

NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION



SCOTLAND

WORKING FOR THE SCOTTISH SHEEP INDUSTRY

MARCH 2024 EDITION

www.nsascotland.org



CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

by Peter Myles, NSA Scotland Chair

The only way is first class

A few years ago, I took some sheep up to Aberdeen to the Shetland boat. I had sent a few breeding sheep to Shetland before, and my brother had bought cattle from Orkney, occasionally, the cattle when they arrived here, always settled very well and were just ready to thrive, and thrive, they did.

However, this was the first time I was able to see the facilities in Aberdeen, properly, and I was very impressed. My sheep were loaded into what they called a small cassette, like a wee shiny metal byre, with peepholes to look through and for air, a plentiful supply of fresh water and hay in their clean fresh sawdust compartment. This cassette gets loaded onto the deck of the boat, strapped down and reconnected to the water supply. Larger cassettes are used for cattle and greater numbers of sheep.

The boys at the dock told me they recently had a visit from a prominent politician who had arrived to find out about this dreadful animal transport issue. Only to be completely converted once he saw the quality of the service provided. A Shetland crofter tells me "the cassettes are a game changer for the isles, as we take the welfare of our animals seriously, and with the transport now, we know they will arrive in Aberdeen in the best condition possible. You just have to see the stock in the ring at Thainstone to see how well they are looking."

Last year SRUC were asked by the Scottish Government to do a comprehensive study on the transport of animals from the northern isles to Aberdeen. As stakeholders, NSA Scotland were consulted.

The survey took place in the busiest time of the calendar August till the end of November when the bulk of quality livestock leave the isles headed for the mainland. All sorts of checks were made from how long the journey lasted, weather forecasts, sea swell, motion sensors, heat detectors, CCTV cameras and microphones placed to check at regular intervals noise levels on the boat. Added to that the animals were checked for visible signs of stress by eye, how much hay and water they consumed, whether they stood or lay down and how much visible muck was on them when they arrived and finally an official veterinarian inspection at any abattoir within 40 miles of Aberdeen.

Aberdeen City Council animal health inspection reports were available for a period of over 7 years and the number of casualties amounted to 0.0008% of animals transported.

All in all, they found this service to be an excellent lifeline service essential for the continuation of quality livestock breeding, that the northern isles are so renowned. With the take home from me the absolute discretion of the ship's master to call whether to sail or not with livestock on board considering the prevailing



weather conditions at the time. I look forward to reading their well written report to be published soon.

Thinking back to when I loaded two blackfaced rams on board I considered the thought that I would probably favoured being with the sheep rather than spending time with some of the truck drivers in the bar overnight!

Our Events

For more information, please [click here](#)

WEDNESDAY 27TH MARCH 2024, 7.30PM – WHAT TO DO IN A SHEEP WORRYING BY DOGS INCIDENT

This online webinar will provide practical advice on what to do in a sheep worrying incident, chaired by Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive. [Register now here.](#)

WEDNESDAY 22ND MAY 2024

FAST Parliamentary Reception, Holyrood.

WEDNESDAY 5TH JUNE 2024 NSA SCOTSHEEP

By kind permission of the Hamilton Family,
Aikengall Dunbar, East Lothian

THURSDAY 20TH – SUNDAY 23RD JUNE 2024

NSA Scotland at Royal Highland Show.

TUESDAY 30TH JULY NSA SHEEP EVENT

Three Counties Showground, Worcestershire.

your business your future



ARMM follows interesting British Wool tour

Peter Myles has been re-approved for his second year as NSA Scotland Chairman at the NSA Scotland Annual Regional Members Meeting (ARMM) held in Selkirk. The hybrid meeting open to members and guests took place in person and over Zoom on Friday 2nd February.

Current Treasurer Mary Dunlop from Biggar was elected as Vice Chair and Treasurer unopposed with the Association's finances now predominately managed by NSA headquarters in Malvern, Worcestershire. Clive Phillips was elected as UK Policy and Technical committee representative to serve a three-year term. Pamela Nicol of Glenisla was re-approved to continue her three-year term as Trustee for a second year with Debs Colley, Crawford also being elected to serve as second trustee over a three-year term replacing Mr Myles.

