

# SHEEP FARMER

APRIL / MAY 2020

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

## SHEEP EVENTS FOR 2020

COVID-19 POSTPONEMENTS

## MARKETING DISRUPTIONS

NSA'S WORK TO SUPPORT THE INDUSTRY

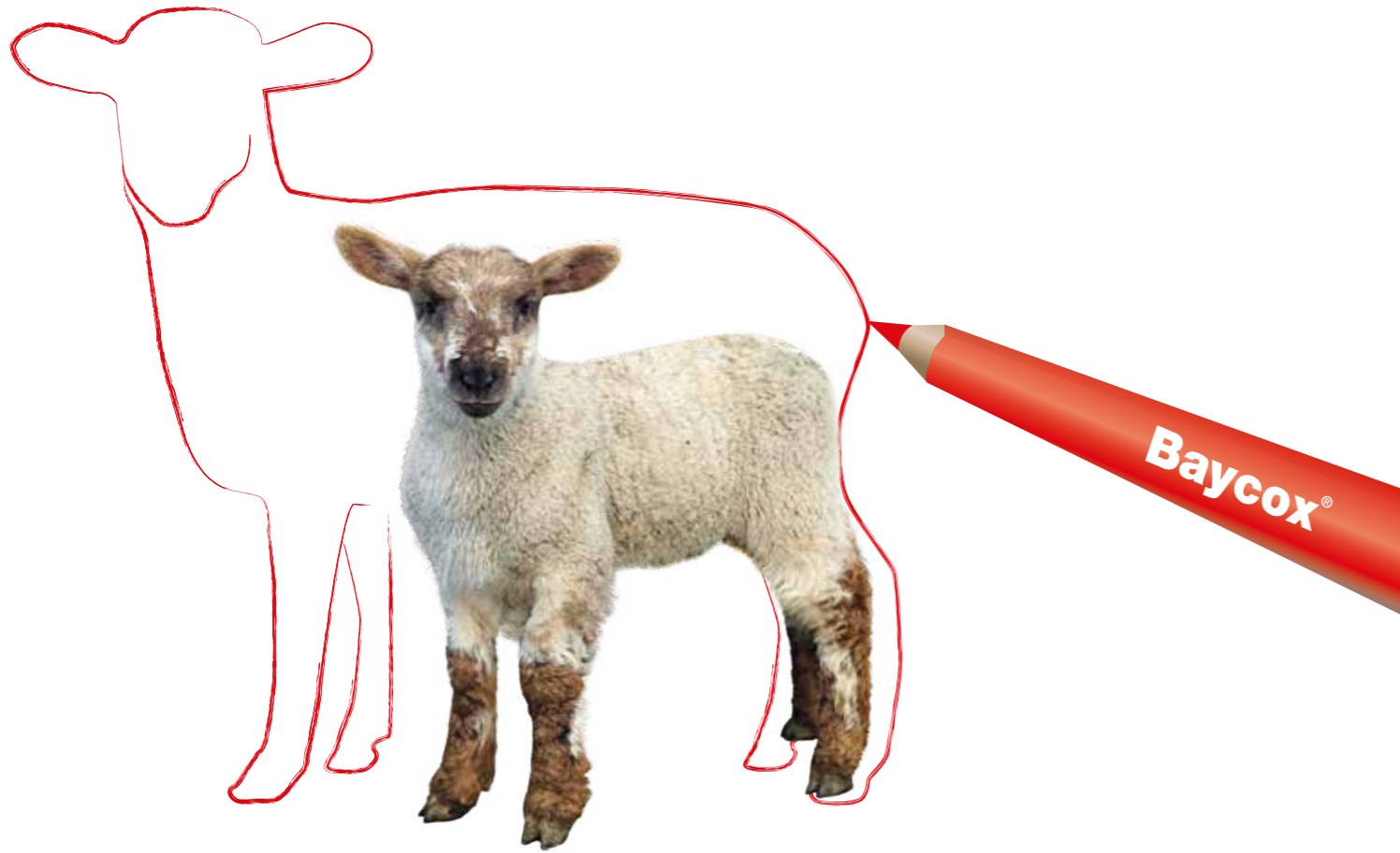
## BENEFITS OF LAMB CONSUMPTION

UNDERSTANDING A BALANCED DIET



your business your future

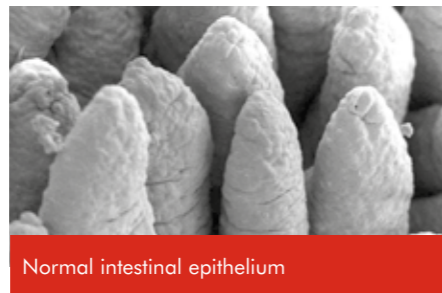
# PREVENTING COCCIDIOSIS CAN HELP YOU DRAW HIGHER RETURNS



Normal intestine



Intestine affected by coccidia



Normal intestinal epithelium



Epithelial desquamation after infection with coccidia

Images Ref: Mundt H.C. (2005); Journal of Animal Protozooses, 20, No. 1

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## Events 'on hold' but negotiations continue

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

There are few things more important than health and wellbeing and, on behalf of NSA, I'd like to offer our condolences and best wishes to anyone who has been affected by coronavirus, and urge everyone to do what they can to stay well.

As we go to press, the UK is locked down and business activity has been severely restricted. Many shows, events and sales have been cancelled – all with huge knock-on effects for budgets, income and, in many cases, jobs.

For us, in addition to the cancellation or postponement of a number of spring and summer meetings, it has resulted in plans for NSA Sheep 2020 and Scotsheep being disrupted. As we go to print, Scotsheep is still hoping to run, however, Sheep 2020 is being rescheduled for October 2020.

### Assessing

So much is on hold, but policy development and trade negotiations will restart as soon as the situation allows.

The marketplace continues, but in a very different guise. The catering trade has closed entirely, both here and on the continent, with a real challenge to switch catering supply chain volumes to retail volumes.

Remember the statistics – 35% of Britain's sheepmeat is exported, with 96% of this going to the EU. A loss of access to the EU market, or paying tariffs of around 48%, would create serious problems and could only be overcome by new free trade deals with nations outside the EU, or vastly increased self-sufficiency within the UK.

Self-sufficiency is often scoffed at, and there is no doubt it would reduce competition and bring carcass utilisation challenges, and in normal conditions exports provide a solid base to market prices. Britain's sheepmeat export and import volumes are rarely too far apart. This means we are in balance but, whenever exports become difficult, our domestic market becomes more important.

There is evidence we are being nudged in this direction already, not just with coronavirus

but with several major retailers making commitments to source 100% British lamb. Stronger retail commitments to British lamb can only be met by supply commitments, with some changes to even out seasonal supply. And it's worth reflecting on the many demands that have been made from producers for supermarkets to support British sheep farmers and put British lamb on the shelves.

### Commitments

While a sudden exit from the EU market was avoided in late 2019, it could end up looming large again as we approach the end of our transition period and exit the EU completely at the end of December 2020. That said, coronavirus-related delays now seem possible. Preparing for this possibility, as well as aiming to be wider global players, the UK Government, Department of International Trade (DIT), devolved administrations, and levy bodies, are busy reaching out to nations across the world – building relationships and preparing for new trade deals.

But for sheepmeat, replacing like-for-like export opportunities – particularly if a sudden change is needed at the end of December this year – is highly optimistic.

Our starting position with the EU appears to be based on playing hardball: no interest in alignment; we will walk away if we don't get what we want; we will use our battleships to protect our fishing grounds.

Contrast that with the narrative surrounding a US trade deal, where the language seems to be softening. We still hear about the intention to protect our standards and values, but the language is becoming more conciliatory, with Defra Secretary George Eustice suggesting we need to be more reasonable when it comes to chlorinated chicken.

There are clear opportunities in the US for our sheep sector. But, if the US was to replace the EU as a major British sheepmeat customer, how would it work? Air freight would be an option, although probably only for high-value goods. And this would not sit comfortably with creating a climate friendly reputation. Sea freight by container takes four weeks, so we'd need to be at the top of our game with shelf life – not impossible, by any means, but will take effort.

Volatility and change has been predicted for some time. I think it's here, right now.



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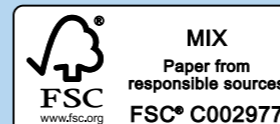
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### Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**

### Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**

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### Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**

### South East



Chairman: **Yan Le Du**

### South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**

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# Covid-19 working update

As with many organisations, NSA has had to change the way it works in order to keep providing support to its members. Some things NSA would consider to be a normal part of our service are, unfortunately, being disrupted. Please be aware while the outbreak is ongoing you may find:

- Sheep Farmer magazine may be a bit late. We rely on the Royal Mail to deliver these magazines, and we know they are under pressure.
- You may not receive letters from NSA as normal, as we are working from home and don't have access to our printers and postal arrangements.
- There will be a delay in the posting of dog worrying signs. While we are trying to ensure signs are posted as regularly as possible, with staff working from home and very infrequent visits to NSA Head Office, we are struggling to post these out as quickly.

