

# SHEEP FARMER

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2020

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# Insistent politicians must be held to their promises

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

The UK Government has been successful in driving Brexit down the priority list of media interests.

We saw this during the general election campaign with our now Prime Minister treating Brexit as something just to 'get done' in order to deal with lots of other more practical day-to-day issues.

Even as we approached Friday 31st January, when we officially left the EU, things were eerily quiet compared to what we were subjected to in the autumn.

I have sympathy with the Government's approach. We have to move on and we have to heal the divide. Cracking on with practical things that matter to people will help here.

And we have plenty of practical things to deal with – not just within the farm gate but external issues – that we must be optimistic about. That optimism should help to steer things in a direction that works for us.

Things like the Agriculture Bill, which has now returned to Parliament, will frame the next era for farming and food production in England and heavily influence the same in our devolved nations.

## Sustainable

As will a hopefully closely related Environment Bill and a Food Strategy, which will be looking to tackle climate change, nature loss, and provide an approach to feeding our nation in a way that promotes health and wellbeing and connects people more closely to their food.

All these important strands of work cut to the core of what sustainable farming should be about.

They relate closely to each other, arguably more in sheep production than any other farming activity, and they must pull in the same direction to achieve a common objective. This takes us directly back to the objectives

set out in all our post-referendum consultations – for farming to be more productive and profitable, and a need to maintain and further improve our environment in its widest sense.

In tandem with this we have until the end of 2020 to agree a trade deal with the EU. It's a tough timescale but the will to achieve it seems to be there from both sides.

Our politicians are insistent in their promises that: farming and food production is important, within the context of improving the environment and becoming less reliant on support; that budgets will be maintained, although used for different things; that a trade deal with the EU can be done; and that environmental and animal welfare problems won't be 'exported' by allowing lower standard foods into Britain.

Our task now is to continue to make a reasoned and valid case for sheep farming in Britain, to be conscious of public and political interests, and to hold our politicians to their promises.

## Transition

The NSA will do everything within its power to support sheep farming members to a successful transition. The events that we have planned for 2020 will focus heavily on preparing for the future.

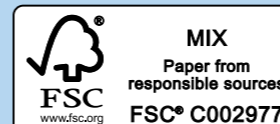
The best advice I can offer is to come along and get involved in events and roadshow meetings, and engage with your NSA regional committees. Few people find change comfortable, but it is within our grasp for the disruption caused to be a 'constructive disruption' with sheep farming coming out stronger in the long term.

I'm reminded of those well-used Darwinian words: "It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent – it is the one that is most adaptable to change."

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### Central



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### Cymru / Wales



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### Eastern



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**



Manager: **Jonathan Barber**  
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### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



Secretary: **Katie James**  
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### Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



Manager: **Heather Stoney-Grayshon**  
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### Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Brian Jamieson**



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Chairman: **Jen Craig**



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### South East



Chairman: **Nigel Durnford**



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### South West



Chairman: **Peter Derryman**



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## Face changes at Head Office

Since the previous edition of Sheep Farmer went to print, NSA Operations Director Joanne Briggs has gone on maternity leave. Everyone at NSA Head Office wishes her and her family warm wishes for the coming few months.

During her absence, NSA has split Joanne's maternity cover between two people: Louise Hart, who has taken on the role of Operations Support (Maternity Cover) supporting head office and external operations; and NSA Honorary Treasurer Dave Gregory as Operations Support (Maternity Cover), responsible for NSA regions and events. Due to the complex nature of NSA's structure, it was decided that Dave's background knowledge and understanding of the organisation would help achieve a smooth changeover.

Both Louise and Dave's contact details can be found on page 2.



Dave Gregory.

## New Coordinator for Scottish Region

NSA Scottish Region has welcomed Grace Reid to the team as NSA Scottish Region Coordinator.



Grace Reid.

Grace will be providing a key communications function for NSA Scottish region, as well as logistical and practical support, to help with its day-to-day work. This will include supporting the region, in liaison with NSA Head Office, to increase the voice of NSA in Scotland and to ensure members are kept informed, as well as representing the region at some meetings. Grace will be based at home in Perth and Kinross.

Grace's contact details can be found on page 2.

## #ColostrumIsGold campaign runs once more

NSA is once again supporting the #ColostrumIsGold campaign, originating from the Responsible Use of Medicines in Animals (RUMA) alliance and now being led by AHDB.

This campaign promotes the benefits of ensuring that every lamb gets adequate levels of good quality colostrum, namely the increased survival and growth rates of lambs. Best practice for ensuring that lambs receive sufficient colostrum is available on the RUMA website and starts with good ewe body condition and pre-lambing nutrition. Rule of thumb intake levels 210-290ml colostrum/kg body weight in the first 24 hours of life, to give a lamb essential levels of natural immunity. Crucially, the first feed should be within two hours of birth. Ensuring lambs receive adequate colostrum is one of the most effective ways, alongside hygiene, of reducing the need for antibiotics.



Adequate colostrum intake in the first 24 hours of life is essential.

## Call for NSA Sheep Event photos

With this year marking the 40th anniversary since NSA hosted its first Sheep Event, NSA is putting out a call to anyone who may have old photographs of the event, which can be displayed on the day to showcase its history. Please send scans of any pictures to enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk.



Former NSA Chief Executive John Thorley with former NSA Chairman George Hughes at Sheep 1982.

## Lambing List remains open

Members are once again reminded that NSA's lambing matchmaking service, the Lambing List, is still open to farmers looking for some extra help, and students looking for work experience. Once NSA members have signed up to the list, details of their enterprise and the help they're seeking are made available to veterinary and agricultural students seeking placements.

Add yourself to the list at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/lambing-list) or, if you don't have internet access, call NSA Head Office.



# NSA proud to announce George Hedley Memorial Award winner

NSA is proud to recognise long time supporter John Geldard as its 2020 George Hedley Memorial Award winner.

As a recognisable face to many sheep farmers across the UK, it may come as no surprise that NSA Vice President and NSA Northern Region Trustee John Geldard FRAGS has been named as the 2020 recipient of the NSA George Hedley Memorial Award in recognition of outstanding contribution to the sheep industry.

John, who farms near Kendal in Cumbria, began his career in the industry more than 45 years ago after securing a tenancy, with his wife Rachel, on a Lake District National Trust tenanted hill farm. They then went on to develop a mixed farming business.

John's family-owned business now employs 25 staff and features a beef, sheep and a layer enterprise, together with Plumgarths Farm Shop. The company supplies a locally sourced product range and supports more than 150 retail and food service outlets, as well as other regional farming businesses.

The enterprise also includes an egg packing station, which benefits numerous other surrounding layer units and provides an opportunity for farmers to contract their eggs to them. John now also takes on the role of managing operation at Plumgarths Lakeland Food Park.



NSA Vice President and Northern Region Trustee John Geldard, (pictured left) with NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, on being awarded NSA's George Hedley Memorial Award.

An avid networker, both at national and regional level, John has chaired more than 20 industry groups and organisations. He has served as NSA Northern Region Chairman and NSA National Chairman for two separate terms, and now serves as a NSA Vice President. John is also currently a director of Farmers Fresh and a director of North West Auctions.

## Dedication

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "There are few people that have given so much time and shown such dedication to NSA and the UK sheep industry as John Geldard has. He has been tireless in his efforts to serve NSA and further our standing in the world of agriculture.

"His impact will be felt at local, regional and national level, having had a great influence on both commercial and pedigree sheep sectors.

He is without doubt a most deserving recipient of the NSA George Hedley award."

On receiving the award, John says: "Throughout my time working in the sheep sector and with NSA I have always held the George Hedley award in the highest regard, due to the high-calibre of individuals who have received it in the past. So I am, therefore, extremely honoured to be named as the latest recipient.

"It must be recognised that NSA punches far above its weight in terms of its efforts to represent the sheep industry and in the activities and campaigns it participates in on a UK-wide scale. I do not believe that any other organisation represents one sector of the agricultural industry so effectively."

## Improve your sheep handling system with NSA membership giveaway

NSA has teamed up with leading agricultural handling and feeding equipment manufacturer Ritchie to give away four prize packages, each including a Ritchie portable sheep handling system, as part of its new membership recruitment prize giveaway.

Every individual who signs up as a member of NSA during 2020 will be automatically entered into the draw for a chance to win one of these fantastic prizes. Existing members can also earn multiple chances to win simply by recommending family, friends or neighbours to sign up. There is no limit to the number of entries for existing members – the more recommendations made, the more entries earned. Each lucky winner will receive one portable sheep race – a prize worth £1,000 and a great piece of

kit to help moving and handling sheep around the farm. Each member's subscription also supports NSA's work to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector and gives access to a wide range of benefits. Four prize draws will be made throughout 2020. After each one, all non-winning entries will automatically roll over to the next draw. Entries will be eligible from Monday 6th January, 2020, through to the closing date of Monday 28th December, 2020.

Information, full terms and conditions, and NSA membership forms can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/draw).



# NSA regional reports

## Marches

NSA Marches Region officeholders and committee members were pleased to welcome many new interested faces to their Annual Regional Managers Meeting (ARMM) in late January.

The meeting saw one change in position with Richard Vines stepping up from the committee to take the position of Vice Chairman, Richard was also elected as the new regional representative for the NSA English Committee.

NSA Marches Region Chairman Antony Spencer looked back on the region's activity during 2019, which included a varied offering of farm walks, Next Generation Shepherds training day, and engaging talks from industry partners. He also took time to welcome newly selected NSA Marches Region Next Generation Ambassadors for the year ahead – Annie Carr and Beth Jones.

Following the formal business, leading sheep vet Phillippa Page, Flock Health, led an engaging and interesting discussion on nutrition in the lead up to, during, and after lambing and some key health issues to be considering ensuring performance is optimised.

Also joining the meeting was NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps, who gave a thorough summary of NSA's recent involvement on many recent and ongoing policy issues.

## South East

It was good to see so many of the region's members at its recent Annual Regional Members Meeting, held at The Angel Hotel, Privett, Hampshire, in early February.

Vice Chairman Yann Le Du presented the Chairman's report, noting the year was marked by the 'changing of the guard' with the retirement of Bob Blanden and the appointment of Sarah Blake as Regional Secretary. The year also saw a successful a farm walk at Plumpton college, and a successful Sheep Health Welfare and Production conference at the University of Surrey Vet School in November 2019.

Following the routine business of the ARMM, including the election of a new Regional Chairman and Vice Chairman, attendees heard from three speakers. Adriana Vaux of The Tenant Farmers Association's gave a presentation on 'Succession Planning for Farms & Agricultural Businesses', covering a wide range of issues to be addressed by those wishing to safeguard the future of their business for the next generation.

Then NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths, after an update on all things NSA, gave a talk on his recent trip to South America. It was interesting to hear how the sheep industry functions in comparison to our own and Bryan provided an insight into the 'brave new world' outside the EU – a world in which we will need to compete for a share in the international market post-Brexit.

The final presentation of the evening was from Bruce Porter, from Farm and Country Supplies and sponsors for the evening, who the region thanked for an excellent shepherd's pie.



James Porter, from Reeth, was awarded the TI Allinson Memorial Award at Northern Region's ARMM.

## Northern

NSA Northern Region hosted its Annual Regional Members meeting in late January at The Tynedale Suite, Hexham Auction Mart.

There was a strong turnout with 50 members in attendance. The evening began with Chairman Thomas Carrick's report on a year of uncertainty in politics. Treasurer Ted Ogden reported on a stable year with the region's accounts, which included a successful NSA North Sheep event. Matt Bagley, Vice Chairman, will now represent the region's English committee. All other office holders remain unchanged.

Carl Stephenson, Barnard Castle, announced the winner of the T.I. Allinson Memorial Award as Mr James Porter, from The Riddings at Reeth. James has been breeding and showing sheep all his life. He has worked tirelessly to promote the northern sheep industry for many years and is held in high esteem by sheep breeders throughout the UK. The evening then saw Chris Adamson, NSA Activities and Campaigns Officer, give an overview of the on-going work by the NSA. The evening was rounded off by 2019 NSA North Sheep host Richard Frankland, who entertained members by sharing his experiences behind the scenes, both before and during this successful event at Settle.

## Northern Ireland

NSA Northern Ireland Region held its Annual Regional Members Meeting at the Ross Park Hotel, Ballymena, in early February.

Next Generation Ambassador, and Regional Trustee, Johnny Farmer, Portglenone, was elected as Chairman, with Fermanagh-based Cheviot breeder Alistair Armstrong taking the Vice Chairman role. After a long and dedicated term as treasurer, Ian McDonnell, from Portaferry, handed over the role to former Chairman Brian Jamieson, from Ballintoy.

Katie James, NSA Communications Officer, then gave an overview of current NSA work. The main speaker for the evening was a young farmer from Wales. Rhys Edwards manages the family farm with his parents in South Wales. Comprising 91ha (225 acres), Hendre Ifan Goch farm ranges from between 600 and 1,300ft, with an annual rainfall of 2,000mm, the farm is currently supporting 600 ewes and 150 ewe lambs running dry. Rhys's presentation generated a lot of interest and a good Q&A session followed.



Rhys Edwards, from south Wales, delivered an informative talk and discussion at Northern Ireland's ARMM.



# Busy seminar schedule at Eastern Region Winter Fair

As winter draws on, NSA members from Eastern Region and further afield are invited once again to join NSA Eastern Region at its fifth Winter Fair.

The event, which takes place on Friday 28th February, will see a host of trade stands, exhibitors and speakers flock to Melton Mowbray Market to share information and discussion about the industry.

A range of knowledgeable speakers, from across the industry, will speak during a wide offering of seven seminars throughout the day. The focus of the talks will be practical and helpful information to make your sheep flocks more profitable. There will also be plenty of time for you to ask questions.

For those arriving earlier in the day, there will be the opportunity to hear from AHDB's Nerys Wright, who has been looking into the positive effect that the correct ewe body score can have on flock production.

This will be followed by a presentation on 'Healthy livestock produce sustainable food', led by vet Kat Baxter-Smith BVetMed CertAVP(EM) MRCVS. Kat is Veterinary Advisor to the Ruminant



Seminars will take place throughout the day.

Business Unit of MSD and during her seminar she will explain how good flock health is crucial to sustainable food production.

## Arable sector

Next on the agenda will be renowned and respected Independent Sheep Consultant Lesley Stubbings, whose seminar – 'Sheep: a profitable alternative to arable crops' – will offer attendees the latest ideas and information about sheep in the arable sector, including the pitfalls and benefits.