NSA national activity and policy updates were provided to attendees of the ARMM by NSA National Policy Manager Emma Bradbury with members raising concerns surrounding the issues of sea eagles and animal movement restrictions from the recent Bluetongue outbreak. There were also calls from attendees to push for development of new vaccines for other viruses transmitted from midges such as the Schmallenberg virus.

A Scotland specific policy update was then provided by NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid which highlighted the progress made in animal health and welfare via the OPA and Sheep Scab working groups. However, Ms Reid stressed that more work is needed to be done in these areas with further testing for Sheep Scab alongside responsible shepherding and communication when dealing with these diseases in

particular. Another priority for the Association is the new Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill which has started making its way through Holyrood. NSA Scotland recognised key aspects of the bill in which the Rural Affairs and Islands Committee are currently focussing on such as: terminology used; the scope of the bill; timescale; budget; its variations with English policy; continuing professional development; and animal welfare.

The meeting took place after a guided tour of the British Wool Marketing Board's new wool depot in Selkirk provided by Mike Anderson and Davie Swinton from British Wool. The tour gave the opportunity for attendees to learn about the processes of wool once it reaches the depot to its distribution around the world and the steps in between.

Mr Myles concluded the meeting stating: "Thanks to the work of the committee members, 2023 proved to be a busy and active year and I hope that continues into a successful 2024 with events like the hotly anticipated NSA Scot Sheep at Aikengall Farm, Dunbar by kind permission of the Hamilton Family on Wednesday 5th June 2024. I hope our members had an informative day touring round the wool depot and were able to have a greater understanding of the work done by British Wool and also NSA Scotland."

Office Bearers



Peter Myles
(Chair)
Edzell, Angus



Mary Dunlop
(Vice Chair, Treasurer and
NSA Finance Scrutiny representative)
Broughton, Biggar, Scottish Borders



Grace Reid
(Scottish Region Coordinator)
Clackmannan, Central Belt

Find out more



Pamela Nicol
(Trustee)
Glenisla, Blairgowrie



Debs Colley
(Trustee)
Crawford, Lanarkshire



Clive Phillips
UK P&T Representative
Stonehaven, Aberdeenshire



Euan Emslie
(Event Organiser
and Secretariat)

News from NSA HQ

Shepherding work made easier for Cornish turned Scottish sheep farmer

Shepherding work has been made easier this year for one Cornish turned Scottish sheep farmer. As the lucky new winner of the 2023 NSA prize giveaway, Kim Courtauld from Argyll can now make good use of his prize of a 3.0m Porta-Yards mobile sheep handling system, kindly provided by Wise Agriculture.

Kim and his family moved to their Argyll hill farm five years ago, more than 600 miles north from their former home in Cornwall. They now run 285 ewes as well as 40 cattle over 880 acres, also producing Christmas turkeys and managing four holiday cottages.

Kim was surprised to receive the amazing news that he has been selected at random as the winner, he comments: "I could not believe it! I had entered after receiving an NSA and British Wool email promoting the competition. The sheep handling system will be a huge help to my aging body and will help revitalize our fank (fold)."

NSA was able to offer members and contacts the chance to win the prize, worth more than £10,000 thanks to generous support from Wise Agriculture, a family run business based in North Yorkshire servicing the entire UK. The company specialises in supplying premium brands of cattle and sheep handling equipment from around the world, including weighing and EID equipment and software to livestock producers across the country.

Edward Wise of Wise Agriculture says: "We partnered with the NSA to giveaway a 3.0m Porta-Yards mobile sheep handling system as a way to give back to the farming community and were excited to see it go to such a deserving farming family. The mobile sheep yard will be

put through its paces by the Courtauld's as it works to help their flock handling efficiency and ease."

The 3.0m Porta-Yards mobile sheep handling system by Landquip NZ supplied by Wise Agriculture is a combination of quality materials and functional design. The system was recently presented to Kim by Edward Wise with NSA Scotland Coordinator Grace Reid.



Enter the 2024 NSA prize giveaway

NSA was excited to announce the launch of its latest prize giveaway at the end of January offering the nation's sheep farmers a fantastic opportunity to improve their stock transportation with the prize of a brand new livestock trailer.