During this time, the easiest way for us to contact you is via email. To help alleviate problems, NSA is asking members to ensure their email addresses are up to date with NSA's records. Members not already following NSA on Facebook and Twitter are invited to like our @natsheep pages on the social media sites to keep up to date with the very latest news and announcements from NSA as they happen. The pages also offer some light relief during these times of self-isolation and lockdown.

## Save the date for AGM

Situation allowing, NSA will be holding its annual general meeting on Thursday 13th August, 2020. More information will be announced as soon as possible.

## Dog worrying awareness

NSA would typically be running its dog worrying campaign around the time this edition of Sheep Farmer arrives with members. Due to the Government's lockdown measures, NSA has chosen to delay this campaign and run it once the measures have been lifted and people are, once again, able to return to the countryside.

When this happens, NSA will be sharing graphics and information via its e-news service and social media and invites members to share these with members of the public.

## UK's young shepherds' show off skills in Europe

A group of young sheep farmers travelled to Paris in February to compete in the European 'Ovinpiades' Young Shepherd Competition. Impressively, all NSA competitors were placed in the top 10 of the competition, with Sam Hewett, from Kent, narrowly missing out on first place and Northern Ireland's Matthew Robinson coming third. Congratulations to all our competitors.

# Thank you to our supporters

NSA thanks the following companies for their annual sponsorship, which is invaluable to the work we do to provide a voice for the UK sheep sector.

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NSA also thanks members of the Livestock Auctioneers Association that help spread membership recruitment messages to their clients.



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Welshpool Market

# Eastern Region Winter Fair speakers provide open discussions

As the highlight of this year's NSA Eastern Region Winter Fair, the seminar line up featured many leading names from the sheep industry delivering thought provoking advice to the good number of visitors in the audiences.

The event kicked off with AHDB's Nerys Wright discussing results from her study into the effects of ewe body condition score on lamb performance, revealing that a condition score one year will have future impacts on performance beyond the current lambing season. Following on, Sean Riches from event sponsor's MSD spoke about why good flock health is essential and how it fits with future farming strategies of farming in an environmentally responsible way that is acceptable to the wider society.

Always a popular speaker, sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings drew a good crowd to speak about the role of sheep in arable rotations bringing improved soil structure and reducing inputs for the arable farmer whilst increasing lamb growth rates and controlling parasite burdens for the shepherd. The theme of sheep and arable continued with shepherd James White and Jo Hodgkins talking about their experiences of farming in this way.

Into the afternoon, seminars continued with further interesting speakers, firstly Mike Gooding, Director of Farmers Fresh discussing potential price volatility for the sheep market but also highlighting some of the emerging

markets that could offer future potential to the UK sheep sector. The final external speaker of the day was Patricia Bush, part of the Defra ELMS team who gave an update on the scheme and sought feedback from those attending on what it proposed.

## Discussions

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker closed the event with another chance for attendees to hear NSA's recent 'Setting the sheep farming record straight' talk on how the sector is defending itself against recent unfounded criticisms.

NSA Communications Officer Katie James, who was in attendance, comments: "On what was a wet and cold day it was nice to see some familiar faces pay us a visit on the NSA stand as well as several visitors who came to sign up to NSA membership on the day. The warmth of the seminar room was an additional pull for visitors who, with the excellent line up on offer, kept themselves warm and dry for most of the day as they heard some interesting and thought-provoking talks."

## Wales/Cymru

**It has been all change at the top with Kate Hovers taking over as Chairman and NSA Trustee Caryl Hughes has become Vice Chair of NSA Cymru/Wales Region.**

This comes after Tim Ward stepped down as Chair and Paul Wozencraft has served his six years as NSA Trustee. The Region thanks them both for all their input and hard work and wish the new team well. The Annual Meeting heard talks from Welsh Homestead Smokery on how lamb bacon can be produced, and Nicola Drew, NSA Next Generation Ambassador, who talked about how she has used new technology to improve the health of her flock. Finally, Laura Johnson British Wool, Owen Roberts, HCC, and Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive, gave presentations on 'Setting the record straight' and putting the industry argument across in a very concise and constructive way.

## New NSA Regional Chairs elected

**With all NSA regions now having held their Annual Regional Members Meetings, NSA is pleased to welcome a four new faces as Regional Chairmen. All other regions remain unchanged – Contact details on page 2.**

**NSA Cymru/Wales Region.** Kate Hovers – Kate Hovers farms in the Brecon Beacons and has been elected as the new Chairman of NSA Cymru/Wales Region. *Find out more about Kate on page 16.*

**NSA Northern Ireland Region.** Jonny Farmer – Jonny Farmer, NSA Next Generation Ambassador and Northern Ireland Region Trustee, has been voted to lead the region as its new Chairman. *Find out more about Jonny in April/May 2019 Sheep Farmer.*

**NSA South East Region.** Yan Le Du – Yann Le Du is based in Wiltshire and while now retired from active farming, keeps busy supporting the next generation of sheep farmers and has taken on the Chairmanship of NSA South East Region. *Find out more about Yann in February/March 2020 Sheep Farmer.*

**NSA South West Region.** Howard Tratt – Howard Tratt, an NSA Next Generation Ambassador running his own sheep enterprise in Somerset. *Find out more about Howard on page 32.*

# Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale



.....  
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## What Ram Sales are available?

FIVE NSA RAM SALES WILL TAKE PLACE IN 2020.

**NSA Wales and Border Early Ram Sale**  
Monday 3rd August - Builth Wells

**NSA South West Ram Sale**  
Wednesday 19th August - Exeter Livestock Market

**NSA Eastern Region Rugby Ram Sale**  
Friday 28th August - Rugby Farmers Mart

**NSA Eastern Region Melton Mowbray Ram Sale**  
Tuesday 15th September - Melton Mowbray Market

**NSA Wales and Border Main Ram Sale**  
Monday 21st September - Builth Wells

See page 2 for contact details for Ram Sale Organisers.



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# Coronavirus causes dramatic shift to 2020 NSA events schedule

These pages in an April/May edition of Sheep Farmer would usually be packed with exciting previews of meetings and events to look forward to in the coming months.

Sadly, coronavirus has meant that no aspect of normal life has been left untouched and we are disappointed we have had to make some serious changes to our event schedule.

From moving some events to an online forum, to postponing others to a later date – all events have been impacted. Here, and in the coming few pages, we will attempt to update you on our progress in modifying these. As this is a developing situation, please accept that these events are all still subject to change as new information appears.

NSA would also like to assure you that, while things are having to adapt, there is much work going on both in head office and



in the regions to ensure things are in place for when we can once again get together.

## Marches

With most regional members currently in the middle of lambing, it has been good to get some interesting meetings and visits in the diary for further into the year when at last (Coronavirus permitting) it will hopefully be easier to get off the farm for a few hours. The first significant date will be a committee meeting on Tuesday 21st April, Marches Region is currently working hard to get online, to allow this meeting to take place via online conferencing facilities. A highlight in the spring/summer 2020 diary will be a visit to the new Cotswold Seeds FarmED visitor and research centre, which the region hopes can continue on Monday 15th June, beginning at 4pm. During the visit, members will hear about the FarmED facility before enjoying a farm walk that covers the Cotswold Seeds trial plots, mob-grazing, natural flood management scheme, heritage orchard, kitchen garden, and apiary. Light refreshments will be provided. *For more information contact Katie James, Regional Secretary – contact details page 2.*

## Cymru/Wales

Plans are now commencing for NSA Welsh Sheep 2021 to be held on Tuesday 18th May 2021 at Red House Farm, Aberhafesp, Newtown, Powys by kind permission of the Owen family. At Red House the Owen family own a total of 550 acres running 1,200 Texel cross ewes together with a few Welsh Mules and a flock of pedigree Beltex sheep. They also have 120 Limousin suckler cows. Further details on the event will be announced in coming months.

## South East

NSA South East Region had organised several field days scheduled for May; however, it has now made the difficult decision to postpone these events for the foreseeable future. The region is currently looking for new dates to run these events once the lockdown has been lifted.

## YOUR NSA REGION

To attend or enquire about events in your region or raise a sheep farming issue you want discussed at a regional committee meeting, find your regional representative on page 2. Don't forget, devolved regions also dedicate time to policy work. Read about this on page 10.