Later on, Jo Hodgkins and James White will share their experiences of running sheep on an arable unit discussing their experiences. James moved to an arable farm and will discuss the changes he has seen. Jo will share an agronomy point of view about the best crops and mixes to grow.

## Seminar timetable

- 10.30am – Nerys Wright, AHDB  
Effect of ewe body condition score on lamb weights to weaning
- 11.00am – Kat Baxter-Smith BVetMed CertAVP(EM) MRCVS  
Healthy livestock produce sustainable food
- 11.30am – Lesley Stubbings, Consultant  
Sheep: a profitable alternative to arable crops
- 12.00noon – Jo Hodgkins & James White  
Sheep Flock within arable farming
- 12.30pm – Mike Gooding, Director Farmers Fresh  
What next for UK lamb?
- 1.00pm – Patricia Bush, Defra  
Environmental Land Management Schemes
- 2.30pm – Ellie Phipps, NSA  
Setting the sheep farming record straight

Mike Gooding, Director Farmers Fresh, will also speak to visitors about the current trends in the export markets.

Staying with the theme of what sheep farmers can expect in the future, Patricia Bush from Defra will be introducing those present to the proposed ELM schemes.

The seminar timetable will be concluded by NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps, who will be continuing the discussions from NSA's 'setting the record straight' talks.

## Cymru/Wales

At the annual meeting on Wednesday 19th February, at Hafod y Hendre from 11am, you will see NSA continuing with the theme of 'setting the record straight'.

There will also be presentations by Claire Jesse, who has diversified into lamb bacon, and Nicola Drew, who is NFU Woman Farmer of the year and NSA Next Generation Ambassador. A hot lunch will be served and it is essential to book in advance. Contact NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Development Officer Helen Roberts to book. *Contact details on page 2.*

## South West

NSA South West Region will be welcoming Phil Hadley, AHDB International Market Development Director, to its Annual RMM, on Tuesday 18th February at 7.30pm.

He will be talking about 'international markets and exports' and exploring where our exports may go in the future. Attendees at the Stockman's restaurant, in the Exeter Livestock Centre, will hear from NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps, who will be updating the meeting on the work going on at NSA Head Office. The presentations will be followed by a buffet supper.

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# Anticipation for NSA ScotSheep

Preparations are well underway for Scotland's national sheep event NSA Scotsheep, which will be held on Wednesday 3rd June, 2020, at Robert and Hazel McNee's Over Finlarg unit, at Tealing, Dundee.

Organised by NSA Scottish Region, livestock producers will be able to see first-hand how the couple and their young family has built up a profitable business since moving to the 300ha (740 acre) farm in 2011. A full programme of events has been organised for the day, which will have something of interest for everyone.

"We are delighted that the McNee family, at Over Finlarg, have agreed to be our hosts for Scotsheep 2020," says NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Jennifer Craig.

"The farm is in a great location and provides a varied and successful business that will be well worth a visit."

Robert and Hazel have made huge improvements and changes to Over Finlarg during the past nine years, and it's now home to a well-known beef and sheep enterprise, including 1,100 head of breeding sheep and 180 pedigree cattle.

## Strong averages

The duo has become noted consignors at both Stirling Bull Sales and the Luing Cattle Society's Premier sale at Castle Douglas, producing strong averages and lead prices in the sale ring.

Around 40ha (100 acres) of cereals and turnips is grown for home use, allowing the McNees to be self-sufficient.

The organising committee for the event is chaired by neighbouring farmer Willy Millar, and event organiser is NSA Scottish Region secretariat Euan Emslie.



Event Chairman Willy Millar (pictured left) with hosts Robert and Hazel McNee and children Kate and Alan.



The McNee family run 1,100 sheep and 180 pedigree cattle.



ScotSheep 2018 saw visitors from all over Scotland, and further afield.



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[www.nsascotland.org](http://www.nsascotland.org)

Further information from the Website or Organiser  
Euan Emslie - Tel: 07718 908523 Email: [ewan@nsascotland.org](mailto:ewan@nsascotland.org)

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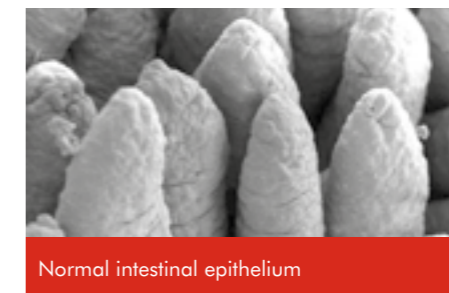
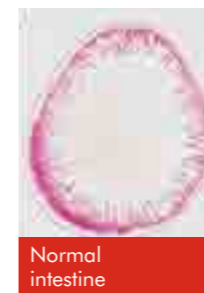
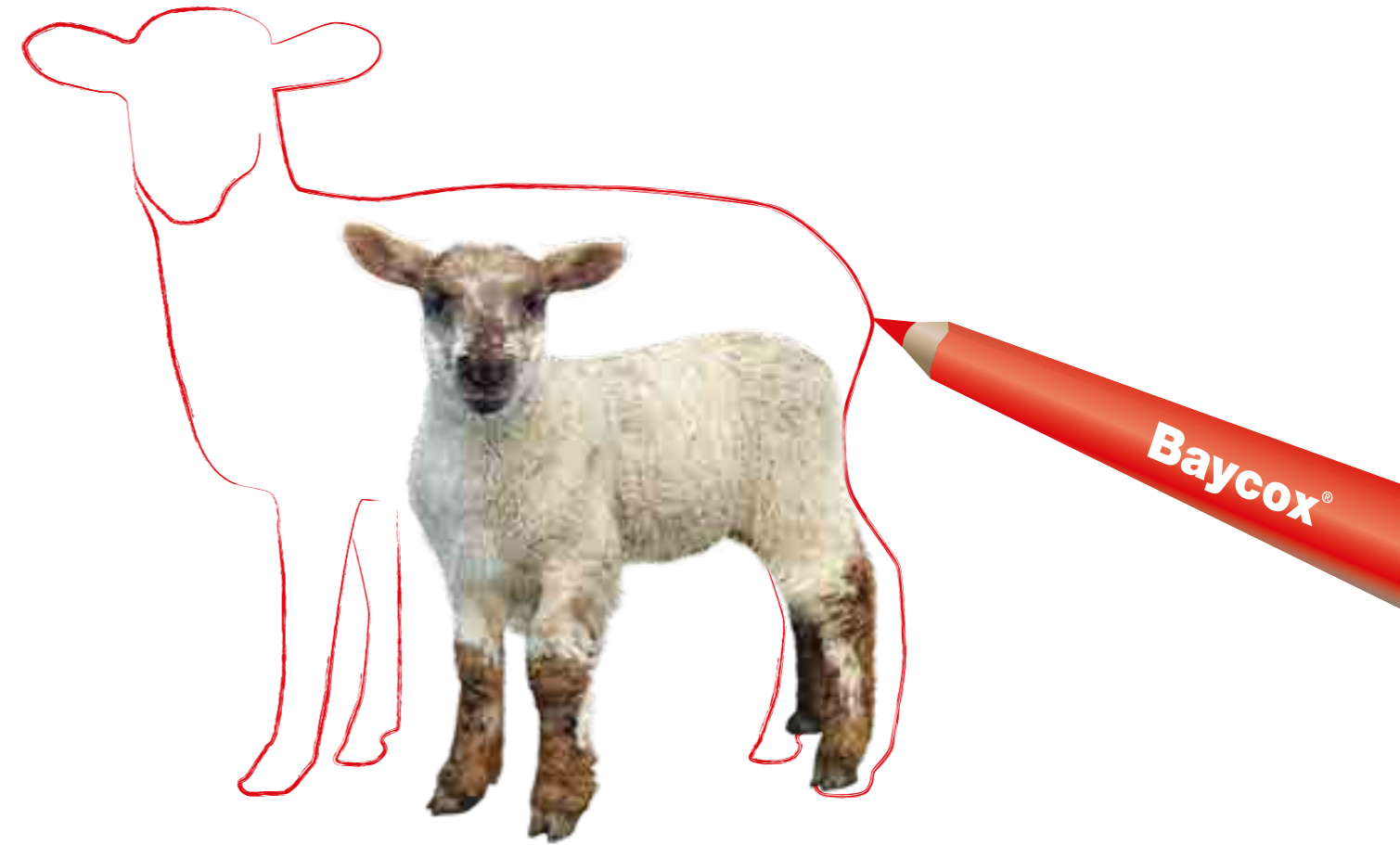
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# NSA Sheep Event set to celebrate the diversity of the UK sheep industry

Despite only being at the beginning of 2020, eyes are firmly set on the return of NSA Sheep Event this summer, with plans well underway for the flagship event of the association.

Held on Tuesday 28th July 2020, it is free to attend for NSA members on presentation of a current NSA membership card.

This year will mark the 40th anniversary of the popular event, which will be held at the Three Counties Showground in Malvern, and it is, therefore, a fitting time for the event to recognise the value of all aspects of the UK sheep industry and celebrate the current diversity of the sector.

Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, comments: "Despite everything that has faced our sheep farmers in recent years, our industry is in a secure place and is ready to face the next hurdle."

## Diversity

"The structure and variety of systems in the sector is recognised as its strength, and means that we fit the direction that is being set by all governing bodies.

"To recognise this positive change in outlook, this year's NSA Sheep Event will celebrate our

industry diversity by highlighting the range of breeds, systems, business sizes, and people who work within it."

Firmly established as the principle technical sheep event, NSA Sheep Event 2020 will provide knowledge and inspiration for producers to fine-tune their businesses.

## Seminars

Phil explains: "We will be very fortunate to be joined, once again by leading sheep industry experts, along with more than 250 trade stands. There will be an even more packed programme of free technical seminars, demonstrations and workshops than we have ever offered attendees before."

"The event will, of course, also feature the final of the NSA Next Generation Shepherds competition. Our qualifying young sheep farmers from across our NSA regions will go head to head in a demonstration of their enthusiasm, knowledge and skill."

Following the success of previous years, NSA will also be running a day of farm tours prior to the event on Monday 27th July 2020, which will include visits to two leading sheep farms.

Phil continues: "The farm tours will visit two contrasting sheep farming systems, highlighting again the diversity within the industry and how different business models can be successful."

"Following years of

uncertainty, we appear to be nearing a time where the whole of British agriculture may have clarity as to which direction we're heading. Sheep farming has never been more critical to the wider industry and environment, with several Government Bills linking the benefits that sheep production has to restoring the countryside and demonstrating the critical role we have in British Agriculture."

The evening before NSA Sheep Event, a dinner will again be held to celebrate the industry and giving members, industry partners, exhibitors, sponsors, and other NSA supporters the opportunity to enjoy a delicious three-course meal – featuring British lamb – and a chance to network ahead of the busy event day.

Phil concludes: "NSA Sheep 2020 is an essential visit for anyone in the sector and will celebrate the breadth and depth of UK sheep farming. Myself and all of the team at NSA look forward to welcoming everyone to what promises to be another hugely enjoyable and successful event."

Further information on NSA Sheep Event will be shared in all issues of Sheep Farmer running up to the day.

For more information on the event, visit [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk).



Visitors from across the UK are invited to join the event on Tuesday 28th July.



The future for farmers and their sheep is set to change under the policy set out in the Agriculture Bill.

# Agriculture Bills and the future of farm support

We have, at long last, left the EU under the agreement of the withdrawal deal. This deal enables us to continue, without too much disruption, until 31st December, leaving much to do to ensure a trade deal is in place after this date when the UK will break away fully.

For the sake of our industry, the UK needs to have secured a trade deal with the EU, or potentially other large trading partners, in order to ensure our exports can continue next year without falling into a WTO tariff situation, as was feared in 2019.

NSA's focus throughout the year will be on providing a voice for sheep farmers to ensure that Defra, and the negotiating teams representing the UK, keep the values and interests of UK farmers at the heart of their awareness.

## Standards

This will include heavy promotion of the high animal welfare, environmental, and food safety standards that we work to here in the UK. NSA recently received confirmation that UK standards would not be compromised by Minister for Farming George Eustice and that UK farmers would be respected and considered as decisions are taken.

However, there is far more to work on than just future trade, with two Agriculture Bills working their way through their respective Parliaments. The Agriculture (Retained EU Law and Data) (Scotland) Bill was introduced to Holyrood in early November 2019, while the Agriculture Bill (2019/20) had its first reading in the House of Commons in mid-January this year.

Both Bills exist to grant the respective governments the power to amend agricultural

policy post-Brexit. As agriculture is devolved, this means that Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales will have powers to amend the regulations individually as nations, rather than Agricultural changes being regulated across the entire UK at once.

Within the Agriculture Bill (2019/20) put forward by the UK Parliament, Wales and Northern Ireland will have powers enabled by this Bill until such a time when the Devolved Administrations are in a position to put forward their own enabling Bills. The Welsh Government has suggested this will come from them in late 2020, as it is still currently consulting on what form future support should take.

## Additions

The Agriculture Bill (2019/20) by the UK Parliament further offers details on the future of farm payments. The now familiar ELM Schemes maintains the timetable originally set out in November 2018. While the Bill has fallen in and out of Parliament since then, the most recent reading demonstrates that most of the principles remain unchanged with some welcome additions, including recognising the importance of food security and soil health as a 'public good' – an area sheep can thrive in (see page 28).

The amended Bill also recognises the importance of native breeds and work is underway to assess how these breeds should be protected into the future. Furthermore, there has also been a reassurance that the Government has ringfenced funding for the duration of this Parliament. This means that until December 2024 there is consistent money put aside to support agriculture, at the same level it is at for 2020.

Meanwhile Farm Payments for 2020, across all areas of the UK, are secured and all farmers who receive BPS should do so for this year. What comes thereafter is ambiguous but it will depend on which area of the UK you live in.

NSA is clear that that Bill does not go far

## Skin-on sheep (smokies) discussions ongoing

Protocols covering operating procedures, microbiological testing, and veterinary medicine residue testing for the production of skin-on sheep products for the ethnic market here in the UK have been drawn up and will be discussed with FSA Wales (who are leading FSA involvement in the area) in mid-February.

Currently this practice is illegal largely because, for sheep, the inspection of the carcase can only be done with the skin removed. But also because of the unknowns of vet residue behaviours in the skin and subcutaneous layer. NSA is hopeful that we will soon have agreement on a way forward to legalise this production and trade, although we still need a legislative change regarding meat inspection.

There is a thriving demand here in the UK for these products and current supply is of an unregulated nature. This not only leads to safety concerns but also potentially encourages illegal trade and even the theft of sheep. Our aim is to bring it above the surface and within a regulated and safe framework.