The amazing prize of the Nugent L3618H 12ft livestock trailer with sheep decks is worth more than £9,500 and is kindly provided by Nugent Engineering Ltd.

Nugent Engineering Ltd hails from an agricultural family background. Initially designed to withstand the vigour of Ireland's livestock and rugged terrain, the Nugent Livestock range is engineered and hand built to last and, with full type approval (ECWVTA), any sheep farmer will appreciate the attention to detail and be thrilled to win such a fantastic prize.

The prize draw is open to any UK sheep farmer over the age of 16. Both NSA members and non-members can enter, but entries are limited to one per person/email address. The quality product is worth £9,500 plus VAT and will provide one lucky winner with innovative features producing the perfect trailer for the transportation of livestock

Entries will be taken throughout 2024 with a single winner announced early next year. Entries can be made online at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw and in person at NSA events this year including NSA Scot Sheep.

**WIN a 12ft
Nugent
Livestock
trailer.**

**Open to any UK sheep
farmer, aged 16 or over.**

Enter now by visiting
www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw
or by scanning the QR code
above for your chance to win a
12ft Nugent Livestock trailer
worth more than £9,500.





Coordinator's Comment

by Grace Reid,
NSA Scottish Coordinator



Progress underway for new legislation - The new Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill has started making its way through Holyrood with the assurance from the First Minister that 70% of the Agricultural budget will be delivered in Tiers 1 and 2 with Less Favoured Area payments on top. As this progresses it is the other legislative commitments currently being debated in Parliament that remain unclear. As the Bill advances, it is hoped that 'progress' is actually achieved when it comes to a future agricultural policy that we can be proud of and be able to work within. Let's not have to resort to the actions of European farmers to be heard and valued by government.

Scotland: A 'Good Food Nation'? - The Scottish Government has a vision that by 2025 Scotland will be a 'Good Food Nation', where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day. Peter and I attended a conference in late February to discuss what this may mean for Scottish farmers and the wider economy. Mairi Gougeon, Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and Islands was in attendance where it was laid out that Scotland has an international reputation for quality and provenance and that the Scottish Government was committed to supporting the food and drink sector which boasts an annual turnover of £15bn and employs approximately 100,000 people.

Despite the obvious challenges ahead in terms of food production in conjunction with a transition to net zero by 2045 and the ever looming climate change and biodiversity loss, Ms Gougeon stated that low income should not be a barrier to a healthy balanced diet. It was announced that a statutory Scottish Food Commission would be established in the near future alongside the first ever Scottish Good Food Nation Plan which would concentrate on setting a direction of travel and strengthening existing targets. But what does all this mean and why does it impact sheep farmers?

We know all too well of unintended consequences of policy and other approaches. One thing we gained from the Covid era was a short lived increase in our national food security! All too often it is the cumulative effect from multiple angles that make our business environments challenging. We have a food supply chain which can be long and highly processed with huge wastage by the consumer at the end up - there must be changes made. Despite all this, it is said that one in six people in Scotland are currently facing hunger/food problems. Poverty is never a choice that people consciously make. NSA Scotland will be submitting a response to the National Good Food Nation Plan consultation as part of the Scottish Red Meat Resilience Group.

Dreaded Duo - Scottish farmers await with bated breath to see if either or both of the midge spread viruses currently sweeping areas of England and Wales comes over the border. Despite no cases being found in Scotland of Bluetongue or Schmallenberg, sheep farmers and crofters keep a steady interest in the number of outbreaks which continue to arise south of the border. It is worthwhile noting that Bluetongue is a notifiable disease and animals can recover from the virus but certain strains can cause significant mortality. To date risk based surveillance has been carried out in South East England with 40,000 animals being tested and a confirmed 123 cases, of which seven have been in sheep. With no vaccine available, trade with the European Union and Northern Ireland has been significantly restricted with significant costs and operational capacity involved to implement any potential resurrection particularly to the live animal trade between GB and NI. Members are advised to employ caution at this time when it comes to movement of animals across the country.