## Breed society forum

Sadly, due to current events, NSA has regrettably had to cancel the Breed Society Forum in its current form. We are planning to host this event online using video conferencing technology, at the time the meeting was set to be held on Thursday 7th May. It is also hoped an in person forum can be arranged in the near future. NSA is still working on arrangements for this event and more information will be shared via NSA's email update.

## NSA Regional Iceberg Diseases Meetings

**In a futuristic gesture, NSA is planning to run these meetings, originally due to take place across the country throughout spring, as its very first online meeting forum.**

NSA looks forward to welcoming the first guests to the online 'webinar' in the coming weeks. The meetings will focus on infectious conditions that are classed as 'iceberg diseases', which include Border disease, Caseous Lymphadenitis (CLA), Johne's disease and Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA). Despite their increasing significance many sheep farmers remain quite unaware of the real impact they can have on sheep flocks.

A team from NSA, Moredun and SRUC had planned to travel the length and breadth of the country to inform on the risks posed by these often unnoticed, but sometimes devastating, diseases. However, all three parties have come together to optimise technology and are now excited to offer these meetings as webinars.

NSA encourages anyone interested in attending to register in advance online. Meetings will take place on Thursday 30th April, 12pm, Wednesday 13th May, 7pm and Wednesday 20th May, 8.30am.

To register, visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events) or contact NSA Activities and Campaigns Officer Chris Adamson - contact details page 2.

# NSA Scotsheep 2020 postponement plans

Due to the devastating disruption and ongoing uncertainty caused by coronavirus (COVID-19), the National Sheep Association's Scottish Region has taken the regrettable decision to postpone NSA Scotsheep 2020.

The bi-annual event, due to take place on Wednesday 3rd June, by kind permission of Robert and Hazel McNee based at Over Finlurg, Tealing, near Dundee, will now take place on Wednesday 8th July, with Clydesdale Bank as the major sponsor.

"The organising committee was keen to set a new date and will continue to work to deliver this prestigious event as soon as possible," said event organiser Euan Emslie.

## Delay

"We have tentatively set a new date that, most importantly, suits the hosts who need to fit this event around their farming operation. NSA Scottish Region understands that this date is optimistic and that it may need to be reviewed again in light of the situation with COVID-19."

Mr Emslie said that NSA Scottish Region has lodged an application for the necessary licenses and will keep the situation under close review.

Should the region not be granted a license for the July date, NSA Scotsheep 2020 will regrettably

have to be rescheduled until next year and will be held in early the first few weeks of June 2021.

NSA Scotsheep 2020 Chairman Willy Millar added: "We are disappointed to have to postpone this event, but the current circumstances give us no choice. The committee also realises that choosing a date in early July has risks, so we have come up with an alternative date for next year should the restrictions on social distancing and gatherings of people not be lifted during the next few months.

"Our firm belief is that NSA Scotsheep is a crucial event for the farming community and sheep industry in Scotland, and further afield. There is no doubt that people will be keen to get back to a more normal way of life as soon as possible, while following government advice on the situation."

Plans are well underway for the prestigious event, which will officially be opened at 10am by former United Auctions Executive Chairman David Leggat MBE.

As this edition of Sheep Farmer went to press, more than 160 stands had been booked for the event, including 130 commercial and educational stalls, 27 sheep breed society stands, and five individual breeder stands.

Other mainline sponsors for the event include British Wool, Caltech-Crystalax, Scotbeef, United Auctions, MSD Animal Health, and Shearwell Data, as well support from Quality Meat Scotland and many other national and local companies.

Visitors to Scotsheep will have the opportunity to tour the farm and attend a series of seminars on



topics including animal health, agricultural policy and support post-Brexit, and how to get a foot on the farming ladder.

A series of 20-minute workshops will cover a range of subjects, such as the role and cost of the ram, livestock management software, making the best use of social media, condition scoring of ewes, and the correct use of sheep anthelmintics and OPAs.

## Competitions

Demonstrations will include sheep shearing, ram MOTs, sheep dressing, grassland, butchery and cookery, crook making, as well as all things woolly with wool spinning, felt making, knitting, and crotchet.

A range of competitions will also be held throughout the day including Next Generation Shepherd of the Year, individual sheep dog trial, stockjudging, guess the tag, and a new fencing competition for up to eight teams. The show and sale of ewe hoggs will be conducted by United Auctions at 4pm.

Further details and entry forms for the competitions can be found at [www.scotssheep.org.uk](http://www.scotssheep.org.uk).

## TENTATIVE DATE

**WEDNESDAY 8TH JULY 2020**  
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## FEATURES INCLUDE

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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)

# NSA Sheep Event 2020 moves to October date

NSA is saddened by the necessity to move Sheep 2020, hosted at the Three Counties Show Ground, Malvern, Worcestershire, from its original date of the 28th July.

However, we are optimistic that our rescheduled date of the 19th October will allow the event to continue in this year, and that it might give sheep farmers and trade the opportunity to come together after months of 'social distancing'.

We hope that the disease situation and the controls that are with us today will be behind us enough to allow Sheep 2020 to take place in the Autumn. Work has started to ensure the event – while inevitably different – is as good, maybe even better, than ever. This preview was prepared before the outbreak and, therefore, there may be some differences to the final event.

Already recognised as the leading business-to-business event for the UK sheep sector, this year's event is adding even more to its usual popular offering of seminars, trade stands, breed societies, workshops and more. NSA Sheep Event 2020 is introducing several new, exciting competitions.

One of the new additions is an inventions competition. Budding agricultural entrepreneurs

will be invited to enter different classes, ranging from small useful items that farmers have designed for their own use on farm to larger inventions that have been brought to market during the past two years. Keen photographers will also have a chance to compete in the event's first ever photography competition.

Still offering some of the existing popular attractions, the Tornado fencing competition and NSA Next Generation Young Shepherd of the Year national finals will also take place, providing a highlight for spectators.

## Demonstrations

The wide-ranging demonstrations held across the showground will also see some new additions, including grassland shows and sheep postmortem demonstrations offering valuable practical advice to sheep farmers visiting the event. There will also be a dedicated rural crime area to provide visitors with the opportunity to chat with specialised rural crime officers on issues affecting their businesses – from sheep worrying by dogs to livestock rustling.

NSA Sheep Event Organiser Helen Roberts says: "This year's event marks the 40th year of the NSA holding its biennial flagship event at Three Counties Showground and, to celebrate this, we are looking forward to providing visitors with an event that is even bigger and better than before.



"We hope that the new features added to the event line up will be popular with visitors, encouraging even more sheep farmers to take a day away from the farm and enjoy a day out. The event will offer a wealth of valuable advice and information, a chance to discuss business with leading commercial companies and experts, and, of course, an enjoyable day out catching up with farming friends – old and new."

## Seminars

The usual programme of NSA seminars, which attract leading names from the UK agricultural sector as speakers, will once again provide a draw for those seeking further information on future policy affecting the sheep industry. And interactive workshops will offer practical hands-on advice to help shepherds on farm.

The event, which takes place on Monday 19th October, is free for NSA members – a saving of £15 on the usual gate entry price.

NSA is assessing whether regular features, such as the farm tours and Sheep Event dinner can be postponed too, if so this provides an opportunity for industry networking and an enjoyable social evening ahead of the busy event day. Details of both will be shared via NSA communications soon.

To find out more about what is happening at NSA Sheep Event 2020 visit the event website at: [www.sheepevent.org.uk](http://www.sheepevent.org.uk)

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MONDAY 19TH OCTOBER  
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- SHEEP BREED SOCIETIES
- NEXT GENERATION SHEPHERD OF THE YEAR COMPETITION
- TORNADO FENCING COMPETITION AND OTHER COMPETITIONS
- TECHNICAL & POLICY INFORMATION
- ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
- TRADE STANDS & WORKSHOPS DEMONSTRATIONS

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Uncertainty is becoming the new normal across the UK.

# Market disruption closely monitored

From Brexit to Covid-19, uncertainty seems to be quickly becoming the new normal – and with it comes the frustrating delay of new and updated regulation.

Vital changes we have been previously assured of, such as sheep ageing and carcase splitting and mandatory classification, are, once again, being held up. But NSA is continuing to work hard to ensure they do not drop off the agenda and remain at the forefront of policy-makers' minds. However, there are several new areas of work

we have had to pick up and NSA would like to assure its members work is going into dealing with all of these.

Since the Covid-19 crisis deepened, and the British public was ordered to remain at home, we have seen a very disheartening drop in lamb price. This is due, in large part, to our reliance on the catering and hospitality trade, both in the UK and in Europe, and it is not, currently, being compensated for in an adequate uplift in 'cook at home' sales. While these businesses are closed, lamb sales face a reduced market. NSA is continuing to monitor the situation and is working with AHDB and Government to protect

our industry.