NSA will update its members in its weekly email update as work progresses.

Leaner and older ewes are prime to be put into the illegal smokie trade.



enough in some areas and continues to call for more assurance that UK food standards will be protected from lower-standard imports. It is also clear that maintaining the provision of nutritious, quality food is in the public interest and NSA is concerned there is real risk in leaving it to the vagaries of a purely profit-driven marketplace.

While future schemes are still under development, there is opportunity for NSA representatives, across all Devolved Administrations, to continue to influence policymakers and ensure future schemes work both with and for farmers. NSA encourages anyone with thoughts regarding these schemes to contact their local NSA committee.

## Understanding the Northern Ireland protocol

With Brexit officially a 'go', there are many questions about the future of Northern Ireland and what the Prime Minister's deal means for the region.

It is important to note that the softer Brexit, which was being prepared by Theresa May's administration, and the Brexit now being delivered by Mr Johnson, are very different.

The agreement for Northern Ireland as it stands is complicated, and work is now underway on the protocols to deliver what has been agreed and do everything possible to ensure it happens smoothly.

Northern Ireland does remain a part of the United Kingdom and your ability to travel to and from Northern Ireland as a British citizen will not be affected by Brexit. But your ability to trade will be affected and there will be some form of border inspection post between the British mainland and Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland protocol will impact the way Northern Ireland can trade with the rest of the UK.



Northern Ireland will be in the unique position of being a part of the UK's customs territory - meaning any new trade agreements signed by the UK will benefit Northern Ireland, but within the rules and regulations of the EU's customs union. This is to ensure that goods can move between Northern Ireland and the South without the need for a hard border.

## Tariff

Exporting something from elsewhere in the UK into Northern Ireland will not be hit with a tariff, unless said good is deemed to be at risk of going on into the EU. Northern Ireland will

remain aligned with EU single market rules.

Because the UK Government has made it clear that we will not be seeking regulatory alignment with the EU, there will be a need for checks from goods entering and leaving Northern Ireland from the wider UK.

In 2025, Northern Ireland (by way of its elected representatives) will be given the option to reject or continue with the protocol. If they decide to reject the protocol, a joint UK and EU committee will come together to decide how to deal with the border issue in the future. There would be two years from rejecting the protocol and the protocol ceasing to exist.

## NSA continues to tackle negative media

In recent weeks and months, NSA members have increasingly been in contact with NSA Head Office regarding negative press surrounding farming and eating meat. NSA agrees with the concerns and has been very busy with various press releases, letters and responses.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker comments: "On behalf of NSA I would like to assure members that NSA is putting a lot of effort into countering these claims and is pleased to see that we now have levy bodies and other organisations far more prepared and ready to engage than was previously the case. Our activity has included things such as letters to media outlets, critical press statements and, where possible, television and radio interviews to point out the inaccuracies. NSA has no intention of slowing down in these efforts and will continue to work as hard as we can to ensure these negative messages don't get the monopoly in media coverage and that the sustainability and light environmental footprint of sheep farming is better understood."



NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker is a frequent face for defending the industry on many news programmes, both radio and television.



# Discussions on future direction ongoing

By Jen Craig, Regional Chairman



In early January NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker and I met with Alan Clarke and Lesley Cameron from QMS. While NSA Scottish Region has a key working relationship with QMS in terms of policy and their marketing work, this meeting was focused on another vital element – working together.

We discussed a lot of areas from continued contributions in this magazine and ensuring that QMS has opportunities to share its work through NSA at Royal Highland, through to making sure that there is an NSA Scottish Region presence in QMS groups, such as the red meat resilience group.

The Sheep Scab Industry Led Working Group, run by SRUC, has been refreshed and I will be NSA's representative on it going forward. Discussions within this group are, currently, confidential so I'm not allowed to share any content from those meetings. However I am keen to ensure that members are aware that this is ongoing and NSA Scottish Region is active in this area.

Alongside NSA Scottish Region Vice Chairman Maimie Paterson and NSA Scottish Region Coordinator Grace Reid, I visited Scottish Land and Estates headquarters, in Musselburgh, to discuss its publication #Route2050 – a

direction of travel for Scottish land management to 2050:

The document explores what the priorities should be for land management in Scotland in the context of the climate change emergency and following almost 50 years of being tied to the Common Agricultural Policy. It calls on the Scottish Government to introduce significant changes to the policy to ensure a resilient, efficient and thriving rural sector.

## Frustration

There was a shared sense of frustration at the Government's lack of direction since Brexit was postponed in March 2019, as well as concern that next year's Holyrood election could be another distraction.

We also discussed LFASS payments – a lack of budget is detrimental to the future and is fundamental to ensuring livestock remains in upland areas. An alternative is needed because investment to be based upon a regional approach and not nationwide. I'd further like to welcome Grace Reid to the team, supporting the region as its coordinator. We're very pleased to have her onboard and Grace, as well as myself and other NSA Scottish Region committee members, will continue to represent the region at the number of meetings already lined up, and more, in coming months.

# Cymru/Wales continue scab work

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



During the past year it feels like the industry has stood still with all the uncertainty of Brexit. But now we seem to have light at the end of the tunnel as we can move forwards towards creating new trade deals ready for 2021. Will this mean an end to the uncertainty or not?

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has sat on stakeholder groups discussing sheep scab and we are now at the stage where, with other industry partners, we will help to put in a bid for RDPW funding. This is something that we have found frustrating because our Minister Lesley Griffiths announced in 2019 that there was £5 million available to help tackle this problem and a further season looks likely to be lost.

to discuss next steps and continue discussions around our response to the Sustainable Farming and our Land consultation. NSA Welsh Commons Forum held an interesting UK Commons Graziers Gathering, which focused on sustainability of livestock grazing in relation to health and nutrition, global warming and greenhouse gases, wildlife and biodiversity.

The short conference explored progressive ways of collaborative working on commons, and speakers included HCC, Bangor University, and the Game and Wildlife Conservancy Trust, as well as representatives from other commons.

NSA is one of the partners in the Big Farmland Bird Count and John and Sarah Yeomans, from Adfa, have recently taken part in a workshop to help with this project. There is still time for you to download a count sheet and take part too. Counts need to be submitted by 17th February, 2020.

More information can be found at <https://www.bfbc.org.uk>.

# Politicians return to Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Regional Development Officer



NSA Northern Ireland Region is part of a Scab Information Group that is headed by Paul Crawford, President of the Association of Vets Practicing in Northern Ireland, and other relevant industry bodies.

The aim of this group is to raise the profile of scab – particularly its identification, treatment and prevention – and there will be ongoing promotion and knowledge transfer to help reduce the incidence in Northern Ireland. Already, due to information circulated, more sheep farmers are realising that sheep showers are not effective in the control of scab and the only way to eliminate scab is to plunge dip.

As a result of the General Election in December, the two main political parties in Northern Ireland got quite a scare as they each lost a seat. The Secretary of State announced that we should have a local election if the parties could not come to any agreement by the 13th January, 2020.

It's amazing how some things can concentrate the mind. After three years of no real effort to govern, the fear of losing more seats, locally, resulted in our region now having now, once again, putting an assembly in place. But, just to endear themselves to the voters, they immediately increased their salaries by more than £1,000 per year. We now have a Minister of Agriculture, Edwin Poots, who has a working knowledge of agriculture and we hope for some sensible decisions soon.



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## Harnessing success!





# Latest reports from NSA Samuel Wharry Award recipients

Both recipients of NSA Samuel Wharry Award, delivered in conjunction with the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, Charlie Beaty and Marie Prebble, are now coming to the end of their study trips. Their reports are beginning to take shape and they will shortly be sitting down to finalise their final drafts, which will be shared in Sheep Farmer, as well as presented at NSA Sheep event 2020. Here Marie gives us a teaser, while Charlie fills us in on her activities in New Zealand.

## Marie

Having spent some rainy days in the office making a start on analysing my shrearer survey results, I've spotted a few trends. Here I'll treat you to a few spoilers.



Many shearing contractors frequently experience conditions that are not ideal for shearing, including inadequate penning and labour, daggy sheep, lack of shade, or shelter.

Almost all shearer respondents said they sheared full sheep. A full sheep's gut can account for 15% of its body weight making them much heavier than necessary, and sheep sit very uncomfortably when full. I always liken it to shearing after a three-course dinner – never a good idea.

This corresponds to the farmers' survey, which shows that 51% of respondents are not emptying sheep out at all, and many more only for between one and three hours ahead of shearing, which is insufficient. Many farmers state that they 'don't see the importance' or 'it never occurred' to them to empty sheep out before shearing.

## Practical solutions

Any practical solutions to making the job less stressful for sheep and easier for shearers should be considered. Of course there are many situations, particularly on hill farms, where there are no facilities to empty sheep out. But even yarding them in a confined area can help.

With only 48% of farmer respondents reporting that their wool clip covers their shearing costs (which includes 24 respondents who clip their own) there seems little incentive for farmers to invest in improved infrastructure for shearing. More than 77% of farmer respondents sell their clip to British Wool, and more than 87% of all farmer respondents do not think enough is being done to promote British wool products.

I still have a lot more work to do before I can write up my report, but I have started drafting the different sections and subject areas to be covered. It all feels vaguely reminiscent of writing my university dissertation, but I intend to have to pull far fewer all-nighters on this one. Once again I'd like to say a huge thank you to NSA and The Staple for this amazing opportunity.



## Charlie

I'm more than halfway through my New Zealand tour, and it has been nonstop. I started (and will be finishing) my tour in the North Island, although I am currently visiting a station near Oamaru, in the South Island.

Since landing in Auckland in early January, I've visited nine farms with another four on the cards before I head home in mid-February. Each farm I've visited has been completely different, from 250ha (618 acres) of rolling hills stocking 2,400 ewes and 50 store cattle, to 6,300ha (15,567 acres) of rugged hill country here at Dasher Station, stocking 7,000 ewes and 400 cattle. I've visited an organic farm, where grazing to manage parasite burdens is the priority, and a stud property, where they're breeding lambs for parasite resilience (not resistance).

Grazing has been a priority for all the farms. Rotational grazing keeps grass quality high, with cattle topping 'stemmy' grass and maintain quality for sheep. Although broadleaf weeds are an issue, grass weeds are deemed more problematic. They are harder to control and of poor nutritional quality.

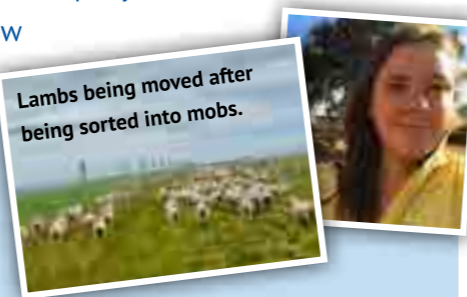
## Forage crops

I am now at Dasher Station, near Oamaru, where Grant and Charlotte McNaughton have farmed for seven years. The station is predominantly steep hill country, with 570ha (1,408 acres) of croppable area. Mind you, my idea of 'croppable area' has significantly changed since arrival. Land I would have deemed too rocky or steep has been cultivated for forage crops, which will then be followed by a long-term grass ley.

Lambing 7,000 ewes here is tough, with heavily in-lamb ewes outside in snowy conditions, followed by bitterly cold winds as they lamb. This year the McNaughtons scanned their ewes at a pregnancy rate of 155% and aim to sell around 130%. Most of the lambs are sold off in large mobs as store lambs, from February to early April, in order to preserve feed for the ewes. As many lambs as possible are finished on-farm, although this number varies year-to-year, depending on the weather. The average annual rainfall here is around 900mm but, despite this, the station is not deemed 'summer safe' and often experiences dry summers. This significantly limits grass growth going into the autumn.

Grazing management is the number-one priority here, with feed budgeting constantly being used to assess the station's ability to carry its stock. While soil fertility and variety selection are all major factors contributing to the quality and viability of the permanent pasture, Grant says that good grazing practice is also essential to success.

Lambs being moved after being sorted into mobs.



# NSA Next Generation quiz the people in power

As part of a new offering for the NSA Next Generation programme, a group of enthusiastic young sheep farmers with a keen eye on agricultural policy travelled to London, in January with NSA Head office staff with NSA to take part in a tour of Westminster and to meet with some key names.

The group, joined by NSA Communications Officer Katie James and NSA Policy Officer Ellie Phipps, had the opportunity to enjoy a tour of Parliament, meet with several MPs and civil servants within the House of Lords, and discuss future farm assurance with the new Red Tractor Beef and Lamb Technical Manager.

The visit kicked off with a sit-down dinner at the prestigious Farmers Club in Whitehall. The attendees had the opportunity to ask NSA President Lord Inglewood about life in the House of Lords, as well as Defra representatives Sian Davies and Andrew Powley who were quizzed extensively about their work at Defra. After their shepherds pies the group heard more from Andrew, who joined Defra from a background of hill farming in Cumbria.

Following an interesting and insightful



Attendees had a tour of Parliament before meeting with cross party MPs to discuss issues affecting the sheep sector.

evening, attendees were up bright and early for an enthusiastic tour of the Houses of Parliament. This took them into both the House of Commons and the House of Lords, where they were able to learn more about the history of the palace – from the crests to the practical workings.

## Questions

After the tour, the group sat down again with Lord Inglewood, this time joined by a group of willing MPs and Defra representatives. The group had the opportunity to ask questions, which focused on the future of farm support and ensuring food standards were maintained in future trade agreements.

Katie says: "As always seems to be the case with any Next Generation activity, we were lucky to be joined by such a knowledgeable and motivated group of young sheep farmers. All members of the group took advantage of the chance to question a group of MPs and it was encouraging to see many MPs supporting NSA's

position and recognising the importance of supporting the next generation."

The group also met with Laura Beck, Red Tractor Beef and Lamb Technical Manager, who was interested to hear their thoughts on what future farm assurance should look to cover and what they envisioned the future of the industry to be.

Katie adds: "This was the first time such a trip has taken place for NSA Next Generation and without doubt it was a huge success. Thanks must go to everyone involved in the various dinners, tours and discussions that the group enjoyed as part of the trip.

A particular thank you must also go to NSA President Lord Inglewood, who kindly sponsored our tour of the Houses of Parliament. I am confident that all attending, both from the farming side and the political, will have taken away much to consider from the informative two days".