Predation - Another threat on the near horizon which poses a significant threat to flock viability is predation. Whilst not completely isolated to this time of year, the sheep industry continues to remain vigilant to ensure the health of the national flock whilst delivering the highest standard of sustainable food production in conjunction with many other faceted outcomes. The National Sea Eagle Stakeholder Panel recently met to undertake a review of the Sea Eagle Management Scheme (SEMS). With significantly more work to be done on dealing with the consequences of this particular reintroduced species, it has been confirmed that there will be a 2024 project budget of £400,000. All SEMS participants from 2023 will be notified with the intention to roll forward their management support with the addition of new applicants also being taken on in 2024. There may be a delay in the issuing of Management Agreement offers due to the volume of agreements to be issued however, payments are still expected to be made before November and December.

Another reintroduction? - NSA Scotland has been invited to engage with the Lynx Focus Group and to take part in a series of cross-sector workshops to explore objectively the concerns and barriers to a trial reintroduction of lynx to Scotland. These were identified by the Vincent Wildlife Trust following its research undertaken in 2021. The workshops will also consider the mitigation measures that would be required if a trial reintroduction was to take place in the Highlands of Scotland. NSA Scotland has and will continue to raise the concerns of Scottish sheep farmers and crofters particularly the damage another reintroduced species can cause on livelihoods and viability of farming enterprises. Scotland must learn from the mistakes of previous reintroductions and value the work being carried out by our farmers and crofters on a daily basis.

Sheep Worrying by Dogs - Despite reassurances from the First Minister, Humza Yousaf, sheep worrying by dogs continues to be a reality of many farmers and crofters across the country. During a recent First Minister's Questions, Mr Yousaf said the worrying of livestock by dogs was unacceptable and highlighted education as a key factor in the prevention of livestock worrying incidents. He noted the positive impact the legislation had on keeping livestock safe and said the government continued to work with stakeholders, including NatureScot, to raise awareness of dog owner's responsibilities. He promised to review the Outdoor Access Code and accepted more could be done to raise awareness of the danger of dog walking around livestock, particularly during lambing season.

Reminder: Veterinary attestations now in force -

A reminder that the requirement for an annual vet attestation for farms came into force in December 2023 and requires an on-farm check by your vet for a satisfactory level of being 'disease free' and working to a level of biosecurity required to export products to the EU. It is advisable to speak with your vet about conducting the attestation during any routine vet visits. Membership of the main national assurance schemes (ran by QMS, Red Tractor, Welsh Lamb & Beef Producers, and, recently added, RSPCA) qualify as being compliant without the need for a standalone vet visit. NSA continues to receive questions on vet attestations, but please be aware this regulation is active and the vast majority of abattoirs and auction marts will require stock for slaughter with a VAN, including lambs and older sheep. Not undertaking a veterinary attestation could risk animals being turned away at the point of slaughter. This rule applies to any animal destined for slaughter from its final holding.





NSA Head Office policy update

by Emma Bradbury, NSA Policy Manager

There has been plenty of change over the past months. In Wales there has been significant policy developments surrounding the new Sustainable Farming Scheme which has received backlash across industry, with a proposed significant reduction in livestock numbers and overall contraction of the industry. Proposals outline a substantial increase in tree planting and habitat creation, with a controversial payment model and outdated mapping, the forecasting from Welsh Government indicates that 5,500 jobs would be lost, as well as a £200m hit to farm business income and 11% fewer livestock in Wales. NSA continues to work across the board engaging with stakeholders, Ministers, and policy developers to try and ensure a workable solution is achieved and there is a resilient future for rural communities in Wales.

Across the border in England things are looking rosier. It was announced at the Oxford Farming Conference back in January by Defra Secretary Steve Barclay that there would be an upgrade to the English post-Brexit farming schemes since the UK left the EU. Updates included funding uplifts, streamlined application processes, enhanced environmental incentives and support for the roll out of new technology. There was also the 10% increase in the average value of agreements in the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship driven by increased payment rates, with uplifts automatically applied to existing agreements, along with around 50 new actions which enabled farmers to be funded for actions including agroforestry and those driving forward agricultural technology such as robotic mechanical weeding. However, some issues are now being seen with supply and demand of crops and issues with tenancies and whole farm designation for some actions.

Turmoil continues to surround Red Tractor and farm assurance, following the launch of its vision for a Greener Farms Commitment (GFC) last autumn, a voluntary bolt on to the current assurance scheme. The Commitment did not have due process or consultation with industry or representatives of industry and launched into a cold atmosphere from industry bodies.