NSA is also working with a cross-industry group, including British Wool and the National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC), to overcome a probable reduced shearing capacity this season, as many international shearers are likely to be unable to enter the country. NAAC has created a database to match shearing contractors with UK-based shearers to help fill the gap.

NSA is also developing a more local service to help connect farmers with shearers in their area. At the time of writing, this service is still under development, but NSA will keep members informed via its weekly email update.

## Scotland

NSA Scottish Region has been busy attending meetings with various key representatives in the industry, including Scottish Craft Butchers, Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland, and QMS.

The theme of these meetings has been collaboration and, more widely, how to get NSA Scottish Region further on the map to promote Scottish sheep farmers and crofters.

NSA Scottish Region Vice Chairman Maimie Paterson and myself met with Sir Edward Mountain MSP, Convenor of the Rural Economy and Connectivity Committee, to discuss various topics from LFASS and its replacement to CAP payments and diversification via trees with the impacts on rural communities. Further meetings are being arranged with key parliamentary committee members and civil servants.

Sea eagles have been getting welcome attention in the Scottish press, via Scottish Farmer magazine's Claire Taylor. This is an ongoing threat to farmers and crofters, with little understanding from most of the population of the devastating impact it has on livelihoods. Diversionary feeding and scaring tactics have taken place with very limited success. If you have been affected, please get in touch so we can gather evidence of sea eagle predation.

### Legislation

The ageing of hogs discussion has failed to move forward. This is frustrating as it further contributes to the real lack of any insight or clarity from Scottish Government or Westminster regarding future legislation changes and support post-Brexit. It becomes increasingly evident Scottish Agriculture will have to wait until next year's election before any substantial changes will be made.

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



## Cymru/Wales

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Welsh Government is working with the industry to develop a sustainable brand values framework for the food/drink supply chain in Wales. Its vision is for a thriving, resilient and responsible agri-food industry, which is more environmentally friendly, as well as more economical and socially engaging.

As a part of this work, HCC has been asked to lead discussions on sustainable brand values in the red meat sector and, to this end, NSA is establishing a Red Meat Working Group. NSA Cymru/Wales Region will be part of this and will feedback information following the April meeting.

We are still working on sheep scab with the industry group that is in the process of applying for the £5m fund, which was announced in 2019.

Finally, Welsh Government has launched its co-design programme for the future of farm support. The programme has three activities: a short on-line survey, which is available to all who register; a series of one-to-one meetings; and a series of group workshops, and NSA would encourage members to take part. For more information visit: [www.menterabusnes.cymru/sfs/home](http://www.menterabusnes.cymru/sfs/home).

## Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



At last we have a devolved Government back in action and our Minister for Agriculture, Edwin Poots, has plenty to catch up on.

The Minister has turned down a request for Northern Ireland to follow Scotland and Republic of Ireland to reinstate Areas of Natural Constraint (ANC) payments. Its argument that all entitlement payments were to move to a flat-rate system and that commitment makes it impossible to find money for such a scheme. We are guaranteed the total cash payments to farmers in 2021 will remain the same. That is not to say it won't be distributed in a different way and not all farmers will receive the same amount.

Ulster Farmers Union (UFU) has been fighting against the Shared Environmental Services (SES) about the strict ammonia emission rules it has imposed. This has virtually stopped any major expansion on Northern Ireland's farms due to planning restrictions. Although these rules do not have a big impact on sheep farming, NSA did support UFU, along with quite a few other industry bodies, in taking SES to court.

SES has now withdrawn its guidelines on ammonia emissions and the court case has been abandoned for the time being, as consultations begin to find a more sensible approach and a decision from the Minister. We can't ignore Brexit and, while the UK Government signed up to a Northern Ireland Protocol as part of the EU Withdrawal Agreement, our Minister for Agriculture has stated he will not accept any checks at ports. The recent track record of government leaves us in a quandary as to what will be the outcome of negotiations occurring until the end of the year. Is 'no deal' really off the table?

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# Shine Ewe-reka key to reducing lamb mortalities in French flocks

French sheep farmers who had been losing up to a third of their artificially-reared lambs to bloat are reporting no mortalities from this condition after introducing a milk replacer made with ewe's milk into their feeding systems.

With the introduction of Finn and Romanov genetics to local breeds including the Berrichon du Cher and the Ile de France and subsequent increases in lambing percentages, rearing orphan lambs is no longer the preserve of dairy sheep farmers only.

While the additional lambs provide a welcome income, problems associated with rearing excess lambs, including infection and bloat, or ballonnement as it is known in France, can result in very high mortality rates and poor performance, despite lambs having free access to milk replacer from automatic feeders.

For three farmers who have changed the replacer fed to Shine Ewe-reka formula, there has been a significant decline in mortalities.

For Michel and Jean Gosset and Thimothee, Jean's son, who farm at Montloué, north of Reims, it has resulted in their orphan lamb mortality rate reducing from up to 33% to almost zero.

The Gossets runs a flock of 650 ewes, some with Romanov genetics, and achieve a lambing percentage of up to 270%.

The flock lambs in three blocks and all excess lambs are reared on an automatic feeder. Each lamb receives around 14kg of milk replacer and weaning age is six weeks. Lambs are intensively finished and slaughtered at 35kg.

Before Shine Ewe-reka formula was introduced, up to a third of orphan lambs died of bloat.

The Gossets report that they now have no mortalities resulting from bloat.

They mark the artificially-reared lambs to monitor their progress after weaning and can see no visual difference between these and lambs reared by their mothers.

"It's now a pleasure to enter the rearing shed and see healthy, happy lambs," Michel admits.

Their experience is mirrored in Hubert Mony's Romane flock.

Mr Mony is president of the Romane Society and runs 450 ewes near Francheville, north of Dijon.

He too lambs three times a year, achieving a lambing percentage of over 220% with all lambs finished intensively on concentrates after weaning.

Faced with 25% mortality in artificially-reared lambs, mostly from bloat, Mr Mony began feeding the Shine Ewe-reka formula, supplied by Univor. He has since seen a marked improvement with no losses from bloat.

Lambs, he says, achieve excellent performance, similar to that of lambs reared on their mothers.

The use of ewe milk in lamb milk replacer is a huge improvement in lamb nutrition and is one of the reasons the Shine Ewe-reka formula is the leading formula for rearing lambs in Europe.

For Bertin brothers, who farm north of Paris near Beauvais, feeding Shine Ewe-reka formula has been hugely successful.

They produce lamb from 1100 ewes in three blocks annually. They have been using prolific breeds since 1975 - currently the flock is Ile de France crossed with Finn. This has resulted in a lambing percentage of up to 240%.

Rearing lambs artificially on replacer fed through an automatic machine had resulted in major problems with bloat, with mortality rising to 30%.

They had attempted to improve the situation by changing the machine settings, were scrupulous with hygiene, fed probiotics and coccidiostats and changed milk replacers, but with no success.

They finally resorted to using antibiotics and, although this did work, they were unhappy with taking this approach.

They contacted a number of milk replacer manufacturers to ask if improvements could be made before they trialled the Shine Ewe-reka formula against their normal milk, without the use of antibiotics.

While 11% of the control group experienced bloat, none of the lambs fed Shine Ewe-reka formula did.

Their latest batch were reared without antibiotics and weaned easily.



Michel and Thimothee Gosset



Jean Bertin



Hubert Mony

For more information on this trial work contact: **Bonanza** on 0808 178 1017 or visit: **bonanzacalf.ie**

To find your local stockist: [www.bonanzacalf.ie/shine-ewe-reka-stockists/](http://www.bonanzacalf.ie/shine-ewe-reka-stockists/)



# Enthusiastic ambassadors set for another successful year

The 2020 cohort of NSA Next Generation Ambassadors joined together for the first time in February for their inaugural session based in Gloucestershire.

With some ambassadors travelling from as far as the northern coast of Northern Ireland and Morayshire in Scotland, the group spent time getting to know each other as well as hearing from industry experts and visiting some local farms.

Leading the group, NSA Communications Officer Katie James said: "The first delivery session is always highly anticipated and is an interesting insight into how the group will bond and work as ambassadors for the year ahead and beyond."

"Any initial concerns were quickly erased as it soon became clear the group were going to get on extremely well and gain full benefit from the year's programme of activities."

The group was joined by Flock Health's Phillippa Page, who spent the day discussing flock

health planning and responsible medicine use, as well as accompanying the ambassadors to view NSA English Committee Chairman Kevin Harrison's flock of North Country mules, based between Bath and Bristol.