Working together to keep the sheep industry healthy

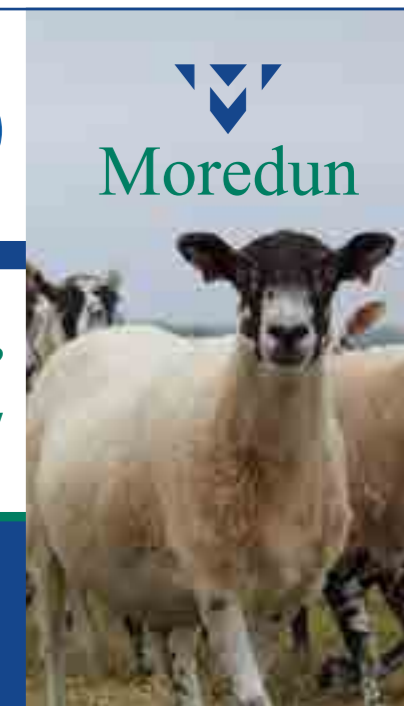


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# Introducing NSA Next Generation Ambassadors for 2020

Having received a record number of applicants to be part of the 2020 cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, it was always going to be a tough decision to select just 12 enthusiastic young sheep farmers on interview day in January.

Joining NSA Communications Officer Katie James to complete the difficult interviewing task were: Edward Adamson, NSA Northern Ireland Development Officer, sheep farmer from County Antrim and long-term supporter of

NSA Next Generation; Jen Craig, NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Lanarkshire sheep farmer and NSA Next Generation Ambassador (2014 intake); Martyn Fletcher, NSA English Committee representative, Wiltshire sheep farmer and long-term supporter of NSA Next Generation; and Jacob Anthony, Glamorgan sheep farmer, NSA Next Generation Ambassador (2016 intake) and Farmers Weekly Young Farmer of the Year 2018.

Katie comments: "Having already scrutinised a high number of applications from enthusiastic young sheep farmers to produce a shortlist of interviewees, we were well aware that the task of selecting just 12 young shepherds to become the latest recruitments to the Next Generation

Ambassador programme would be a difficult one.

"I was pleased to be joined by an excellent interview panel to help select candidates who we were confident would benefit from the career and personal development the scheme offers, as well as those who have the potential to be great ambassadors for NSA and their regions. We were all in agreement on our final 12 and look forward to meeting them again soon to begin the Ambassador programme for 2020."

Meet our newest NSA Next Generation Ambassadors...



## Jack Charleton (25) Derbyshire



As newly promoted assistant farm manager at Chatsworth Estate, it is clear that Jack is already brimming with the enthusiasm required to go far in the sheep industry. Having grown up actively involved on his family's farm in Northumberland, he has progressed gaining experience on farms across England as well as New Zealand. Jack recognises that there is still much to learn and he is hopeful that the Next Generation programme can help him to achieve this. Jack may already be a familiar face to members in the NSA Central Region as he is already involved on the regional committee, finding time to balance this with a busy work life and his active role in his local Young Farmers Club. He has also qualified to represent the region at the final of the NSA Next Generation Shepherds competition at NSA Sheep 2020 this July.

Jack says he is looking forward to using his role as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador to help promote the industry further, particularly to more young people through social media.

## Annie Carr (25) Herefordshire



Annie recognises that her future working as a shepherd may move her away from the family farm, therefore is keen to explore her options for the future and is looking forward to seeing how the Next Generation programme can help her to do this. She is currently is running 500 ewes alongside her parents on their sheep and arable farm in the shadow of the Malvern Hills, just a stones throw from NSA Head Office. Annie has set herself a goal for the future, regardless of where she ends up, to have an expanding flock of high health status and production and to farm in an ecologically and environmentally conscious way. Promoting the industry is something Annie is particularly passionate about, she says: "With the NSA platform behind me, I am hoping to be more active in promoting lamb whether that is within the media, going into schools or being part of discussion groups. I believe it's very important to promote our sector and have a voice that can be heard, particularly in current times where red meat and farming are constantly being portrayed in a negative light."

## Beth Jones (25) Herefordshire



During her Next Generation interview it was clear that Beth is a great advocate for the importance of supporting both our local livestock markets and local abattoirs, recognising their importance to rural communities. Beth produces both breeding stock and finished lambs from her family farm, near Hay on Wye in Herefordshire, and is driven by setting both herself and her business targets to continually improve performance. She is not dismissive of the challenges that the sector faces and she hopes her experience as an ambassador can help her deal with these. Beth comments: "Sheep farming isn't just about sheep, it's also about being able to run a business, have personal skills to communicate well, the ability to plan plus many other skills, but most importantly farmers need resilience. Sheep farming is an incredible way of life but it can be very tough too, so being able to respond and have a united voice about the current challenge we face and the future that lies ahead is vital". As an ambassador Beth says she hopes to be able to listen to other NSA members and their challenges and voices, while hopefully inspiring others to also join NSA so that as many sheep farmers as possible are represented.

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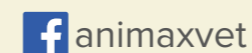


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## Jodie Swan (24) Cumbria

Jodie started her own contract shepherding business and flock of Mules and North Country Cheviots with the help from the Princes Trust and Farmer Network. She is already promoting the benefits that these organisations and the NSA gives to help young people to help them succeed in the sheep industry. Jodie is looking forward to gaining more personal skills and knowledge through the Next Generation programme to enable her to continue this promotion more effectively.

Jodie is ambitious for her future in the industry and is aiming to expand her upland sheep farming business, based near Cartmel in Cumbria, by taking on either rented ground or purchasing land locally. She's also increasing her self employed work, by investing in equipment and gaining experience that will enable her to specialise in certain areas of shepherding, such as sheep dipping or scanning.



## David Hodges (28) County Antrim

David will certainly be well placed to pass on his experiences from the NSA Next Generation programme, as he balances a busy farming life alongside lecturing in Agriculture at a college in Northern Ireland.

At home, David farms with his father on a mixed enterprise of sheep, beef and poultry across two sites totalling 40ha (100 acres). Running 200 commercial ewes, David is keen to maximise productivity of his current flock before increasing numbers up to around 300 ewes. He is also considering moving to a closed flock with an aim of breeding something nearing the 'ideal ewe'.

As an Next Generation Ambassador, David is looking forward to learning new skills, increasing his knowledge and meeting new like-minded people who share the same passion for the industry as he does. He comments "I always get real enjoyment and interest from talking to other young farmers particularly the difference in how each person's enterprise works. Sometimes in farming, we are guilty of not sharing ideas and information with our neighbours, so I think the Next Generation programme will be a great opportunity to do this".



## Amy Jo Reid (24) Moray

As a self-employed shepherd, Amy Jo is currently running a 700-ewe organic contract for the Drummur Estate, producing organic prime lambs and replacement females. Amy also has 200 breeding ewes of her own and gimmers 200 hogs annually on seasonal and annual grass lets. This is an enterprise that will surely set her in good stead to help her achieve her five-year goal of securing long-term grazing to develop her flock further – whether that be owned, tenanted or as part of a share farming agreement.

Amy already has a keen interest in getting further involved in the industry through Young Farmers, where she sits on the Agri and Rural Affairs committee. She also competes in the Next Generation Shepherd competition and other NSA Scottish Region events.

On starting her role as an NSA Next Generation Ambassador Amy says: "This Ambassador opportunity will hopefully leave me with more skills to advance my contribution to the industry and leave me better informed about the UK sheep sector, as well as increasing my contacts and meeting like-minded sheep farmers. I can't wait to get started!".



## Alasdair Hill (27) Somerset

Managing a mixed enterprise of 450 ewes and 150 suckler beef cattle, Ali has been tireless in his efforts to gain more knowledge to further improve the system since taking on the position almost 18 months ago. Having joined NSA for several recent events during the past year, Ali has seen some of the benefits the NSA Next Generation programme can deliver and is keen to gain more in his role as ambassador this year and into the future.

Ali says he is looking forward to growing the profitability of the sheep flock at the farm during the next five years and is interested to explore the option of adding a small rare breed flock to the system for direct sales to the public.



## Harry Morgan (25) Wiltshire

As a demonstration of his ambition to progress successfully in the sheep sector, Harry noted many targets that he would like to achieve in the next five years as part of his application to join the NSA Next Generation programme this year. Most notably, he would like to focus on improving the taste and eating quality of sheepmeat which he believes is one of the key factors the sheep sector needs to be looking at. Harry is currently employed as a shepherd at Beeswax Dyson Farming, lambing a mixed flock of 1,500 Innovibred Aberfield-type ewes and 500 North of England Mules. In addition to this, Harry also manages to run 150 Welsh ewes on rented ground back near his childhood home in South Wales. Already keen to promote the industry to the younger generation, Harry is just about to start 'Facetime a farmer' and is heavily involved in the farm's Open Farm Sunday each year.



## Dylan Laws (32) Devon

As one of the lucky few young farmers to have a county council farm, Dylan splits his time between managing the 400-ewe flock with a role as a fieldperson for one of the UK's leading retailers, sourcing quality West country lamb. In addition to this he has also added a glamping site and livery to the farm business, based near Exeter, alongside his partner Suzanne.

During the next five years, Dylan says that he hopes to be sheep farming full time with a system that is adaptable to the pressures and requirements the industry will face during the next 10 years, while also providing a good work-life balance.

This work-life balance is something that Dylan believes farmers should consider more. He says, "My feelings on this have changed significantly during the past few years. I used to think we should be paying ourselves what we are worth, and although it is important not to undervalue ourselves, I now think that provided we're happy doing what we are doing with our stock, that is the most important thing."



## Erinna Rogers (26) Powys

Erinna considers herself very lucky to have the opportunity to farm on the Cambrian Mountains, working full time alongside her mother, and farming hardy Elan Valley Welsh Mountain ewes as well as a small flock of pedigree Texel, Charollais, and Suffolk sheep.

Erinna says she is passionate about improving and promoting Welsh native breeds of sheep and the impact that they have in the conservation of their natural habitat. To support this and market her flocks, Erinna is currently investing time and money in starting a meat production business from the farm.

On being selected as an ambassador, Erinna says: "I am looking forward to the chance to learn more about all sorts of aspects of the UK sheep industry and meet a range of people involved in the industry, including new entrants and experienced sheep producers and industry experts. I think this will be a wonderful experience and I'm looking forward to promoting the benefits and work of the NSA through networking with young farmers in my area, and people I meet while stewarding at shows and selling stock in markets."



## Gwen Price (24) Dyfed

From a young age Gwen has been involved with the running of the family farm in Carmarthenshire, having taken on more responsibility as she has got older and now looking after many of the farm's business records. Gwen is just as happy in the lambing shed as she is in the farm office. The family farms more than 1,000 breeding ewes and, after taking the opportunity from the Welsh Government as a young entrant to start farming on her own, Gwen now runs her own flock of 130 Speckle and Suffolk breeding ewes, 50 Suffolk ewe lambs, and 10 heifer calves on rented land not far from her family farm.

Gwen is already very business focused, "I have outlined my business plan for the next five years as a priority – I hope to build on being sustainable, cut cost of production and increase stock numbers. However to do this a plan of action needs to be set in place and I will need to keep an open mind on other agricultural enterprises that could be invested in. I believe that learning as much as possible about running a business and the sector you are working in is key to success and I am looking forward to what the Next Generation Ambassador programme can offer me to help me progress".

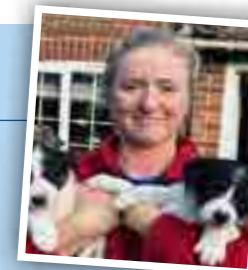


## Clover Crosse (22) Wiltshire

Despite being the youngest of this year's group of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors and a new entrant to agriculture, Clover has wasted no time in capitalising on the opportunities presented to her to already gain an impressive amount of experience in the sheep industry. Having spent time in New Zealand, as well as several progressive UK sheep farms, Clover is currently working on an arable farm where she is keen to increase the integration of sheep into the system to build sustainable fertility on the land.

Clover's aim is to one day manage a mixed farming enterprise using her previous experience with that from her current position, as well as any knowledge and skills she can develop through the ambassador programme.

Having spoken with previous Next Generation Ambassadors, Clover is hopeful that the programme will give her the same positive experience and says she is looking forward to using her role to further engage and enthuse the younger generations of sheep farmers.





# Sheep interest is a lifelong commitment, proves South East Vice Chairman

By Ellie Phipps, NSA

While for many retirement means stepping away from work, for Yann Le Du, South East Region Vice Chairman, it has merely seen a change to his daily occupations. Having farmed across the south for most of his career, Yann, along with his wife Maureen, now lives in a small village in Wiltshire.

"I retired in autumn 2013 following a particularly wet winter, with endless rescuing of sheep from flooded pastures. I had sheep across three counties at that time, and it was just too much. I had been thinking of stepping back and that winter helped finalise my decision," says Yann.

Since selling up Yann has, among other things, been supporting the next generation of farmers, both at home and in Europe, with practical and technical advice. He explains: "It wasn't really an active decision, but during a lifetime in the industry you develop a lot of

contacts and build a reputation among your peers."

After studying agriculture at Leeds University, Yann undertook research with grazing suckler cows at the then Grassland Research Institute (GRI), at Hurley in Berkshire, gaining a PhD from Reading University in 1975. There followed a period at GRI, focused on defining grazing management strategies for both beef and dairy cattle based on the measurement of grazing height. He adds: "Ironically, this work, reported in the late 1970s, has bounced around the world, to finally gain traction in the UK some 30 years later."

## Farming

During the 1970s, alongside his work as a researcher, Yann was keeping a few cattle on some rented ground. "In 1981, I had the chance to take some grazing with buildings and took the leap into farming full time," he reflects. "Dairying was not an option, due to milk quotas, but the Variable Premium Scheme was in operation and this effectively guaranteed a return – or at least one that the bank manager could understand. So I came to sheep farming by default."

Having bought 300 North Country Mules, 70% of them older ewes, at Wilton Sheep Fair in October 1981, Yann left GRI at the end of November that year to focus on farming. "Within a short time, the interest rate on the unsecured loan that I took out to help buy the

sheep started to rocket. At one point it rose to 18% – the bank was making more than I was," he recalls.

In addition to the ewes, which he put to Hampshire tups, Yann also reared calves. This enterprise was to grow until he eventually contract reared between 300 and 400 head between August and January each year. In the early years he also did some tractor work for a neighbour, partly in return for rent on a tied cottage.