NSA took Red Tractor to task regarding this. Highlighting continued disregard for industry and the impact these proposals could have on the wider supply chain and farmers. The GFC takes Red Tractor into the realm of setting environmental policy in isolation rather than getting behind the key environmental and sustainable farming schemes being introduced by DEFRA.

NSA called an extraordinary meeting of its NSA English Committee to discuss the repercussions of the proposals and issued a statement indicating the appetite for a review of Red Tractor governance. NSA made it clear at the time that it continues to support the concept of farm assurance as an open gate declaration of good practice. But we have long been frustrated that the scheme is losing its way and has become less relevant to sheep farmers with little acceptance of the unique nature of our sector. NSA recognised that most of our sheep farms are not 'big business' with layers of management, but are family farms and single operators, many with little land of their own, and our sector still offers a valuable first step on the farming ladder for young new entrants. NSA made the case that becoming Red Tractor Assured presents a huge hurdle for many sheep farms, and for most of our routes to market it adds no value. In the last days of October Red Tractor capitulated and has now announced there will be no further development of the GFC or any standards until an independent review is complete on the direction and value of assurance and the governance of the scheme.

Looking forward to Spring and the warmer weather is likely to bring an increasing risk of Bluetongue as seen across the South East of England this Winter, resulting in movement restrictions and some severe culling but also a halt to trade to Northern Ireland. There are some good resources available through the [Ruminant Health and Welfare Group](#) and [AHDB](#) websites including several veterinary webinars highlighting key information on how to mitigate impact and what to do if you suspect an animal infection.

More widely on exports, the Live Export Bill, which is currently being debated in Parliament, delivers on a Conservative Party commitment to ban the export of live animals including cattle, sheep and pigs for slaughter and fattening only. Live exports in other specific circumstances, for example, for breeding and competitions, will still be allowed. However, the ability to export stock destined for slaughter to the EU was halted following Brexit, and farmers have also faced a barrier in their ability to export breeding stock. This is due to the absence of a live animal Border Control Post (BCP) at Calais, meaning any movements have had to go far further via Scotland, Northern Ireland and through the Republic of Ireland.



NSA Scots Sheep 2024

Engaging and enjoyable programme to entertain NSA Scot Sheep 2024 visitors

All roads lead to Aikengall Farm near Innerwick, Dunbar, on Wednesday 5th June as the countdown to NSA Scot Sheep 2024 has officially begun.

Seen as the most important specialist event in the year for sheep producers in Scotland and further afield in the North of England, the one day event will welcome farmers to enjoy an abundance of trade stands, seminars, workshops and working demonstrations, as well as the ever popular farm tour of the impressive Aikengall site, home to a 2800 flock of Scottish Blackface and Scotch Mule ewes. The show and sale of pairs of ewe hoggs, sheep dog trial, speed shear, and competitions including stockjudging and the NSA Next Generation Shepherd of the Year will also return to entertain visitors.

Featuring a number of industry leading scientists and advisors, the seminars are sure to offer plenty of food for thought for attendees, and there will be numerous workshops and working demonstrations taking place throughout the day.

It is set to be a bumper year trade stand wise with 32 sheep breed societies booked in as well as nine individual breeders and more than 160 commercial and educational exhibitors.

The organising committee is grateful for the continued support of Virgin Money as a major sponsor and The Scottish Farmer as media partner, and delighted to welcome Community Windpower as a new major sponsor for 2024, as well as all the other sponsors of the event.



Seminars

10.45am – 11.55am Flock fit for the future

Chair: Dr Christine Middlemiss, UK Government Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO)

Panel: Dr Chris Cousens, Senior Research Scientist, Moredun – Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA)
Craig Watkins (DPhil), Principal Research Scientist, Moredun – Johne's disease
Stewart Burgess (PhD), Principal Research Scientist, Moredun – Sheep scab
Marion McMillan (BVMS CertAVP(Sheep) MRCVS), SRUC – Sheep disease diagnostics

12noon – 12.25pm Political Affairs

Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture and Connectivity

12.30pm – 1.45pm Implementation and Benefits of Changing Support

Chair: Colin MacPhail, NSA Scotsheep Chairman and Agri-business Consultant

Panel: Steven Thomson, Agricultural Economist, SRUC
Stephen Buchan, Regional Head of Agriculture, Virgin Money
Jim Walker CBE, Farmer and Businessman
Other speaker - TBC

2pm – 3.15pm A Profitable and Sustainable Farming Future – What will farming in 2030 look like for your business?