## Targets

The group also spent time considering their own personal and career development, setting themselves targets for the future and learning more about NSA and its current policy work.

The session concluded with a visit to Martyn and Pauha Whittaker at Overtown Farm in Cranham, Gloucestershire. Their openness provided the group with an enjoyable and interesting end to the three days.

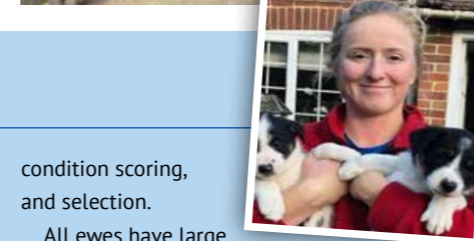
"We have a full programme planned for the year ahead, subject to change due to the covid-19 outbreak, and I look forward to spending time with this already knowledgeable and experienced group to witness their development further," added Mrs James.

NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker, who met with the group, said: "It was a privilege to be able to spend the first day of this year's Next

Generation Ambassador programme with the new group of young people selected for the programme. The occasion was all the better because we met right on my doorstep and managed to eat that night at the local pub - aptly called The Fleece.

"All the ambassadors had prepared well and are a credit to themselves. It bodes well that we have young people like this entering our industry and I look forward to engaging with them throughout the year."

Find out more about this year's group of ambassadors on the NSA Next Generation website: [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/next-generation).



## Updates from Ambassadors

Throughout the year, we'll hear updates from our 2020 cohort and what they are doing at home on the farm. Here we hear from Clover Crosse, from Wiltshire.

We are due to start lambing our 900 Romney cross Highlander ewes, outdoors, on 10th April.

The ewes have spent the winter on a diet of fodder beet and have access to a small area of stubble turnips, to boost protein levels in their diet. The shearlings have also been on stubble turnips on a neighbour's farm.

Like many areas, we had our annual rainfall (825mm) between September and February. We have weathered this winter well, all things considered, and the ewes and shearlings have

scanned at 191% and 162%, respectively.

More importantly, twinning percentage was up by 10%, at 64%, across the whole flock. This will save us invaluable time at lambing, which we would otherwise spend fostering. The ewes are now at grass, with reasonable covers ahead of them. The twins will be lightly stocked and singles will be tightly managed and drifted onto extra grass, post lambing.

## Recording

During the past 10 years, we have seen a massive benefit to performance recording our ewes, with an increase in twinning and eight-week weights. We are aiming for shearlings to be 80% of their mature weight at tugging in October, so plans are already in place for the next batch of replacements, with regular weighing, body

condition scoring, and selection.

All ewes have large management tags that are colour coded for age. This enables easy data capture (within 24 hours of birth) and linking of lambs to ewes, at lambing, with minimal disturbance.

From this data, two thirds of ewes are put to maternal sires, Romney or Highlander. The bottom third are put to a terminal sire. Ewes that are tugged to a terminal sire include ewes that have previously weaned a below-average combined lamb weight at weaning, had triplets more than twice, or cannot maintain their body condition.

The top 5% of ewes (best combined eight-week-to-weaning weights; without detriment to her body condition score) are deemed super-elite, which we are now keeping rams from.



# Benefits of eating lamb are significant for human health

By Phil Stocker, NSA

The previous two editions of Sheep Farmer covered the first two of the three themes of NSA's successful 'Setting the Record Straight' meetings, which were held during winter 2019/20.

These meetings aimed to give members, and the wider industry, some facts, figures, and inspiration to combat the endless tirade of criticism that has rained on the sheep industry during the past few years.

It is not inaccurate to say for too long many industry bodies felt the right approach was to ignore this criticism and not rise to the bait. For years, I've felt that even if this worked it could only be a short-term sticking plaster over a wound that would keep festering. If we have a good story to tell, and I believe we do, then far better to tell it. If we have things that we don't believe are defensible then it's far better to be open and honest about them, and work to sort them out.

## Health

The previous two editions of Sheep Farmer looked at the relationship between sheep farming and greenhouse gases and nature, and then animal welfare. The third topic, covered here, is one that has come to hit us every January but rumbles on all year round – the claim red meat is bad for our health.

Although I'm not sure we realised what was happening at the time, problems started back in the 1970s when government advice started to encourage people to eat more white meat,

including chicken and pork. This was on the basis red meat had a higher fat content and fat was related to heart disease, which was emerging as a major fatal disease.

The fact society had gone through significant changes, with people living longer and lifestyles starting to become more sedentary, was talked about but didn't stop the relentless charge towards the substitution of lamb and beef by chicken and pork.

## Consumption

At the same time chicken and pork production boomed, intensified, and became cheaper, lamb production, in particular, stayed extensive and grass based and lost out on the basis we were told it was less healthy and it was more expensive.

Breeding and lamb selection have resulted in fat levels in lamb falling significantly and, per capita, consumption of lamb has fallen dramatically during the past 50 years. But still red meat has been blamed for causing obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Here we feature some of the key points presented by different people and organisations at our recent Setting the Record Straight events, that show the tide can, and must, turn, with sensible lamb consumption being accepted as a positive health-giving food that contributes to good gut health, fitness, and active immune systems.

Research shows meat is an essential source of protein, iron, zinc, B vitamins, Vitamin D, selenium, and iodine, as well as eight essential amino acids. There is no proven, causal link between red meat and cancer.

Red meat delivers between 25g and 35g of protein per 100g, compared to just 9g per 100g

for foods like white beans and lentils. Protein is essential for muscle growth and to support muscle mass. Furthermore, it is an essential tool for the development of bones in children.

In addition to proteins, lamb is a good source of vitamins and minerals, providing seven

## Negative media

A World Health Organisation (WHO) announcement in 2015 created a litany of media headlines claiming eating red and processed meats posed a similar health risk to smoking tobacco.

But:

- There is nothing to suggest eating red meat, in line with the 70g a day cooked weight, impacts negatively on health.
- People in the UK are now, on average, consuming this recommended amount, having lowered their meat consumption from around 140g a day several decades ago.
- The risk levels of meat consumption identified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, are for far higher amounts of meat currently being eaten daily in the UK.
- Four in 10 men should reduce their intakes, but some women and girls could be encouraged to eat more red meat to boost iron and zinc status.
- The fat content of carcass meat has significantly reduced in recent decades.
- A blanket 'eat less' message to everyone seems wholly inappropriate and could have the unintended consequence of negatively impacting on the iron status of women and young girls.

Reference: Red meat: cutting through the confusion (Meat Advisory Panel)



Eating a balanced diet, which includes red meat, is the best way to remain healthy.

different ones that are key to supporting good health and wellbeing. Of these, there are four essential vitamins that reduce tiredness and fatigue and four that support the immune system. Five are crucial for supporting normal cognitive function.

## Fats

Fat is a subject often held in contention when assessing the viability of a product. But the research is clear – fat of the right type, consumed in the right quantity, is an important part of a balanced diet. And lamb, particularly grass-fed lamb, meets this specification well - if consumed at the recommended target of around 70g a day. In 2016, The National Obesity Forum and the Public Health Collaboration produced a report which called for a major overhaul of dietary guidelines. It argued sugar-containing processed foods should be avoided and replaced with whole foods, including meat, fish and dairy.

Not all fats are the same and different fats and oils contain both saturated and unsaturated fats in different proportions. To eat healthily, unsaturated fats (oily fish, rapeseed, sunflower, nuts) should replace saturated fats

(those found in biscuits, cakes, dairy products, processed or fatty meat products) and trans fats (hydrogenated vegetable oil).

While the British sheep flock is not entirely grass-fed, it is predominantly so. And research has shown lamb and mutton that is 100% grass-fed, tends to be lower in total fat and have higher levels of 'good fats', including omega-3 fatty acids, a more balanced and healthier ratio of omega 6, omega 3 ratios fatty acids, and higher levels of vitamins A and E.

Not only does omega 3 help to reduce the risk of high blood pressure or an irregular heartbeat, further increased protection against heart disease, diabetes and cancer is offered by the higher levels of conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) present in grass-fed meat (beef and lamb) and dairy products.

Breaking down the barriers and helping consumers understand these crucial differences is an important job, but not an easy one given how little knowledge most people have of nutritional research. In the modern world, people rely on the information coming out of 'official' sources and when WHO, UN and other 'reputable' sources criticise a product, it becomes difficult to

## Red meat and cancer

For a long time, farmers and industry bodies have been countering claims red meat causes cancer. This accusation came from an arbitrary link and research shows there is no conclusive link. In simple terms, saying red meat causes cancer is purely a coincidental link. The two things correlate in that people who consume red meat get cancer – but that doesn't mean red meat is the cause. The same type of study could, in theory, link a rise in hedgehog deaths on the roads in Asia with an increase in the number of TVs in households in the United States.