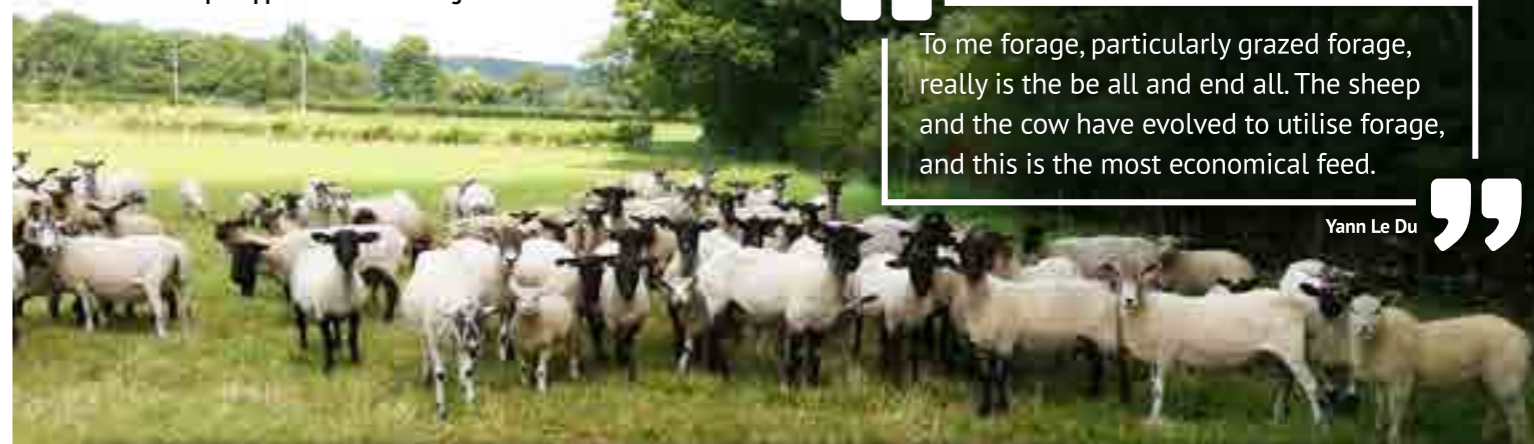
"During the next few years I built up a reputation as a reliable grazier and was offered more parcels of grazing land on annual lets." After about 10 years, FBTs were introduced and Yann secured an agreement on 90ha (220 acres) near Newbury, with a house rented separately, on what became a rolling three year agreement. He stayed there for 20 years.

"We retained a lot of the other areas of grazing and at our peak were farming more than 300ha (740 acres), tugging 2,000 ewes, and running a suckler herd of 120 cows."

## Rethink

Yann initially lambed indoors in mid-March, but later, with cattle in the buildings, outdoor yards were used to get the sheep off the pastures for between six and eight weeks. This was an expensive exercise, both in terms of feed and lambing labour. A radical rethink led to the move to outdoor May lambing on two sites, 15 miles apart, with 1,000 ewes looked after

Yann now helps support friends and neighbours flocks.



"To me forage, particularly grazed forage, really is the be all and end all. The sheep and the cow have evolved to utilise forage, and this is the most economical feed."

Yann Le Du



Yann at work before his retirement.



Yann spent many years struggling with flooding land.

by one person at each farm. "This dramatically reduced costs, with no hard feed or conserved forage fed to ewes. They were at keep on all-grass wintering, with purchased fodder beet offered occasionally towards the end of winter."

Yann followed this system for around 15 years until his retirement. "I began to cut cow numbers back in 2004 to a manageable 'hobby' herd of 25, with weaned calves bought in to graze any surplus grass and then sold as forward stores," he adds.

"For the past 10 years I mostly operated the farm single handed, with help from Maureen, particularly at lambing time. To do this I reduced ewe numbers to between 700 and 800, and also lambed up to 1,200 ewe lambs, which were then sold as shearling. All progeny was finished on dairy ground or turnips on arable farms. Through the winter everything was behind an electric fence. Due thanks must be offered to the Ridley's, father and son, for their revolutionary contribution to my farming life and to our industry."

## Resources

Throughout his career, Yann has operated a variety of livestock management systems, finally having a clear picture of what he believes to be the most effective way to farm ruminants. He says: "By making best use of the resources available on the land I was able to rent year round, together with any catch crops and surplus

grass/forage that became available. And then by applying ideas and thinking from my earlier research career, I was able to adapt my systems to generate good returns.

"To me forage, particularly grazed forage, really is the be all and end all. The sheep and the cow have evolved to utilise forage, and this is the most economical feed. Optimising the return from each animal sold is also crucial. And attention to drawing finished lambs/hogs and, indeed, selling cull ewes in good condition can have a big impact on the bottom line."

When Yann made the decision to sell up, in 2013, he was fortunate enough to be approached by a friend with land where he had had sheep at keep, who was wanting to establish a flock. "It made for a simple sales process. He took most of my flock and the associated equipment. We also did a deal for me to work with and train him, and his novice shepherd, for 18 months or so."

Despite selling up, Yann has found it difficult to fully step back. Yann says he misses working with the livestock and, particularly, having dogs. During the past few years he has managed the establishment of a 50-cow Angus suckler herd in a neighbouring village, and 'flock sits' for a friend when he is away on holiday.

Perhaps, more importantly, Yann is always willing to offer help and advice when asked and is also involved in mentoring other farmers. This has extended to supporting farmers in Bulgaria

and Latvia. He explains: "The latter has proved particularly satisfying and the group I visited there asked me to organise a UK trip for them. We went to several farms, including Innovis and Harper Adams, all of which proved successful. Several of the farmers have been back to the UK to attend NSA events."

## Advice

Although always willing to help out and offer advice, Yann comments: "When we take our car to a garage or go to an accountant or solicitor for advice, we, albeit grudgingly, pay their often extortionate fees. Why is it that so few farmers seek formal advice from consultants? This advice, if we choose the right person, can reap rich returns. I think it a great shame that we seem to so often expect free farming advice, but would never expect it from other professionals."

Although an NSA member for many years, Yann only became more active once his time was freed up after stepping back from the farm. He adds: "I was invited onto the South East Region committee four or five years ago. I'd attended several NSA events during the years but hadn't had time to get more involved. Now I have a bit more time, I hope I can play an active role in helping to structure the future of our sheep industry."

*As Yann no longer keeps sheep, some of these photographs are taken from pictures captured prior to his retirement*



Yann Le Du.

Yann initially lambed indoors, but later moved his lambing outside.

"For the past 10 years I mostly operated the farm single handed, with help from Maureen, particularly at lambing time."

Yann Le Du



# iSAGE research begins to deliver results for sheep farmers

By Wendy Jones, NSA



Working with industry partners, NSA has been actively involved with a selection of case studies, each exploring innovation within the sheep industry and identifying the take-home messages. This work has contributed to the European iSAGE project, which draws to a close in February 2020.

More information on these and other case studies can be found at [www.isage.eu](http://www.isage.eu).

## Livestock grazing in arable rotations



Demand has grown for sheep in arable.

Traditionally, sheep and arable enterprises on the same farm were commonplace, with sheep providing weed control and soil fertility. Post-WW2 intensification meant specialisation and the loss of sheep on arable units.

Over time, knowledge has been lost. But with the current focus on rebuilding soil health and controlling herbicide resistant blackgrass there has been a resurgence in demand for livestock grazing within arable rotations. Herbal leys offer benefits in warm conditions, with their deeper rooting systems improving soil structure and accessing moisture. Lambs on herbal leys demonstrated improved growth rates and lower worm burdens within recent case studies.

### Take-home messages:

- Good communication from both parties from day one is essential – don't ignore small problems, discuss them at the earliest opportunity.
- Be prepared to take advice.
- Remember cross compliance and agree who is responsible for what.
- Locating a good shepherd/stock person is essential.
- Have contingency plans for extremes of weather (drought, waterlogged ground, flooding).
- Remember it is a partnership.

## Farm sustainability tool



Safeguard cards set out key issues.

Adoption rates of 'holistic farm management' or whole-farm approaches in the UK are low.

With talk of BPS being replaced by delivery of 'public goods', there is a need for UK farmers to be more aware of what contributes to 'public goods' and how farm assessment tools can help.

### Take-home messages:

- Farm assessment tools help you to assess your farm business, identifying strengths and good practices that contribute to an individual farm business' overall sustainability.
- Reviewing sustainability concepts on your farm does not have to cost money.
- Results are not shared, nor is it a competition with your neighbour.
- The only barrier to using a 'public goods' tool is willingness. There is no stereotype to participants. Be prepared to step out of your comfort zone and be challenged.
- Sageguard is a web-based platform designed to provide guidance on sustainable sheep and goat production within Europe. As a structured sustainability tool, this will be available for farm businesses to identify their strengths and weaknesses, enabling directed guidance within sustainability topics to target weaknesses. This resource will be available on the completion of the iSAGE project.

## Flock Health Clubs

Flock Health Clubs were set up in 2016 by Flock Health Ltd. The clubs are run by sheep vets at local practices and provide an opportunity for discussion between vets and their sheep farmer clients.

### Take-home messages:

- Your sheep vet should be seen as an important member of your farm team.
- Flock Health Clubs provide an opportunity for discussion with like-minded farmers and a vet who is interested in sheep.
- Many Flock Health Club members have changed management practices as a result of membership.
- 'Prevention is better than cure'. A pro-active relationship with your sheep vet can help you to work towards preventing, rather than treating, disease. At this point, losses and costs have already been incurred.



Flock health clubs provide discussion forums.

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# Setting the record straight: Animal welfare and British sheep farming

By Phil Stocker, NSA

Sheep farming has, during the past few years, faced criticism from climate change activists, environmentalists, vegetarians and vegans, and welfare campaigners.

Some of this has come from people who have their own extreme view of life, but also from people who believe the media and know no better. If we do our job well, we have a chance to improve the awareness of the 'know no better' category and, even within the better informed anti-farming campaigners, there are many who accept that sheep farming can be good on many fronts. Here we look at sheep welfare, why we can, and should, be proud of the way we keep our sheep, and raise a few topics we need to keep a close eye on.

## Health

What we are not writing about here is sheep health. There is not enough space and we always devote a lot to this subject in every issue of Sheep Farmer. Suffice to say that good health is a precursor to good welfare. In fact, I would argue that the best thing we can do to improve sheep welfare, and sheep productivity, is to raise the health status of our flocks – through genetics, nutrition, biosecurity, and effective health management.

Beyond health, sheep farming has a very positive reputation for good welfare conditions. Sheep live in semi-natural and extensive conditions, are free to range and roam, and they spend most of their time in the company of other

sheep. They are flock animals and can fulfil most of their natural behaviours. Most flocks have grass or forage and drinking water available to them at all times.

## Foundation

Even animal welfare organisations would agree that we have a good welfare foundation. But they don't like everything we do and the extremist group PETA did a serious exposé in 2019 on the subject of wool and shearing.

Like all its campaigns, it contained a huge amount of inaccuracies and misleading film clips. But it did capture some practices that were unacceptable and have since been dealt with and improved on.

Ironically, while shearing is criticised for being 'cruel', farmers do it primarily to improve the welfare of sheep – to reduce risks of fly strike, and for temperature control in the heat of summer. Done well (see box) it is clean and efficient, causes little stress, and is quick. Good welfare of the shearer is equally important, and a calm and stress-free shearer leads to the same in the sheep.

Transport, particularly export, of live sheep is another target for campaigners. Opposition to live exports followed the Foot and Mouth outbreak in the early 2000s, when the UK was desperate to create any market demand. And, at the same time, there were global campaigns against the live shipping of animals in the southern hemisphere.

But the UK invested heavily in switching to exporting cuts and carcasses and the number of sheep exported live is a fraction of what it was

15 years ago. All sheep exported are veterinary checked and, despite what campaigners say, the UK has a good reputation for complying with regulations and enforcing the law.

Livestock transport is an emotive subject and reducing journey time was part of the current Government's manifesto and a major consultation on this subject is expected this February.

Welfare at slaughter, and non-stun slaughter,

## British Wool on shearing

Shearing improves sheep welfare and should take place at least once every 12 months. A thick, heavy fleece in the summer months can cause heat stress and increases the risk of death and predator attack by sheep becoming 'cast' or stuck on their back. Most importantly, shearing reduces the risk of stressful and painful flystrike.

A shearing training programme has been put in place by British Wool, designed to support candidates of all abilities from a Blue seal, which covers the basics of shearing sheep, up to a Gold seal, which trains shearers who will be shearing a large flock or operating as a shearing contractor.

The courses are designed to ensure that shearing can be carried out carefully and sympathetically at any level, and includes closely supervised hands-on experience, teaching best-practice methods for shearing each part of the sheep.



Sheep grazing extensively sets a good foundation for welfare.

is another area that attracts public concern. If anything, slaughter is even more emotive than transport and society, increasingly, has an expectation of a 'good life and a good death'. The campaigning organisations have uncovered isolated cases of less-than-acceptable practices in lairages and slaughter halls. But most plants take animal welfare extremely seriously.

## Transparency

They are required by law to have nominated and trained animal welfare officers, vets are always present, and many plants have voluntarily installed CCTV equipment to ensure transparency. Non-stun slaughter is highly contentious but accepted as part of religious faith, and not surprisingly the Government has no plans to take any action.

Industry bodies have worked hard to reduce demand for non-stun slaughter and, frustratingly, have not been able to persuade the Government to conduct recoverable stun trials. This is despite being advised this would be an effective way to increase the uptake of pre-stunning within the Halal market.

Within our industry there are plenty who are proactive in seeking other welfare improvements, particularly:

- Lameness (where industry has developed

the five-point plan to reduce lameness levels).

- The use of pain relief and anaesthetic (for castration, tailing, and other operations). But, currently, few practical options exist and abandoning some of these operations can lead to unintended consequences that can worsen things (such as stained tails that attract blowflies, and ewe lambs for slaughter unintentionally in lamb). Some farmers are leaving lambs entire where they can be sure of not creating problems and, as with shearing, most operations, like castration and tailing, are carried out to improve welfare.

No one wants to invest in producing lambs for them to die pre or post-birth – it doesn't make good economic sense and it damages industry reputation. There is much that can be done to reduce losses, including sound basic sheep health management, such as abortion vaccines; good biosecurity; and good sheep nutrition, which leads to and starts with good quality colostrum.

Finally, while extensive and free-range conditions create the best possible foundation for welfare, sheep benefit further by having good shelter and shade. This is likely to become recognised as important for welfare in future years and it fits well with environmental objectives of good dense hedges, letting some

## Best practice

- Nutrition is a platform for good welfare and responsible medicine use. Visit [www.colostrumisgold](http://www.colostrumisgold)
- Take time out – farming is a stressful and frustrating job, particularly with recent criticism. Always take time out to relax and look after your welfare too.

## Main focus for campaigners:

- Transport and live export
- Welfare at slaughter
- Shearing

## Things to watch for:

- Lameness
- No use of anaesthetic and pain relief (when available)
- Lamb losses
- Lack of shade and shelter

hedges grow up, and the integration of trees.