Chair: Brian Richardson, UK Head of Agriculture, Virgin Money

Panel: 3 speakers TBC

Workshops/demonstrations

Reducing production costs and the carbon footprint of your flock

Dewi Jones, Innovis and two farmer speakers

Prime lamb selection

Alister McSporran, Dunbia

Value added carcass

Shows the versatility of the lamb and what can be produced from its carcass – Gordon Newlands and butcher, QMS

Net zero: an opportunity not a limitation

Gemma Wark and Emma McGowan, QMS

Halal sheep meat marketing and the opportunities available in the UK and globally

Rizvan Khalid, Euro Quality lambs

Cattle breeding policy at Aikengall

Gavin Hill, SRUC and James Hamilton

Live demonstration on OPA and scanning of sheep

Dr Chris Cousens and Phil Scott, Moredun

How to dose sheep with boluses

David Bell, Agrimin

Investing in your wellbeing bank account

Alix Ritchie and Clare Dickson, Farmstrong Scotland

Winter grazing/forage crops

Kirsten Williams, SRUC

With further workshops provided by Community Windpower and Island Green Energy

Shearing, wool handling, spinning, felt making, crook making and sheep dressing demonstrations will also take place throughout the day.

NSA Next Generation Insight

The 2024 cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors came together for the first time in February to begin their year of personal and career development. Coming from across the UK the young farmers quickly threw themselves into discussion demonstrating passion and commitment for the sector.

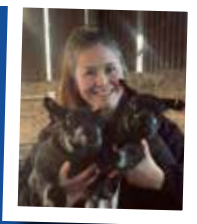


Meet the 2024 NSA Next Generation Ambassadors from Scotland

Kathryn Dick (25) Stirlingshire

Meeting people and sharing information and experiences was a key driver for Kathryn when applying to join the ambassador programme this year. Her current job as Promotions and Communications Office for the Lleyn Sheep Society and past experience working as a business reporter for Scottish Farmer has already raised her awareness of the value of this. *"Meeting a multitude of people you get a sense of what mindset is required in order to make a positive change to your business and the sector as a whole,"* she comments.

As well as the chance to network Kathryn is looking forward to gaining useful advice to help further her small flock of Blue Texel and Charollais sheep that she plans to begin performance recording this year with the aim of being recognised for producing naturally reared tups that have good longevity and are able to thrive in both commercial and pedigree settings.



Emma Clapp (30) Edinburgh

Emma has the Covid pandemic to thank for her changing career path to begin farming. She had always had an interest in agriculture but says: *"When the pandemic hit I was in a job that I was unhappy with, I knew I needed to make a change and so got in touch with a local farmer with whom I volunteered and learnt new skills."* Emma has clearly not looked back since. Fast forward four years and Emma is now working as Head Shepherd on a 400 acre Scottish estate managing 1200 Lleyn cross ewes plus replacements. An achievement that greatly impressed the interview panel.

Emma hopes becoming an NSA Next Generation Ambassador programme will be the start of a long relationship with NSA and is looking forward to continuing her learning and development of her career.

Having now completed the first of the Ambassador sessions Emma adds: *"The first delivery session was a really positive experience for me, getting off the farm and meeting the other ambassadors. Learning about each other and our involvement with the sheep industry, as well as meeting and hearing from previous ambassadors and professionals within the sheep industry made me really excited to see what the next generation programme is going to bring this year and the doors it can open for the future."*



Perry's farming life

Meet NSA Next Generation Ambassador Perry Parkinson. Perry joined the NSA programme in 2022 and has subsequently been the recipient of the NSA Samuel Wharry Travel Bursary. This year Perry will be providing readers with a regular update from his farming life.