Special thanks go to AHDB, HCC, QMS as well as Newcastle University for their support during the talks, as well as for providing links to research for this article.



counteract.

But UK levy bodies, and farming organisations like NSA, have been working together with researchers, in the UK and abroad, to clear the name of these products and highlight the importance of consuming these in a balance.

To help break down some of the facts, and provide an easy-to-understand-and-share source of information, with references, NSA has produced a 'Top 10 facts' book about sheep farming.

The booklet is available at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work/28998/nsa-top-ten-sheep-farming-facts/](http://www.nationalsheep.org.uk/policy-work/28998/nsa-top-ten-sheep-farming-facts/).

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# Mixing farming with a veterinary career keeps new Cymru Chairman busy

By Ellie Phipps, NSA

Despite her busy life as a vet, newly-elected NSA Cymru/Wales Chairman Kate Hovers finds plenty of time to care for her 260 head of sheep, at home near Trecastle in Brecon, with help from her partner Elvet Jones.

The farm is home to several breeds – a mixture of pedigree, to meet the couple's passion for showing, and commercial. "We keep a few different breeds for different reasons," explains Kate. "I have kept Torwen Badger Face sheep for more than 30 years and I own a flock at Cwmhydyfer and co-own another in West Wales.

They also have their own flocks of Hill Radnor sheep (Elvet's family breed) and, for the past four or so years, they have had a flock of South Country Cheviots. "Our commercial flock is Brecknock Hill Cheviot Sheep. We breed the best of all breeds pure and the rest are crossed with a Charollais or Texel tup to produce commercial fat lambs."

## Manageable

Despite their variety of sheep, Kate says they have dropped their numbers in recent years. "I work four days a week elsewhere and we are both getting older, so we decided it would be more manageable to reduce the number of animals we run. This year we'll be lambing 260

ewes – we've already crossed off 50 ewes that lambed in mid-February to early March," she adds.

The rest of Kate's flocks, which on average scan in at 150%, are due to lamb indoors throughout April. Kate says: "Our farm is 300 metres above sea level in the Brecon Beacons, so the ground isn't suited to outdoor lambing. It's not ideal for the lambs to be born into wet and muddy conditions and it makes feeding the sheep much more difficult."

Work has been done to expand their shed and Kate says that, if needed, this enables them to house the sheep leading up to lambing. "Due to the wet ground, in the leadup to lambing we keep a close eye on the fluke risk. Fluke can be a real problem for us so, if it's looking to be a bad year, we can house the ewes early," she explains.

As the farm is usually wet, Kate monitors the fluke risk carefully using the NADIS forecast and she also blood samples some lambs during the summer to identify when they're picking it up. Interestingly, she adds, this was much later in 2019 than the previous few years. Sheep are treated according to the blood test, muck sampling and forecast, but there's no set time.

Kate takes an interest in animal health and ensures her animals have the best possible vaccination programme. "All of my ewes will be vaccinated for enzootic and toxoplasma and, as we breed our own replacements, we make sure every replacement ewe is vaccinated before she is mixed with the wider flock."

As well as ensuring the ewes are vaccinated, she also takes care to ensure her lambs are well covered. "Lambs get a thorough vaccination programme with multiple shots where required – all throughout their first year, and all ewes get a booster at between three and four weeks before lambing. We also vaccinate everything against footrot once or twice a year, depending on the risk and whether they're going to be housed for long in the run up to lambing.

## Vaccination

"The lambs also get a nematodirus drench – although this is based on the forecast and the lambs age. I also carry out several faecal egg counts throughout the year and worm when necessary," she explains.

Kate's rams, which are sourced from society sales, known breeders or NSA Ram Sales, are also put through a strict vaccination, examination and isolation programme to avoid bringing any problems onto the farm.

In recent years Kate has also taken to performance recording the lambs. This is a new



Kate Hovers.

“There is a very real contention about showing sheep, with some questioning whether doing so is ruining breeds. But, in my mind, nothing should win a prize unless it's got good teeth and good legs, and, if it's a hill breed, it's 'hardy'”

Kate Hovers



Kate's sheep are all carefully vaccinated to help prevent disease.

process. "In 2018, we used a Welsh Government Farm Business Grant to buy an EID weight scale and a software package, and we began tagging and recording lambs from birth," she says. "This allowed us to track their progress from day one. We had some concerns about the risk of joint ill, but we make sure we disinfect all tags before we put them in, and it seems to have done the trick."

While they have begun to use this technology, Kate says there is a lot more to do. "We don't use the EID and software enough yet – but it's something that we're working on and coming up with new plans for. It's something we're learning as we go along. This year we want to do more weighing.

"At the moment we condition score regularly, but we haven't been getting it on to the system. Our next priority will be to begin to record it better so we can follow our ewes throughout their lives," she adds.

## System

Despite there being more to learn with the system, Kate says it is already helping them with flock management. She comments: "It's been really useful to follow lambs. We always keep an eye on the 'stragglers', but it allowed us to also see what is happening with the lambs in the middle and at the top end."

Once finished, Kate sells most lambs direct to Dunbia, but some are still sold through Sennybridge or Brecon Markets, along with the culls. As well as a financial business decision, she also considers this to be the best decision for the animals. "Initially, it's good for us as we get

the feedback from the abattoir, but it's also less stress and hassle for the animals," she explains.

It's not just the animals that are closely monitored. Kate says they test their soil and reseed where necessary, as well as ensure plenty of biodiversity across the farm. "For us it's important to have diversity. The farm is a mixture of permanent pasture and woodland. We have several bird boxes which home owls, rare bird breeds and lots of bats.

"We also have a river running through the farm, which hosts plenty of wildlife. We're fortunate with the river. It does flood, but only usually covers about half a hectare (an acre) of our 38 hectares (94 acres). This year was more significant with around three times as much land underwater, although it was still only a very small area of our unit."

Kate is also keen to show her sheep. She takes Torwens and Radnors to the Royal Welsh every year. And, in 2014, Kate and Elvet were proud to win the Native Upland Championship with a Brecknock Hill Cheviot ewe. They also take sheep to local shows every year. While being serious competitions, these also provides plenty of 'social', according to Kate.

She adds: "There is a very real contention about showing sheep, with some questioning whether doing so is ruining breeds. But, in my mind, nothing should win a prize unless it's got good teeth and good legs, and, if it's a hill breed, it's 'hardy'. Nothing should win unless it's a good representation of the breed."

Off the farm, Kate is a reputable vet and holds several positions across the country. "Until 2004,

As well as showing, Kate keeps a commercial flock of Brecknock Hill Cheviots.

## Farm facts

- Farm is 38 hectares (94 acres) of mostly permanent pasture, with some woodland.
- Utilises farm business grants, but doesn't use other schemes.
- Sells most lambs direct.
- Sells draft breeding ewes and cull ewes at local markets.
- Sells a few breeding sheep (female and male) most years at society sales or to private buyers.

I had my own vet practice – working mostly with sheep and cattle. I've always had a special interest in sheep and hold an extra certificate in sheep veterinary work and am a past president of the Sheep Veterinary Society."

She also carries out a lot of advisory work, as well as currently being one of the Directors of Wales' Veterinary Science Centre. This centre, among other things, provides post-mortems for farmers to learn about their flocks. Kate is also a veterinary advisor to the HCC Stoc+ project, which is a health planning project for sheep and beef farmers in Wales.

Kate became involved with NSA when she bought her first sheep at the NSA ram sale in 1988. From there she began regularly attending the Sheep event at Malvern and joined the NSA Cymru committee. "I'm proud and honoured to be elected as chair of NSA Cymru for the next two years," she says. "NSA is a strong voice for our industry, and always supportive, and I am particularly impressed with the Next Generation Ambassador scheme."

“We breed the best of all breeds pure and the rest are crossed with a Charollais or Texel tup to produce commercial fat lambs.”

Kate Hovers

Kate will house her flock before lambing if there is a high fluke risk.

# iSAGE project identifies challenges and opportunities

By Wendy Jones, NSA



Innovation for Sustainable Sheep and Goat Production in Europe



The Innovation for Sustainable Sheep and Goat Production in Europe (iSAGE) project concluded earlier this year, after four years of collaboration between industry and research institutions across Europe.

The UK's sheep sector in the UK, as well as Europe, faces many challenges. Innovation, sustainability and resilience to climate change were key themes across the work packages of iSAGE.