In areas where wide expanses of open land are appropriate and desirable, such as hills and uplands, the use of native breeds, which can cope with those conditions, is one of the best ways to ensure good welfare.

Raising healthy animals within good welfare conditions is a fundamental part of sheep farming. It is something most farmers build into their work plans and something all farmers should do. We have a great story to tell and we must do more to tell it. But we shouldn't shy away from working hard to keep our standards high in order to demonstrate a caring and compassionate industry.



Shearing is a vital area of animal welfare.

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# Sheep can play a vital role in building and repairing soil health

By Chloe Palmer, Contributor

Soil health is rarely out of the headlines and it is now back on the agenda as one of the 'public goods', which the Government suggests it will pay for with 'public money'.

The role that soil health plays in the productivity of grassland sheep farm systems is far less obvious than it is in arable systems – not least because it is rarely visible. But it can have a significant effect on productivity and profitability, particularly in extreme weather conditions.

Elizabeth Stockdale, Head of Farming Systems Research at the National Institute of Agricultural Botany (NIAB), believes that soils on livestock farms in the UK are generally in 'pretty good health'. She says: "The physical and biological status is good, but sometimes it is the chemistry within the soil that is lacking. For systems not chasing high yields the lower phosphate and potash indices will not be a problem, but the low pH will often catch farmers out if they have not been liming regularly."

## Productivity

"Once soil pH falls below six it begins to reduce grassland productivity, below 5.5 it becomes critical and the biological activity of these soils 'drops off a cliff,'" says Dr Stockdale. "A low

pH will also have a serious impact on yield and sward diversity, not least because pH is a logarithmic scale this means a pH of six is 10 times more acid than pH of seven, and a pH of five is 100 times more acidic."

Dr Stockdale also highlights the thatch of dead vegetation that is frequently seen on the surface of upland pasture on acidic soils, which shows there is little or no biological activity in the upper layers of the soil profile: "When soil pH has fallen well below six, it can take a long time to correct and applying lime on a little-and-often basis will not do the trick. The farm liming strategy should be a key part of pasture management."

## Compaction

Another issue often affecting soil health on grassland farms is compaction, according to Dr Stockdale. "Dig a soil pit and look carefully to identify where the compaction is occurring. Then set up any machinery to respond to the problem seen. On sheep pasture, the compaction will typically occur between the top 10cm and 15cm. If used under the right conditions, an aerator can do a good job at aerating the soil."

"Make sure that the soils are at the correct moisture content throughout the working depth. If soils at between 30cm and 40cm deep are wet, even if the surface layers are dry, the tractor-mounted aerator could put added compaction at depth at the same time as fixing the topsoil issues. It is important to have a look

at the effect of the aerator on the soils after the first run in a field. Check that it is having the desired effect before doing the whole area."

She adds that addressing problems of compaction and correcting the pH will give the soil biology the opportunity to flourish, particularly where diverse swards are grown, because the range of species above ground will help to feed the soil microfauna in different ways below.

Ian Wilkinson, Managing Director of Cotswold Seeds, agrees that increasing species diversity in swards will solve many of the problems with soil health. He says:

## What is healthy soil?

Healthy soil can be defined as a soil that is able to sustain the key functions that support plant and animal productivity during a long period. These functions include:

- Gaseous exchange
- The flow of water and nutrients to plant roots
- Storing and transforming of organic material
- The degradation of contaminants



Grazing sheep in less traditional areas can provide a cash income to arable farmers.

"Monocultures do not work well at any level, as they do not help to build soil fertility or help with pest control. Most crops will fail without the life support system that they need, which should be the soil."

"A sheep flock is a natural fertility generator and they can also provide a cash income to an arable farmer, who chooses to grow cover crops to improve soil health. Herbal leys can be used as a break crop in the rotation to help control black-grass and here we would advocate rotational grazing where the swards are rested for at least 50 days before the livestock return to graze again."

## Resilient

"Moving the sheep elsewhere when there is still around half the plant left will help to encourage a more extensive rooting system below ground and will also allow the soils to hold more water. This can help to make the system more resilient in both drought and excessive rainfall situations."

Mr Wilkinson suggests that many commentators are blaming agriculture for our environmental woes, but he believes farming 'has all the solutions'. Even in upland situations, where a more hostile climate precludes the growing of species rich herbal leys, he believes that there is still scope to make a difference to soil quality when choosing the best mix for a re-seed.

"Where ryegrass monocultures are grown, they are dependent on artificial nitrogen inputs. Adding true clovers, such as white, red and alsike, to the seed mix removes the need for nitrogen and will help to improve soil structure due to their greater rooting depth. In the long term, this will make a farm business more self-sufficient," he adds.

Geraint Powell has long been an advocate



Growing clover for grazing sheep can help to improve soil health.

of diverse swards to ameliorate soils and boost productivity. He manages a 200ha (500 acres) farm in mid-Wales, comprising permanent pasture with 40ha (100 acres) of woodland. He will be lambing a flock of wool-shedding ewes this spring, alongside an Aberdeen Angus suckler herd.

He describes plant diversity in swards and rotations as the 'driver of the nutrient and water cycle' and believes the approach should be central to future decision making regarding financial incentives for farmers. "Our agricultural policy should be aiming for increased plant diversity because it will deliver everything policymakers want to see in terms of public goods."

He points to the 'recreational use of inorganic fertilisers' as part of the cause of grassland soils not being as productive as they might be. "The plants are fed with nutrients applied to the surface so the roots do not need to go searching for them. In turn, this will discourage the root system from cycling nutrients via the biology of the soil food web."

"On permanent grassland with a perennial vegetation system, the roots are in the ground all year round so there should not be much of a soil

health problem. It is more of an issue affecting potential yields of forage and profit," Mr Powell says.

On the farm he manages, Mr Powell intends to introduce more plant diversity by careful grazing management rather than deliberate species introduction. "We plan to incorporate a combination of short periods of occupation followed by long rest periods into the grazing regime and ensure the management is right, and then see what nature can deliver."

## Clostridia

Fiona Lovatt, a specialist sheep vet and Director of Flock Health, highlights the risk of bacterial disease picked up from the soil. "When sheep graze pasture they are always exposed to clostridia in the soil. Clostridia are responsible for diseases such as tetanus, pulpy kidney and lamb dysentery. So any sensible sheep farmer vaccinates his flock."

"At the very minimum, this means all ewes and tups must be given a primary course of two doses, four to six weeks apart, and an annual booster. In the case of ewes, if the booster is given in late pregnancy then lambs are subsequently themselves protected through their mother's colostrum."

Healthy soil promotes better plant growth, providing better grass quality for stock.





# Recognition given to UK shearing as Welsh shearers crowned champions

By Laura Johnson, British Wool



For the first time in its 40-year history, the Golden Shears World Championships were held in France, in early July, at Le Dorat, Haute-Vienne.

Three hundred competitors, from 34 countries, took part with more than 62,000 spectators visiting during the four-day event. The 12-hour days started at 6am and everyone struggled to operate in 39°C heat during the day and still-sweating 30°C at night.

Throughout the championships there were many meetings for Golden Shearers World Council delegates, when current and future world championships were discussed and preparations made. The next Golden Shears World Championships will be held in conjunction with the Royal Highland Show in 2022.

## Support

British Wool was proud to support the UK teams, who enjoyed great success at the competition. Richard Jones, from Wales, took home the World Individual Machine Shearing Champion title and, also from Wales, Aled Jones was crowned world champion in the Individual Wool Handling competition.

Richard began shearing sheep at the age of 15, going out with his father and Hywel Jones,

now British Wool shearing instructor. He has also completed seven shearing seasons in New Zealand, two in Norway, and five in Switzerland. Richard now has his own shearing run back home in Wales, where he employs local shearers.

## Competitions

This was the third time that he has represented Wales in the World Championship, along with a number of other competitions. "I competed in as many shearing competitions as I could before France. I worked hard every day and concentrated on the job I was doing as much as I could," he says.

Aled also began wool handling at a young age, helping on his family's farm from the age of 13. "It was a way of being involved in the shearing shed at a young age before I knew how to shear," he says.

Aled has competed in 40 open competitions and won 10. He first represented Wales in 2014 at the World Shearing and Wool Handling competition, at Gorey in Eire, where he won the World Team event along with team mate, Meir Evans.

With so much experience built up between them, Richard offers some advice to aspiring shearers.

"Go on as many courses as you can and listen to those who are more experienced and trying to help you. Travel to New Zealand, keep at it and

work hard," he says.

British Wool is the approved provider for shearing and wool handling training in the UK, with a programme designed to support candidates of all abilities in learning and developing a traditional rural skill.

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Aled Jones (left) with John Davies, British Wool Welsh southern board member



Richard Jones in action at the Royal Bath & West Show 2019

## SCOPS' TOP TIPS



### SCOPS' top tips for worming around lambing time are:

- Leave at least 1 in 10 of the fittest ewes in each group untreated
- Make sure you drench to the heaviest ewes
- Check and calibrate drench guns before you start

More information at [www.scops.org.uk](http://www.scops.org.uk)



# A lawyers insight: Will 2020 mark significant change in UK law?

By Julie Robinson, Roythornes



There are plenty of changes in the law on the horizon that sheep farmers need to be aware of as landowners, tenants, employers, business owners, animal keepers and environmental stewards.

Starting with Brexit, under the terms of the withdrawal agreement, the UK's exit on January 31st means that direct payment schemes across the UK will be governed by UK law rather than by the relevant Common Agricultural Policy regulation.

In practice, from the farmer's point of view, the UK's 2020 schemes will still look and feel like the EU's Basic Payment Scheme – even down to the name. Any hopes that cross compliance and the three-crop rule were for the chop post-Brexit will have to wait until domestic schemes are established.

Farmers should expect some significant divergence in the shape and detail of support schemes across the devolved administrations in due course. Establishing workable common frameworks on agricultural and rural matters will be critical, and will also be one of the biggest challenges for our policymakers in 2020.

## Reforms

England and Wales could well see some tenancy reforms enacted. Changes to the Agricultural Holdings Act succession regime, conferring succession rights on a wider group of potential successors and allowing for tenancies to be assigned to third parties, are expected.

Additional rights for tenants to challenge restrictions in their tenancy agreements are also among the proposals. There does appear to be some appetite for reform, but whether parliamentary time will be found to do this is another question.

An animal welfare bill was announced in the

Queen's speech, promising higher maximum sentences for cruelty offences in England and Wales and new legislation ensuring that animal sentience is recognised in domestic law. Scotland's own Animal Health and Welfare Bill will also raise maximum sentences.

Ending longer journeys for animals going for slaughter or fattening is also on the cards for England, with a consultation expected. NSA and other representative bodies are watching developments on journey times closely and the internal cross-border aspects of any restrictions will need careful consideration.

## Renting

Significant changes are afoot for farmers who let residential properties. First is the requirement in England and Wales that all let residential properties – not just new lettings – must meet minimum energy efficiency standards – from 1st April 2020.

This means that farm cottages and other dwellings that are rented out (whether to workers or to external tenants) must have an EPC rating of E or above. If the rating is F or G then landlords must take steps to bring the rating up to E. There are some exemptions, and a cap of £3,500 (including VAT) on what landlords are required to spend.

While we are not expecting local authorities to launch non-compliance campaigns, landlords will be vulnerable if they continue to let properties which do not meet the standards.

The timeline is different in Scotland, but heading in the same direction. The EPC 'E' band requirement will apply to all new private residential lettings from April 1st, 2020.

Expect to see more protections for tenants introduced, not only as far as rents are concerned but also in relation to the landlord's right to end tenancies and recover possession.

From 6th April 2020, workers must be given a written statement of terms, in a single document, no later than the day their employment starts.

Previously employers had up to two months to provide this statement and could provide it in separate documents.

This new rule could easily catch out farm businesses because they rarely have HR advice to hand. The new provisions apply in Scotland, England and Wales but not, for the moment, in Northern Ireland.

## Environment

Wherever in the UK they are, sheep farmers can expect to see more stringent measures to protect the environment during 2020, and beyond.

Contentious, and long-running, Welsh Government plans to introduce Wales-wide nitrate vulnerable zones regulations have not arrived on the statute book yet, but still loom large. In England, the planned incorporation of the water abstraction licensing regime into the environmental permitting regime will be unwelcome. In Scotland a draft National Planning Framework will be published, setting out how and where development should take place for the period up to 2050.

Not all developments in environmental law are bad news. The current focus on encouraging woodland as part of the climate change challenge offers alternative long-term income streams. In England the concept of net biodiversity gain, where development takes place, will be legislated for in the Environment Bill and this will, potentially, provide opportunities for farmers near developments to be paid to deliver compensatory biodiversity.

And the introduction of voluntary conservation covenants, which bind future landowners, is another mechanism for funds to be channelled into the delivery of environmental goods.

So 2020 and the decade it heralds will be a time of unprecedented legislative change. More than ever farmers' representative bodies will be needed, to ensure that the interests of their members are not overlooked.

There are many changes to the law anticipated, and it is important as farmers to be aware of these.





By helping to identify food crime, you can help protect both yours and other farmers' produce from being misused.

# Understanding the food crime unit and its importance

By Jason Lonsdale, FSA



Tackling fraud in the food supply chain, more commonly referred to as food crime, is a challenge for the whole food and drink industry.

From farm to fork, the effects of food crime have the potential to impact everyone in the supply chain – including farmers.

The Food Standards Agency's National Food Crime Unit (NFCU) aims to help protect businesses and consumers from fraudulent supply chains through building relationships with industry, delivering crime prevention initiatives and conducting thorough, proportionate investigations where necessary. This is to support the Food Standard Agency to deliver its overarching strategy that 'food is safe and is what it says it is'.

The NFCU works to tackle serious fraud and related criminality and is expanding its functions to deliver criminal and financial investigation capabilities. It will lead on a small number of the most serious and complex food crime investigations each year and will have some

capacity to support and coordinate investigations led by partners. The unit has introduced an outreach team and a prevention team.

## Engagement

The outreach team's strategic aim is to cultivate, maintain and enhance engagement with industry, other private sector organisations and our law enforcement partners. Continued engagement with the private sector – including the Food Industry Intelligence Network, the Global Alliance on Food Crime, and a variety of industry associations – will help to enhance information sharing and aid the fight against food crime. The team is also developing efficient interoperability – the ability to exchange knowledge and information – across the wider law enforcement community within the UK and beyond.