As the nights start getting lighter and the grass is finally starting to grow, I think a lot of farmers will be breathing a big sigh of relief, I know I am! The last couple of months have seen me lambing down in Doncaster, South Yorkshire and now back up in Scotland as well as my own flock at home. The mild weather is certainly helping when it comes to getting ewes and lambs straight out of the shed which is a godsend! However with the good, the bad usually follows, and in this instance it's in the form of the dreaded nematodirus which we've already seen in our own January born lambs! Thankfully, because we routinely faecal egg count (FEC) test our ewes, we noticed the hogs and lambs had a low count of nematodirus in the middle of January which was a big wake up call! Thankfully it was caught early enough that we could stop it in its tracks.....for now at least anyway.

I've also been lucky enough to carry on working alongside an animal health company this winter too, hosting a couple of 'on farm' days

for its new batch of SQP's from across the U.K. which has been great (see image). The majority of the day consists of talking about worm resistance in sheep and what we can be doing to prevent it, as well as the typical sheep farming calendar and the problems and constraints that's naturally come with it.

I always welcome meeting new people and especially ones who have a clear passion for agriculture and are happy to learn new things and take home new ideas. As I'm about to head into the final lambing of the year, I'm praying it goes as smoothly as the rest and then I can enjoy the summer, starting a new job and showing some great lambs that will be the result of some bloody hard work!

Good luck to all sheep farmers across the country and I hope you're lambing is a success!





Research shows many farmers and crofters are great at looking after their equipment and livestock, but, like many others, they can neglect their own wellbeing. As an industry, we face many challenges in farming that are hard to predict or control. We can't afford to let these pressures reach the point where they damage productivity and affect the lives of families.

Some people develop Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) – in fact, NSA caught up with Farmstrong Scotland Chairman and livestock farmer John Scott, to find out about the new wellbeing programme, that is already making a positive impact.

"Farmstrong Scotland is a personal development initiative to help farmers, crofters and their families to make small steps to improve their wellbeing and mental resilience, to cope with the ups and downs of farming and crofting."

"Farming, as we know, faces many challenges from the weather to farm gate prices, political changes and recruiting staff, alongside day-to-day activity such as pressures during lambing, calving and harvest."

"Like many other farmers and crofters, I haven't historically been good at looking after myself, and have faced highs and lows. We consistently demand more of our bodies and minds and wonder why every now and again why we lack energy, struggle with decisions, and have no desire to plan for the future."

"Fostering personal resilience to deal with these challenges starts with your own wellbeing, the steps you can take to change how you feel, impacting how you then act. And it doesn't need to be big. The smaller steps are some of the most powerful for helping you 'live well, to farm and croft well'."

"One of best things I do is 'connect'. When I feel myself getting a bit low, I reach out to friends, and they step in to lift my spirits."

Farmstrong's peer-to-peer led programme, is driven by scientific information and real-life stories. A range of resources and activities supports the delivery including videos, podcasts, online webinars, events, written stories, blogs and features, so individuals can decide what works best for them to make meaningful changes.

Farmstrong will also work closely with key industry stakeholders to integrate wellbeing conversations into existing events to increase the awareness and highlight the benefits to both personal and business life.

John adds the importance of signposting: "We are building an important and vital network so together we can share our own stories, listen, or simply attend a social event, and get some time away from the farm or croft."

"Our first story was with Hazel Moss, who farms with her family in Orkney. She highlighted the importance of stepping away from the day-to-day business to do something she enjoys – wild swimming. It was a hobby she came across during the pandemic but has remained a constant in her life, finding a local group to join so she connects with people at the same time. The impact of that story has seen individuals take to waters across Scotland, following her example, which is just great to see."

"Our Five Steps to Wellbeing and the Wellbeing Bank Account have already been utilised by many farmers and crofters. These are just examples of two tools we have already developed, with many more in the pipeline including stress and sleep management."

"And for those who may need further support, Farmstrong will be signposting to other charities and health professionals, so everyone gets the right care they need."

"Our industry is changing and whilst it's important our businesses evolve, we mustn't forget about our most important asset, ourselves, and that starts with our wellbeing."

The programme has kindly been supported by RHASS, NFU Mutual and Movember, as well as many other agricultural and rural organisations and individuals. Every £1 raised will be match funded by Movember, up to the value of £350,000 making donations and fundraising go even further.