The project identified a number of challenges. Some come from within the EU sheep sector and others are generated from third parties who operate more widely. Not all challenges affect all countries, including the UK, equally. Similarly, some challenges impact on individual farms and holdings more so than others.

Challenges from within the industry include: low promotion of local breeds; poor business management training; low professionalisation; slow adaption of innovation; and low adaptability of high producing breeds.

## Provenance

Challenges from outside the sector include: low consumer education of products; low consumer knowledge about farming, such as where food comes from; researchers do not address real problems; unfair trade and lack of traceability; and poor recognition of public services (goods).

Results from iSAGE highlight the way forward for the industry. Looking at supporting

products and supply chains, iSAGE interviews with consumers and retailers across Europe highlighted that organic labels, national origin and protected designation of origin, drive consumer willingness to pay more for sheep and goat products. Consumers indicated they want to know more about fat levels, preparation, provenance, traceability, and quality control when buying lamb.

Solutions included: increased provenance labelling and assurance schemes; providing easy to cook and novel lamb meat cuts; 'tell the whole story' from the breed; and the availability of novel recipes.

Other ideas identified include utilising different outlets and products to minimise the risk of carcass imbalance – markets need to be found for all parts of the carcass not just the premium cuts.

The study also found it's easier to market lamb (or other products) when there is a consistent supply on which to base value-added initiatives, such as branding or marketing campaigns. Market planning needs to consider seasonality and different customer's needs.

## Sustainability

UK supermarkets contributed to the case study and feedback - with sustainability and longer-term relationships all identified as key considerations within the marketing chain.

As for coping with climate change and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the UK has been set a target of achieving net zero emissions by 2050, or before. Agriculture is responsible for approximately 10% of all GHG emission, by sector. Energy and transport

account for 24% and 27%, respectively.

Most recent figures (2017) indicated the UK sheep industry produces approximately 4.5 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent per year, with methane accounting for more than four million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent. Since 1990, the sheep industry has seen an annual average methane production reduction of 0.7%.

Research at Oxford University has shown methane does not persist for long in the atmosphere and, within a decade, it is converted back to CO<sub>2</sub> and reused by plants. Levels stay stable if livestock numbers are stable.

The take-home messages were that sheep and goats in the UK have caused no additional warming to the atmosphere.

On-farm greenhouse gas production can be mitigated through different on-farm interventions. In working towards net zero, the main strategy should be to focus on high production standards.

*A short video has been produced under iSAGE to help explain why ruminants are not to blame for climate change. This can be found at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbO4EEaH7YM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbO4EEaH7YM)*

### Climate change 'adaptation' options

#### Pastures:

- Consider alternative plant species based on:
  - Deeper rooting plants.
  - More legumes, increasing protein content of pasture and reducing the need for applied nitrogen.
  - Multi species swards, providing greater resilience across a range of changes.
- Consider planting trees around pastures, not only will they provide shade long term, but they will help conserve water, provide flood protection as well as providing habitats for birds and insects.

#### Livestock:

- Select breeds for the climate either by changing breed or selecting for resilience.
- Adjust stocking densities in line with grassland potential.

#### Other:

- Provision of knowledge exchange supporting changes in management practices, such as soil and water management.
- Consider adaptations to housing, such as ventilation systems.

The iSAGE project included studies from across Europe.

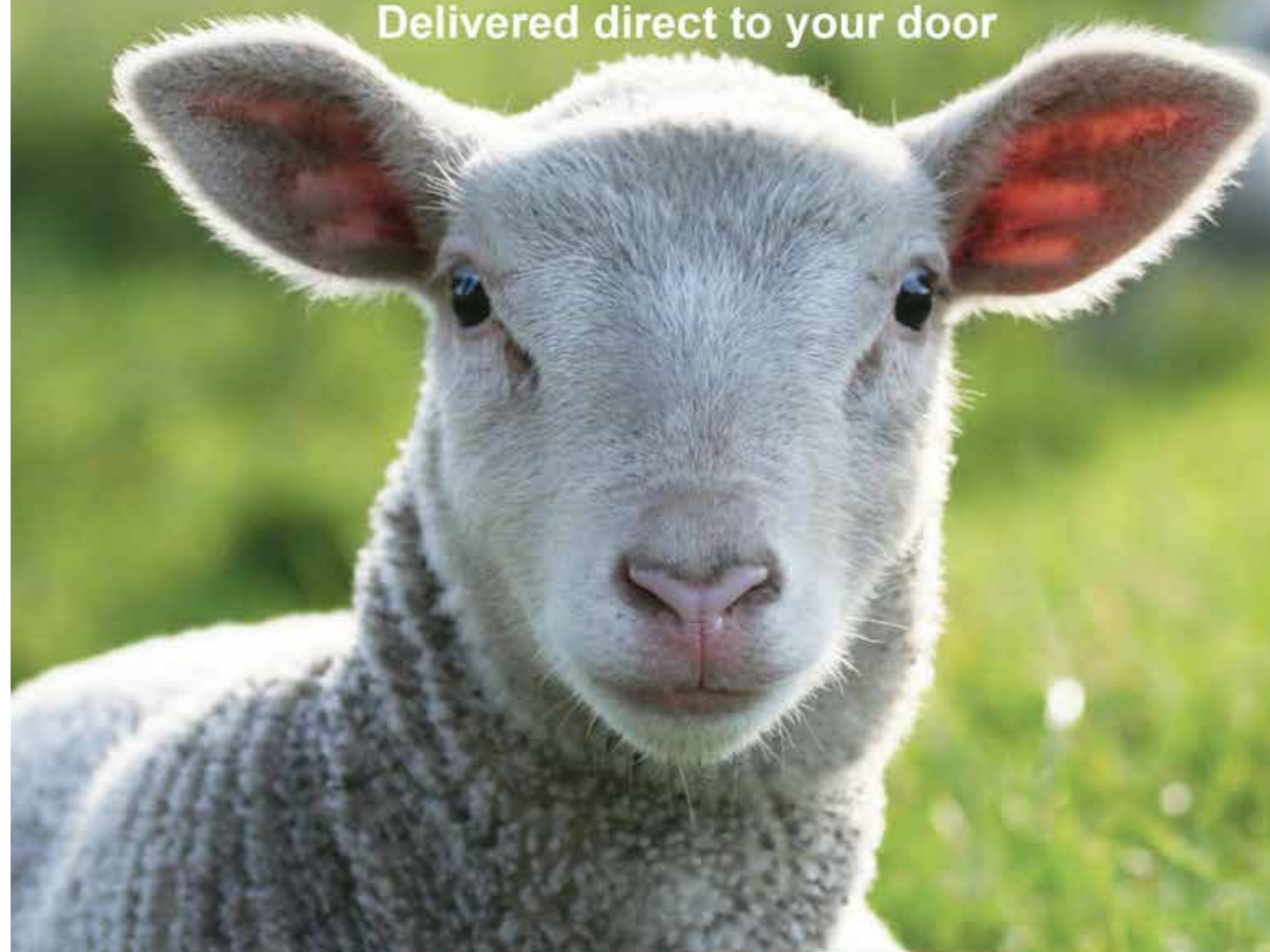


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# Lamb promotion campaigns underway throughout UK

## HCC launches Welsh lamb campaign

HCC's £250,000 campaign went live in January with one clear aim – to show the truth of Welsh sheep and beef farming and how it compares with some of the environmentally damaging practices in other parts of the world, often portrayed in the media.

The campaign comprises of TV advertising, on-demand advertising, radio advertising, media partnerships, and social media.

Fronting the campaign is NSA Next Generation Ambassador and newly-elected NSA Cymru/Wales Vice Chair Caryl Hughes, who stars in the TV advert. The campaign sees Caryl at home on her family farm, near Llanarmon Dyffryn Ceiriog, talking about how Welsh farmers use what they have in abundance – grass, rainfall and lots of pride – to produce Welsh beef and lamb. This message is reinforced with social media messaging and targeting, which highlights that Welsh red meat is not as environmentally unfriendly as the media often portrays.



## QMS kicks off 'Make it' campaign

Quality Meat Scotland's latest campaign – Make It – is directed at 18 to 39-year olds in Scotland and aims to give these consumers the confidence and reassurance to choose red meat, as part of a healthy, balanced diet.

The campaign, which is part of an integrated 'always-on' approach to promoting the Scotch brands, aligns itself with the values of the target audience. This comprises single people, couples, and families with young children who care about health and nutrition and are interested in sustainability and where their food comes from.

The campaign began in March utilising print and digital formats, as well as out-of-home advertising at 45 locations outside Tesco, Sainsbury's and Morrisons stores. It also featured on audio across Capital FM, Spotify, DAX, and Bauer. Alongside this there will be extensive social media coverage, with paid-for activity on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The PR strategy also involves a series of collaborations with key influencers, who resonate with the primary target audience. Secondary to the core audience are those aged 45 and older, with older children, and 'empty nesters', aged 55 and above.