The prevention team is working to develop a comprehensive understanding of the methodologies, enablers and drivers of food crime in order to identify opportunities to deliver food crime prevention initiatives.

Through collaboration with industry and businesses, initiatives will seek to reduce

The seven categories of food crime:

**Unlawful processing:** Slaughtering or preparing meat and related products in unapproved premises or using unauthorised techniques.

**Waste diversion:** Unlawfully diverting food, drink or feed meant for disposal, back into the supply chain.

**Adulteration:** Reducing the quality of food by including a foreign substance, in order to lower costs or fake a higher quality.

**Substitution:** Replacing a food or ingredient with another substance that is similar but inferior.

**Misrepresentation:** Marketing or labelling a product to wrongly portray its quality, safety, origin or freshness.

**Theft:** Dishonestly appropriating food, drink or feed products in order to profit from their use or sale.

**Document fraud:** Includes the making, use and possession of false documents with the intent to sell, market or otherwise vouch for a fraudulent or substandard product.

or remove the food industry's exposure and vulnerability to offending. The prevention team will also seek to reduce the threat from potential offenders by diminishing the means, motivation, or opportunity to commit food crime.

Food Crime Confidential is a reporting facility where anyone with suspicions or concerns about food crime can speak up about it safely, and in confidence, over the phone or online. This means that your details will not be shared with anyone else.

You can speak up about your concerns by visiting [www.food.gov.uk/foodcrime](http://www.food.gov.uk/foodcrime), emailing [foodcrime@food.gov.uk](mailto:foodcrime@food.gov.uk), or by calling the Food Crime Confidential helpline on 020 7276 8787.

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# Benchmarking can prove an important tool when building business resilience

TECHNICAL

With significant changes to come this year, there is no better time to review your business and begin benchmarking, and AHDB has come up with six simple steps to help you do so - and the last few quiet weeks before lambing can provide the perfect opportunity.

Take a couple of weeks before lambing starts to review your business and document some data during scanning. Understanding and recording data during lambing can help you to get and stay ahead of the game and could yield big returns before tupping in autumn.

We understand benchmarking sounds daunting and sitting down with paperwork after a long day isn't particularly appealing. So AHDB has put together a few resources to help break it down - and it all starts with just an hour of your time.

## Simple steps

The 60-minute farm review allows you to review your entire business in just six simple steps. It tells you at a glance whether it's worth buying that extra piece of machinery,

if you should invest in extra labour or consultancy this year, and even shows if you've got the optimum head of livestock to maximise grassland and grazing use.

The form simply asks for figures and most you'll know instantly, such as hectares farmed, livestock numbers, scanning percentages, and labour.

The calculations are all there for you, but it's helpful to have a calculator to hand. The form can also be printed off, if that's your preferred way of working.

## Flock notebook

Another way to help calculate these figures is by quickly jotting down numbers in our free handy flock notebook and sheep record sheets. These are printed booklets that tell you exactly what to look out for and what data to record.

The ideal time to start completing these is during scanning through into lambing. These figures then make calculating your lambing percentages easier, with greater accuracy.

We've signposted any extra information you might need along the way and given clear category examples so your figures are as accurate as possible. There is an easy to identify 'green', 'amber' and 'red' format to follow, with possible solutions if you fall in the 'amber' or 'red' categories.

By Chloe McKee, AHDB Beef & Lamb



For example, if your flock performance data would benefit from improvement, we suggest manuals: 'Ewe fertility for Better Returns' and 'Managing

## Important dates for your record keeping calendar:

- January: Record scanning percentage and empty ewes.
- February to April: Record lambing and calving information.
- April to May: Keep track of growth rates and any losses.
- May: Submit Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) paperwork.
- June to October: Attend AHDB events to plan for next year's changes to your business.
- July to September: Keep track of growth rates and record lamb sales.
- September to October: Pre-tupping, record ewes culled and number of replacements sourced (depending on your business).
- November: Analyse the year and start planning for the next one.
- December: Farm subsidy arrives.



AHDB offer advice to farmers on how to evaluate their businesses before meeting with the bank.

ewes for Better Returns', to help you identify ways to improve issues that are specific to your farm.

Once the form is completed, you'll receive an immediate overview of the strengths and weaknesses of your business.

This is arguably the most important takeaway from benchmarking because it allows you to see, at a glance, exactly which areas of your business to focus on in the long, medium, and short-term. You can even compare your technical and business performance with other similar farms in England - invaluable when making decisions for the future.

When you're comfortable with calculating

your costs, the next step would be to join our Farmbench programme. Farmbench uses your data to calculate your actual cost of production for each kilogramme of beef and lamb sold. It also compares the profitability of each of your enterprises, which may help you to decide which ones to expand or which to reassess.

## Planning

Having personalised information helps you take a holistic approach to your business, allowing you to plan for the medium- and long-term, while considering personal and professional goals, to build a resilient and profitable business for the future.

## Tools and resources

- Get started with our 60-minute farm review to help assess where your business stands.
- After lambing, calculate your flock's performance using AHDB's KPI calculator and see how you compare to industry targets.
- Order sward sticks, flock and herd notebooks, sheep and suckler records sheets or other resources, from AHDB.
- Understand and compare your full costs of production across multiple enterprises by using Farmbench.

Access these resources at [www.ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb](http://www.ahdb.org.uk/beef-lamb).

TECHNICAL



Delegates complete interactive accountancy tasks in a workshop during a Strategic Farm event, held in Cornwall.

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# Monepantel resistance identified in UK can pose worm prevalence risk in the future

TECHNICAL

Monepantel resistance has been confirmed on a mixed livestock and arable unit in the UK. The farm runs 1,200 ewes and sells lambs during an extended period on a supermarket contract.

The unit, based in the south west, lambs in three batches of 400 due to housing capacity restrictions. Grazing comprises of blocks of permanent pasture, some co-grazed with cattle.

Suspicion of monepantel resistance first emerged in autumn 2018 when a Fecal Egg Count (FEC), revealed a count of 1,020 eggs per gram (epg). The farmer was surprised at the result because this batch of sheep had been wormed with monepantel only two weeks previously.

## Samples

A post-drench sample from another batch of recently wormed sheep had a count of 880epg and concerns of a possible treatment failure were reported to the product manufacturer.

Further Faecal Egg Count Reductions Tests (FECRTs) were carried out on 15 individual samples. The first round had a pre-treatment average of 293epg (zero to 1,400) and the post treatment average was 400epg (zero to 1,200) showing no reduction in FEC overall. A repeat of the FECRT gave a pre-treatment average of 820epg (300 to 1,700) and a post treatment average of 686epg (zero to 1,350) giving an overall reduction of just 16%.

Samples were sent to the Moredun Institute

and the eggs hatched so that the larvae could be identified – 96% were *Cooperia* spp worms.

In autumn 2019, APHA Veterinary Investigation Centre VIOs the farmer and his vet by following up with more FECRTs. Four groups of 10 lambs were treated with different wormers from the different wormer groups: Levamisole, Benzimidazole, Monepantel, and Macrocytic lactones (ML).

Egg counts were taken before and after treatment. Worm eggs from samples were cultured so that researchers could see the different worms present. Pre-treatment larval differentiation results showed the makeup of the parasites in the flock to be 8% *Teladorsagia* spp, 50% *Trichostrongylus* spp, 2% *Haemonchus* spp and 40% *Oesophagostomum/Chabertia* spp (see table).

These results showed that resistance was confirmed in all four classes of wormer on this farm.

Monepantel is one of the newer classes of anthelmintic, introduced around eight years ago. This isn't the first time resistance has been seen in the UK, but it does illustrate how heavy reliance on anthelmintic treatments appears to have been the reason behind the rapid development of resistance to Monepantel on this farm.

Results of the FECRTs for Monepantel-resistant flock				
Lamb group	1 (Lev)	2 (BZ)	3 (Monepantel)	4 (ML – ivermectin)
(10 individual samples/group)	1 (Lev)	2 (BZ)	3 (Monepantel)	4 (ML – ivermectin)
Pre-dose EPG	750	550	50	350
Post-dose EPG	345	225	765	465
% reduction	54	59	0	0

*Trichostrongyle* eggs detected in FECs.

By Amanda Carson and Sian Mitchell, APHA



Analysis of the farm records revealed approximately 2,100 individual Monepantel treatments per year for the past three years and some sheep had been treated twice or even three times with monepantel during the season.

## Over-treatment

Fear of sheep scab had also resulted in multiple whole-flock treatments with 2% Moxidectin, and may also have contributed to the development of intestinal parasite resistance to MLs.

Land management is also likely to have played a part with lambs weaned on to the same block of land in repeated batches throughout the season, and the use of the 'dose and move' strategy will have accelerated the development of resistance in the worms on this farm.

Recommendations going forward have included the use of more targeted treatments, rotational grazing with cattle where possible, sequential combination treatments with yellow and clear drenches and the limited use of Derquantel for emergency treatments.

All sheep farmers need to work closely with their vets and adopt SCOPs advice, and the effectiveness of anthelmintic products used should be monitored carefully.

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# Attention to detail at lambing can pay dividends in your returns

By Phillippa Page and Fiona Lovatt, Flock Health 

When we lamb sheep indoors we are putting both ourselves and our ewes under great pressure. This is due, in part, as nature intended sheep to live and lamb outside on extensive pasture.

As farmers, we have to fine-tune our skills and optimise conditions to ensure that our ewes and their lambs are not disadvantaged by the intensive nature of a busy lambing shed.

The issues that face us at lambing time relate to the newborn lamb, the ewe, and the environment. At birth, lambs are hypogammaglobulinaemic. This means that their blood is yet to contain any circulating antibodies and they are also in need of a supply of energy before their limited resources run out. These are the fundamental issues behind the mantra #ColostrumisGold.

## Assessment

As previous articles have pointed out, the devil is always in the detail. Although there may be high numbers of lambs born in any one day, they are not all at the same category of risk (see table). No one expects an individual risk assessment to be undertaken on every lamb born, but it is helpful to think about groups or types of ewes, lambs, environmental conditions, and the different factors that can affect the lambs' chances.

There are farms that repeatedly see unacceptable levels of either watery mouth or joint ill, but they fail to address the issues and risk having to resort to unacceptable use of

Neonatal Lamb Risk Assessment					
Lamb factors	1	Single	Environment factors	8	Outside
		Twin		9	Inside
		Triplet, Quad or Quin		10	Stocking rate - low
2	Size - ideal (4-8kg)	11	Stocking rate - high		
	Size - note ideal not extreme	12	Shelter - good		
3	Size - too small (<3kg)	13	Shelter - not good		
	Birth - simple, unassisted	14	Weather - good		
4	Birth - assisted but ok	15	Weather - not good		
	Birth - difficult	16	Bedding - clean and dry		
5	Colostrum - filled self from ewe	17	Bedding - dirty or wet		
	Colostrum - unknown or artificial	18	Bedding - dirty and wet		
6	Colostrum - insufficient	19	Early stage of lambing time		
	BSC - OK/ideal	20	Mid-end of lambing time		
7	BSC - not ideal or too fat	21	Little or no disease so far this season		
	BSC - too thin	22	Disease in other groups this season		
Ewe factors	8	Ration - checked and ok	23	Disease in this group this season	
		Ration - not checked			
	Ration - low energy/protein				
	Ewes - clean and sound				
9	Ewes - dirty or several lame	24			
	Ewes - dirty and several lame				

Answer each question with a tick in box. Orange indicates increased risk with a cumulative effect. Yellow indicates possible increased risk. Green indicates low or minimal risk.

preventative antibiotics because they have not made sufficient tweaks to the details of their existing system.

One of the reasons we keep stressing the importance of details is because businesses build success by aggregating small marginal improvements across the whole system. It is much easier to improve a 100 areas by just 1% than to expect to improve one area by 100%.

## Considerations

When considering how to apply this to your own flock it may be useful to also consider the narrative around the British Cycling team. Prior to coach Dave Brailsford taking on the team

in 2003, only one gold medal had ever been won by British cyclists and there had been no victories in the Tour de France for more than 100 years.

The new coach turned this around by concentrating on improving many different aspects of the cyclists' lives by a tiny amount. The detail was recognised as hugely important so, for example, they banned shaking hands and they hired a surgeon to teach them how to wash their hands more thoroughly to reduce the chance of catching colds, and they painted the inside of their team truck white to allow them to spot the tiniest speck of dust that could compromise bike performance.

Ensuring that all newborn lambs receive colostrum is essential.

## Practical problem-solving and disease-prevention tips

- **Housing ewes:** If you always house the same number of ewes, you may be over-stocked, which can lead to an increase in disease challenge. Try to keep singles outside longer, or house them separately.
- **Bedding:** Try to bed up more often towards the end of the lambing period. Also, consider whether you are using the best material for bedding.
- **Crutching:** Dirty fleeces are a common source of infection/contamination for a newborn lamb and the straw and lying area in the shed.
- **Water leaks:** If your trough or roof leak, fix quickly to reduce humidity and prevent damp bedding.
- **Lameness:** Separate lame sheep from sound sheep. Keeping them apart allows more effective treatment, better care, and limits the spread of infectious lameness.
- **Cleanliness:** Ensure your lambing shed is properly equipped with hot water, detergent and a clean dry towel to encourage staff to regularly wash their hands and equipment.
- **Serialisation:** Sterilise ear tags, ringers and stomach tubes to prevent the spread of infection.

The accumulated results were phenomenal and British cyclists are winning multiple gold medals and the Tour de France (six times in the past eight years).

In the same way, every shepherd needs to work alongside their trusted sheep vet to focus on the details to identify the marginal gains – and there is no time that this is more important than at lambing.

No tiny detail is too insignificant or irrelevant because each one combines with others to return value and significantly impact the bottom line of flock productivity.



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# Worming ewes around lambing time has benefits in some circumstances

When it comes to worming, there is ample debate as to whether adult ewes need treating. In most cases there will be no direct benefit to giving a worming dose to an adult ewe, as they have their own natural immunity and resilience against gut worms.

The main consequence of worming ewes unnecessarily is that it will create resistant worms within a flock and that will, in turn, reduce the efficacy of future worming doses. This resistance problem is not restricted to worm. It has also been confirmed that there are sheep scab mites resistant to injectable avermectins (clear wormers).

## Contamination

One compelling reason for worming ewes is to control their worm egg output and, therefore, pasture contamination at lambing time. If there are fewer worms on the pasture when the lambs start to graze, then the growing lambs have a lower parasite challenge. This leads to better growth rates and reduced reliance on wormers.

It has been shown that the number of worm eggs shed by ewes significantly increases during the two weeks prior to lambing until six weeks after lambing. The rise in eggs shed during this period is a significant source of pasture contamination for future grazing lambs.

