using appropriate expert advice
9. Sheep: roundworms	Roundworm investigation: Faecal Egg Count and wormer efficacy testing	Implement sustainable prevention and control plan, including biosecurity measures where relevant, using appropriate expert advice

is provided by the vet or other expert adviser, using the expert adviser form available on the online platform. In the first year of claiming, an extra £250 will automatically be added to support learning and development on any aspect of sustainable farming. Scottish Government is keen to help sheep farmers increase their knowledge of health and welfare, which underpins sustainable livestock farming.

The Interventions will be available again in 2024.

To close I'd like to wish you all a Happy Christmas, when it comes, and my best wishes to all for 2024. I hope you have a successful lambing and (personally) that winter stays cold – but not TOO cold.



Veterinary Corner

Ed Hill - Thrums Vet Group

At the time of writing I'm just finishing up the last of the tup fertility testing for the year, for those putting tups out late or a for a few - retests of tups that had failed earlier in the season.

Since August we have sampled hundreds of tups, almost all as routine pre-breeding examinations. Looking at this year's results approximately 20% have failed the test for full fertility and a further 4% with borderline or inconclusive results. A small percentage of those that failed would have subsequently gone on to pass on a retest, but these results really do highlight the importance of routine testing when striving for efficiency and optimal lambing percentage.

Out and about the feeling is ewes have had a hard time this back end with persistent rain meaning they've rarely had a dry back. This coupled with an increased parasite challenge certainly means this has been a challenging time for many flocks. Whilst we can't control the weather, this should focus the mind on the health risks we can control. Is your liver fluke prevention plan fit for purpose in a wet year like this? Have we got our silage analysed so we can start to plan nutrition for winter and the run up to lambing? Do any lambs to be housed have sufficient pneumonia protection? Health risk management is constantly changing so it helps to keep in touch with your vet to ensure there are no blind-spots that might catch you out over the next few months.

Earlier this month I joined a small group of vets at the Moredun Institute looking to take OPA control to the next step. The plan is for each vet to follow a few flocks over the next two years and record our scans and post-mortem a percentage of our cases as well as recording our overall



results. The hope is this will give us a really solid evidence base to say that a scan-and-cull approach to OPA is a cost-effective way of controlling the disease. This is something, from my experience of taking this approach with affected flocks over the years, I know works well – we are making a really positive change on these farms, but it will be nice to have the results of an expansive project and hard scientific evidence to back this up. It will also hopefully generate a group of veterinary scanners with proven and accredited skills that can then be used as a launch pad for a national control scheme. Many of us in industry have been working really hard at controlling this awful disease and this next step is an exciting development.

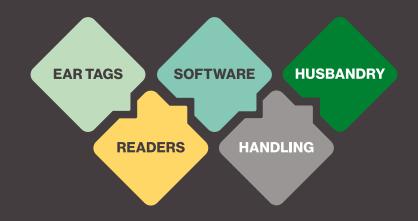
I'm sure you will all be aware of the Preparing for Sustainable Farming grants, which are a superb opportunity to get some money for some really pro-active veterinary tasks. (It is worth noting that the scope of the fluke testing option has expanded to include blood sampling and post-mortems, as well as faecal worm egg counting.) We've certainly completed a lot of eligible work for our farmers, such as scab testing and lameness consultations, but to date we have not yet signed many forms to secure the funding. I know none of us like form filling, but if your vet is inundated with forms to fill out on the last day of applications they might not get through them all in time - so please try and get your forms into your vet as soon as possible!

I hope everyone manages to have a relaxing Christmas and wishing you and your flock the best of health in 2024!









WORKING TO HELP THE LIVESTOCK FARMER