To find out how you can support Farmstrong Scotland, visit www.farmstrongscotland.org.uk or contact hello@farmstrongscotland.org.uk

Farmstrong Scotland – Five Steps to Wellbeing

Investing in your wellbeing means you will have some to draw on when you are under pressure. It will also make you healthier and more productive on the farm or croft. They key is to use small, but regular improvements, so they become a habit.

The research has found that people who thrive had five things in common – the five steps to wellbeing.



Step One: Connect

Making friends and spending time with your mates makes a big difference to how you feel. Even when life is busy, try and make it a priority. When you do, the rewards will be huge.



Step Two: Take Notice

Take notice of the small things in life that make you happy. Each day take a few moments to stop and think about what's most important to you, and what you have that you really appreciate.



Step Three: Give

When you give to others, not only do they benefit, but it also makes you feel a lot happier. Consider the ways you can give back to the people around you, and don't forget about yourself too.



Step Four: Keep Learning

Being curious and learning about all sorts of things on or off the farm will help you farm and croft smarter. At whatever age, learning new things, keeps your thinking open and flexible.



Step Five: Be Active

Keeping active is a great way to feel good. Working up a sweat releases endorphins in your system that make you feel fresher and better able to cope with challenges.



Veterinary Corner

Ed Hill – Thrums Vet Group



At the time of writing we're about a month off lambing for most and as such we're carrying out lots of 'metabolic profiles'. This involves taking a blood sample from a small subset of expectant ewes to see how they are responding to the diet being fed to them – is there sufficient energy and protein there to avoid issues like twin lamb and ensure colostrum quality is optimal? If not, then we have an opportunity to tweak things in the ration (or how it's fed) in time to prevent issues.


We've also been busy carrying out lots of scab blood tests as part of the local initiative in some of the glens to really drive down scab prevalence in the area. The results so far have been really promising as many of the units that showed exposure to scab last year are now clear. Whilst there's clearly still work to do and no room for complacency, it's really encouraging to see that trying to break down stigmas, getting good communication and collaboration going, and employing the blood test has so far yielded positive results.

Our Flock Health Club recently had a really interesting meeting. We discussed ewe nutrition and had a presentation and demonstration of 'ClipFitter'; clips which are used for castration and tail docking. The evidence seems to be that they cause much less of a pain reaction than traditional rubber bands, which ultimately will have a positive knock on effect on lamb health and growth, as well as just being better welfare. Like it or not, it seems highly likely the use of rubber bands without anaesthetic will come under increasing scrutiny over the coming years so it's good to see technological solutions such as this solving the incoming problem. A few of my clients are giving them a go this year, so it will be good to get some first-hand feedback!

Unfortunately we have dealt with a few cases of abortion already. Toxoplasma and Enzootic abortion are usually the most

common causes, but SRUC reported *Campylobacter* being the most common cause last year. This tends to come in four year cycles, so hopefully will be less of an issue this year. Further south Schmallenberg seems to be causing a real issue again for many farmers, so we should be mindful of this disease, but hopefully it doesn't start causing problems here. One question we're often asked is how much abortion would be considered 'normal'. As a general rule if you get two or more abortions in a day, or more than 2% of the flock in total then it would be best to contact your vet for advice and investigation. They may also be able to access some subsidised testing from pharmaceutical companies to reduce the cost of testing. Please remember that many of the causes of abortion in sheep can cause disease in humans too, so whilst everyone hopefully everyone knows that pregnant women should not be in contact with lambing ewes, diseases like *Campylobacter* and *Salmonella* can cause disease in anyone, so follow strict hygiene measures and wear gloves when dealing with ewes that have aborted!

I hope everyone has a successful lambing and the weather in spring is kind to us, it can be a great time of year, but it can also be pretty tough if things don't go our way, so look after yourselves and anyone else having a hard time and remember there's always someone to talk to, (even your local vet!) if things aren't going well.

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NSA SCOTLAND NEWSLETTER



Remember to have a look at the previous editions of the NSA Scotland Newsletter on our website. [Click here](#)



NSA Scots Sheep 2024

Save the Date!

NSA Scots Sheep will be held on WEDNESDAY 5th June 2024

by kind permission of the Hamilton Family, Aikengall, Dunbar, East Lothian. Make sure to keep an eye out in future editions of this newsletter for more information and insights.



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