Typically, a ewe's immune system is able to effectively control the development of larvae (worms) within their body, with many worms failing to reach maturity. But during late pregnancy and early lactation there is a 'relaxation' of the ewe's immunity that allows dormant and ingested larvae to develop to adult worms. These produce eggs.

The extent of the loss of immunity in ewes at lambing time depends on many factors including: age, nutrition (particularly protein intake), management, health, number of lambs, and breed. Put simply, a healthy ewe in good condition with one lamb has a much lower egg count rise compared to a thin ewe carrying triplets.

There are flocks that do not need to worm their ewes at all during lambing time due to management practices. Flocks that lamb early and keep their ewes housed for the first few weeks after lambing, for example, do not need to be wormed as they will not be shedding worm eggs on to pasture.

Similarly, freshly lambed ewes that graze meadows that will not be grazed by lambs later in the year do not need to be wormed. Only where lambed ewes graze a pasture that will be later grazed by lambs should worming of the ewes be considered.

Where worming ewes is justified, consideration should be given to which ewes will be wormed. Worming all ewes with a long-acting wormer that covers the whole period of immune suppression will rapidly lead to the development of wormer

resistance. This is because only resistant worms will survive the treatment and, therefore, only resistant eggs will contaminate the pasture and lambs will be infected with a high proportion of resistant worms from the resistant eggs.

## Stress

Ewes to be wormed should be targeted depending upon how high their egg production post lambing will be. Typically, this will equate to how much physiological stress they will be under at lambing time.

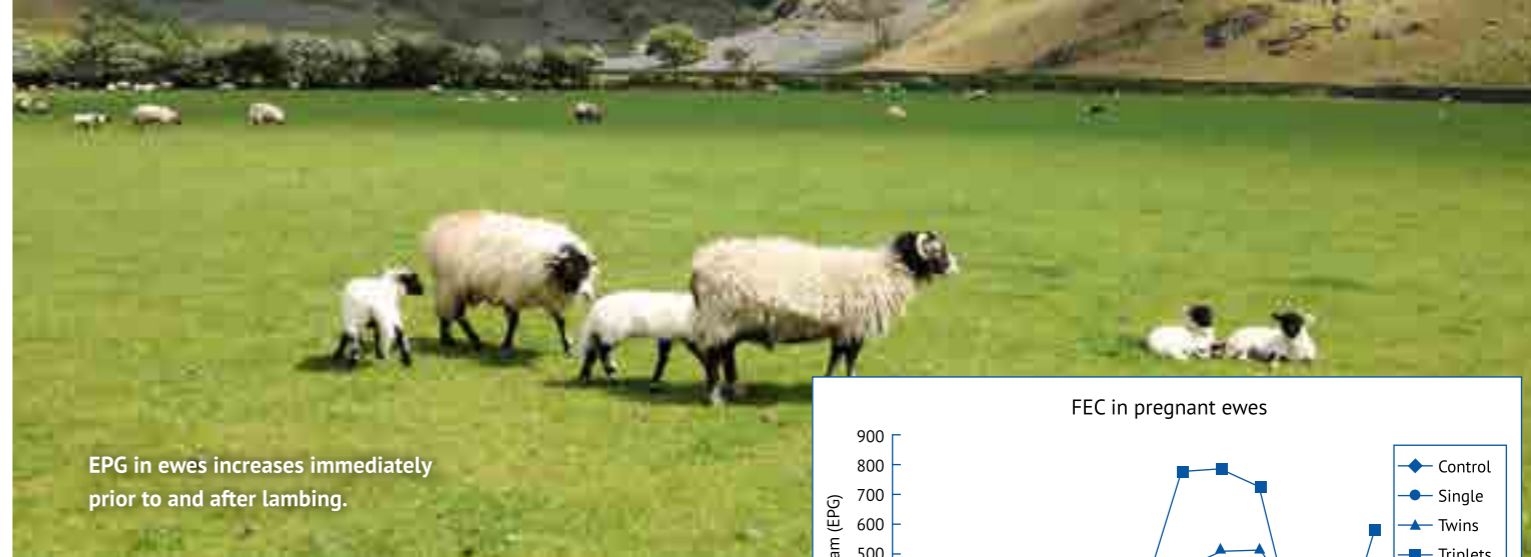
A ewe that has lambed triplets will be under higher stress and is likely to shed more worm eggs than a healthy ewe with a single lamb. The ewe with a single lamb should not be wormed, but the ewe that lambed triplets should be.

Dose timing at lambing time is also important. Too soon and the worms won't yet be there to treat, too late and the ewe will already have passed significant numbers of worm eggs onto the pasture. So management practices and logistics need to be considered.

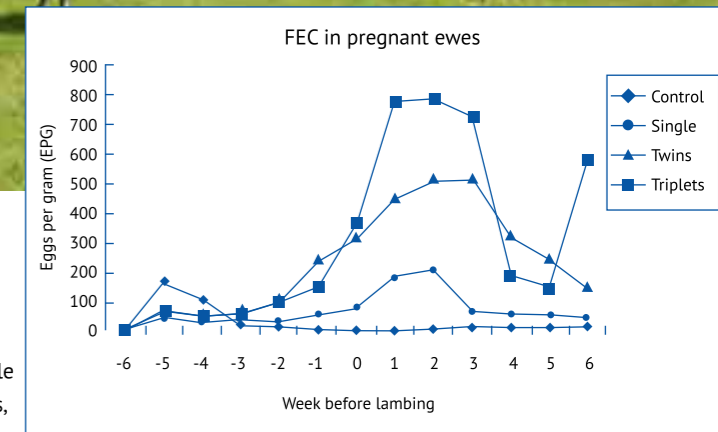
Within a few days of lambing is the most appropriate time to worm ewes. Some farmers like to worm ewes at housing in order to save a job during lambing time. But this can be too soon and the worming dose may be wasted.

The biggest challenge is faced by flocks that lamb outside where the ewes are not routinely handled at lambing time. Many of these flocks may not need to be wormed (see above), but for those that do options can be limited and

By Mark Thompson, Craven Farm Vets



EPG in ewes increases immediately prior to and after lambing.



veterinary advice should be sought.

Most groups of wormers are short acting, which has the disadvantage that immunosuppressed ewes often become re-infected with worms soon after the wormers affect has passed. The standard avermectins (clear wormers) are a good choice to selectively treat ewes. They have a medium duration of action, which covers a good proportion of the immune-suppressed period.

## Resistance

There are very long acting avermectins that have their place, particularly in outdoor lambing flocks. But they can strongly select for resistant worms due to their prolonged sub-optimal drug

concentrations. The duration of action also means there is a long period of time where resistant worms are able to thrive and shed eggs, contributing to a more rapid build up of resistance compared to shorter acting wormers.

In summary, there are a lot of factors that should be considered before worming adult ewes. Whole group worming strategies may appear desirable, but they rapidly lead to the development of wormer resistance. The aim should be to target the use of wormers to high-

risk animals and leave a proportion of grazing animals in a group that have not been given a worming dose.

To ensure optimum management of worms within your flock, ensure regular consultation with your vet or SQP for guidance on which animals to treat, when, and with the most appropriate product to use.

Ewes should be wormed on how high egg production post-lambing will be.



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# Cooperation and coordination is key to controlling scab in hefted flocks

Back in 2018, seven farmers grazing Herdwick hefted flocks across one common took part in the Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association sheep scab project, to investigate the disease on common land.

This followed a report that sheep scab mites in some flocks in Great Britain had developed resistance to injectable treatments (macrocyclic lactones or MLs).

None of the seven flocks had any obvious signs of sheep scab and all the sheep were healthy and in good condition. However, some flocks reported that the sheep were pulling at their wool in January 2017 and that some of these sheep did have lice, so it was assumed that lice were the problem.

## Wool-pulling

We wanted to find out if sheep scab may also have been present at a very low level and if, while not showing signs associated with sheep scab, scab mites may have been present in low numbers and contributing to this wool-pulling.

If not checked, sheep scab would continue to circulate, even if only at a low level. Scab mites may have been picked up via contact at shows or from bought-in animals.

A new blood test was used to detect antibodies to scab mites, which show whether the sheep have been exposed to mites. Each flock had 12 sheep tested – this allows us to determine if the flock has been exposed to sheep scab mites.

We detected low levels of exposure to sheep scab mites in five of the seven flocks. These sheep had no signs of sheep scab, but clearly there were sheep scab mites around.

Following the test, the farmers agreed to dip their sheep and to coordinate this so all flocks were treated at around same time. Some farmers did not have access to sheep dips due to environmental limitations, but they brought in sheep dip contractors.

## Antibodies

After dipping, the same sheep were tested again and antibody levels had declined – dipping had been successful.

No 'itchy sheep' or sheep pulling wool were observed in the seven flocks in January 2019, nor in January 2020. The collective and coordinated dipping in autumn 2018 appeared to have resolved the low level of sheep scab in the flocks and controlled the lice that had been seen in the sheep in January 2017.

Those farmers who had previously dipped their sheep at the late summer/early autumn weaning gather delayed dipping until October in 2019, so all ewes from the seven flocks were all dipped within the same time frame and returned to the fell.

This study shows that sheep scab can be present in a flock at a low level – so low that the classic signs associated with sheep scab – intense itching, severe wool loss, raw oozing areas of skin – were not seen.

The trials also highlighted the importance of knowing what you are treating. Assuming sheep pulling wool are affected by lice can lead to treating the wrong parasite. An accurate

By Amanda Carson, Herdwick Sheep Breeders Association



Treating flocks that come into contact together can prevent spread.

diagnosis is vital and the blood test for sheep scab can detect scab before signs develop, allowing farmers and vets to act quickly with the right treatments.

Only one injectable product offers both treatment and long-lasting protection against sheep scab – 2% moxidectin. Scab mites can live in the environment for 17 days, so for some injectable products the sheep can get re-infected if they go back onto the same land.

This is an issue for fell going flocks. Injectables had been used previously in some of the flocks in this project, but we can't say from this study that there was any resistance.

A correctly administered treatment may well have worked, but when the protection period wears off, the sheep are vulnerable. This means it is important that sheep are all treated in the same time frame.

Out on the commons, if flocks are treated at different times they risk getting re-infected if another flock has mites and treats at a different time. This may explain why there was evidence of low levels of mites.

Contractors can be a cost-effective way of controlling scab, providing there is cooperation to coordinate dipping where different flocks may have contact with each other. Contractors are able to remove dip and work in such a way that they eliminate the health risks associated with dips.

While the farmers on this common demonstrated that they could work cooperatively to deal with the scab mites that are present, their flocks are still at risk from adjoining hefts unless there is wider cooperation and coordination. Other farmers may want to discuss sheep scab and consider testing to see if there is evidence of sheep scab and develop a coordinated plan.

SCOPS offers more information about sheep scab at: <https://www.scops.org.uk/external-parasites/scab/>

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# Following the flock

We visit NSA Scottish Region Chairman Jen Craig, Lanarkshire; NSA Northern Region Chairman Thomas Carrick, Cumbria; and NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths, from Devon.

## Thomas Carrick

NSA Northern Region Chairman, Cumbria

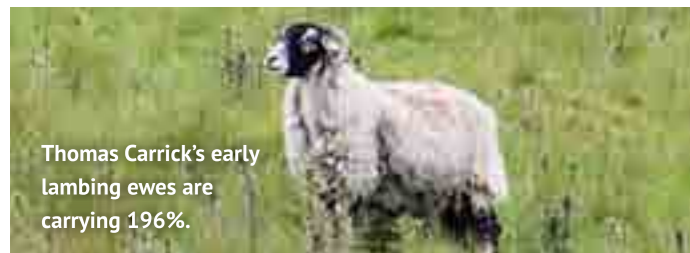


The past few months in the North Pennines have certainly been wet. Long wet winters take their toll on morale and certainly on the appearance of stock out in the fields.

However, our sheep are built to deal with it and are surprisingly fit after such a blustery few months and relatively little grass going into the back end of the year. Our scanning results for the earlier lambing ewes are off the scale with Swale ewes in-lamb to the Leicester running at 196%. The later ones are yet to scan, so here's hoping they don't let the side down.

Scanning results alone can be misleading, but they do seem to be heading (year after year) in the higher direction – a hidden curse for the hill farmer, when so much of our ground carries a ewe with one lamb comfortably, but with two at a stretch (and a fair bit of work).

No doubt this is a result of hill sheep all around the north of England being kept off the hill and enjoying easier winters. I just wonder if are we killing these hard hill breeds with kindness. My grandfather would be scratching his head. In his day ewes were on the fell all winter with a small bale of hay to 40 when it snowed. How things have changed!



Thomas Carrick's early lambing ewes are carrying 196%.



Bryan Griffiths' ewe lambs are carrying 170%.

## Bryan Griffiths

NSA Chairman, Devon



Appalling ground conditions compelled us to house the flock several weeks earlier than usual, with everything undercover by New Year.

Some quality silage, harvested in May, has kept the ewes in excellent condition with no need of supplement until much closer to lambing. The kind autumn has resulted in high scanning results, with Mule ewe lambs carrying an alarming 170%.

Our automatic lamb feeder has taken much of the workload out of rearing surplus lambs and has largely eliminated 'blow up and die' syndrome. But we had best not get ahead of ourselves – there's many a slip twixt scanning and lambing.

Our annual Health Plan review falls in January. As with so many audits, much of the paperwork is tedious and the resulting files are unlikely to see light of day until next year. But two hours walking through the flock, discussing every detail of our husbandry methods with an enthusiastic sheep vet, is invaluable.



## Jen Craig

NSA Scottish Region Chairman, Lanarkshire

It's been a wet and mild start to the new year for us here, but the ewes are in good condition.

We scanned our in-bye flock a couple of weeks ago. We're gradually replacing our cross ewes with Scottish Black Face ewes to reduce the inputs, but we still have some cross ewes remaining – all of which have gone to the North Country Cheviot tup. They scanned really well, with only seven empty out of 204 and a percentage of 168%, which suits us just fine here. The Blackie hill ewes will be scanned at the end of February.

The in-bye ewes will start lambing around the 10th April, with the hill ewes following on the 16th. We lamb most of them outside. The in-bye Blackies and hill ewes carrying twins are lambed in the fields and the singles lamb out on the hill. We bring the cross ewes inside to lamb as they tend to need a bit more assistance. The hope now is that we get a decent run weather wise, up-to and during lambing, and some early grass growth wouldn't go amiss either.



Despite difficult weather, Jen Craig's ewes are in good condition.

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