## Keeping lamb on the plate



LMC is working hard to tell Northern Ireland's consumers the truth about lamb.

In September 2019, LMC launched the third and final year of its current advertising campaign 'Flavour Your Life', which is designed to promote the versatility and nutritional profile of both lamb and beef, and their role in providing a flavourful meal option for the whole family. The campaign urges consumers to try new flavours and challenge their cookery skills beyond the traditional roast, while highlighting the importance of choosing Northern Ireland Farm Quality Assurance lamb. The campaign has been featured on television, radio, outdoor, online and in print media, as well as across social media channels throughout various important events, including Love Lamb Week.

## The importance of social



With more than 90,000 followers, British Wool is continuing to invest in social media channels to connect different audiences and encourage user-generated content.

"Social media allows us to talk with our audience, starting conversations, spotting trends, and also managing any myths about wool or the livestock industry," says Director of Marketing Graham Clark.

"We invest in variety of content – and are rewarded with high engagement rates proving there is an audience interested in the benefits of natural fibres." Social media is used to add to the story of British wool, explaining how consumers are supporting British sheep farming by buying a British wool product.



## Ordinary Food is good enough



Frustrated by the misleading fake news demonising certain food groups, AHDB is setting the record straight with its latest campaign; 'Ordinary Food is Good Enough'. Beef and Lamb, as well as other sectors, are showcased in the campaign.

A video was created to highlight the mass of mixed messages around food, health and diet consumers are exposed to every day. It encourages people to achieve a healthy, balanced diet by making simple, everyday food choices across all food groups.

The video has been viewed more than 600,000 times. Nutritionists, industry organisations and high-profile social media influencers have promoted the video on their social channels.

A supporting webpage has also been created and includes statements from healthcare professionals about choosing a balanced diet, the health implications of cutting out entire food groups, and government guidelines on healthy eating.

View more at [www.ordinaryfood.co.uk](http://www.ordinaryfood.co.uk).



For further information visit [www.makingmilkmatter.co.uk](http://www.makingmilkmatter.co.uk)

Further information is available from Ceva Animal Health Ltd Unit 3, Anglo Office Park, White Lion Road, Amersham, Bucks HP7 9FB. Tel: 01494 781510 [www.ceva.co.uk](http://www.ceva.co.uk)

# Latest OPA research offers prevention and control pointers

*Ovine pulmonary adenocarcinoma* (OPA) is an infectious and deadly lung disease in sheep, which is caused by the Jaagsiekte sheep retrovirus (JSRV). This triggers the growth of cancerous cells, resulting in tumours.

The affected cells then produce more of the virus, which can infect new areas of the lung or spread to other sheep.

JSRV spreads by inhaling the virus present in the air or by direct contact with infected respiratory secretions. The virus may also be spread from ewe to lamb through milk or colostrum. While JSRV can infect sheep and goats, it cannot be passed on to humans or other animals.

A major hurdle in trying to tackle OPA in flocks is the long incubation period between infection and the development of disease. The number of animals in a flock infected with the virus can, therefore, be much greater than the number that develop clinical signs of disease during their commercial lifespan.

## Symptoms

The main symptoms of OPA include loss of condition and respiratory distress. In many advanced cases, there is an accumulation of fluid in the lungs that drains from the sheep's nostrils when its head is lowered in a 'wheelbarrow test'. Often, a secondary infection causes further damage to the lungs. By the time symptoms become apparent the cancer has often spread extensively, and the

disease is invariably fatal.

In affected flocks, OPA can result in a mortality rate of between 1% and 20% in a year and this poses a significant economic problem for farmers. However, the reason why the sheep immune system fails to recognise JSRV is currently poorly understood.

A recent study led by scientists from the Moredun Research Institute and the University of Edinburgh's Roslin Institute has helped improve understanding of how OPA develops in sheep by identifying genetic changes that occur as tumours grow. This could help lead to earlier diagnosis of lung cancer in both sheep and in humans.

The study looked at how lung cells change when infected with JSRV. It was found cells related to the immune system and the formation of cancer had altered 'gene expression', which means the production of proteins important for cell function has been affected.

## Infection

Understanding the genes that are switched on or off during JSRV infection provides important clues as to how the virus initiates cancer and may help researchers come up with alternative ways of combating the disease.

Interestingly, investigating OPA also represents a valuable tool for studying some forms of human lung cancer due to similarities in how the cancer cells activate.

Comparing their results on OPA to previously published data on human lung cancer, the team found a large degree of overlap in the genes that were 'faulty'. Lung

By Amy Tyndall, Moredun  Moredun

cancer is difficult to diagnose in its early stages, and the discovery of common markers could lead to improved early detection in both species.

Moredun released a video on OPA control in September 2019 that shows how on-farm thoracic ultrasound scanning can identify sheep with OPA before clinical signs become obvious. A research project applying a 'test and cull' programme, involving more than 12,000 sheep a year across 14 farms during a four-year period, has been shown to reduce the number of positive scans year on year.

At the official film launch, discussions centred on how this technique could be applied to both commercial and pedigree flocks to reduce the incidence of disease and decrease risk for potential buyers.

The video is freely available for the industry to use to promote open and honest discussions on OPA and decide on the best strategy for disease control.

Biosecurity is a large part of disease control in relation to OPA and questions arose at the launch on how best to use scanning. This could be in the form of individual scanning of bought-in or for-sale animals, or whole-flock scanning for test and cull. The latter is the best option for long-term disease reduction and enables culling at a time when the sheep is still in good condition. Not only does this have an obvious economic value, but also ensures culling before the virus spreads more widely.

*More information, and access to the video, at [www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/opa-jaagsiekte](http://www.moredun.org.uk/research/diseases/opa-jaagsiekte).*



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## Beware iodine over-supply to pregnant ewes or cows

Livestock farmers are being advised that it's possible to over-supplement pregnant ewes and cows with iodine, risking poor absorption of colostrum antibodies and ill health or death in new born lambs and calves.


An investigation reported by The Vet Record journal of 100 ewes, from which 40 live lambs died within a few days of birth, concluded that "probably some ewes ingested sufficient iodine to cause a reduction in colostrum absorption by their lambs" [Veterinary Record, 9 July 2016, p42]. The ewes were being fed daily with mineralised compound feed, and had access to mineral licks too. In readiness for main crop lambing and onset of the spring calving peak, this alert comes from vet Dr Elizabeth Berry of Animax. "Once the daily supply of iodine is in the target zone, more is certainly not better," she explains. This alert to farmers is prompted by another supplier's advertising claim of "50% more iodine than competing boluses" [Available on request from author]. If this is a comparison with her company's Tracesure range, in which iodine (along with selenium and cobalt) is formulated to supply daily requirements, she says farmers using a '50% more' product risk unintended over-supplementation. In the same Vet Record report, another investigation of multiple lamb deaths at two to three days old found that hygiene and colostrum quality were good. Lamb post mortems identified normal milk clotting in the abomasum (stomach), but low levels of immunoglobulins in blood plasma, indicating "failure of maternal colostrum antibody transfer." The report suggested this was due to high levels of iodine supplementation in the ewes' feed. Maximum iodine levels to aim for are 9.9mg/kg of dry matter feed intake for ewes, and 4.4mg/kg DM for cows.

For guidance on how you can help farmers to hit these targets, contact Animax: Veterinary Director [elizabeth@animax-vet.com](mailto:elizabeth@animax-vet.com) 07780 334 605  
Scotland [jim@animax-vet.com](mailto:jim@animax-vet.com) 07854 479 511 and [matthew@animax-vet.com](mailto:matthew@animax-vet.com) 07584 486 229, North of England [tom@animax-vet.com](mailto:tom@animax-vet.com) 07769 694 427,  
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The film was launched at the 'Healthy Hill sheep for profitable farming' event co-hosted by Moredun, NSA and MSD.



# Livestock markets are driving the UK sheep trade, says LAA

Through the challenges of Brexit, extreme weather conditions and misrepresentation of the trade in the mainstream media, sheep farmers have been able to rely on two close allies through a difficult year – the live auction sale ring and the livestock auctioneer.

During a turbulent 12 months, livestock auctioneers the length and breadth of the country have been driving the trade and setting the prices ahead of the deadweight market. It is the live sales ring that is delivering the true benefits to sheep farmers, allowing for best returns on all breeds, quality, ages and sizes.

As 2019 drew to a close, auction marts across England and Wales reported positive trends, and the early months of 2020 justified this optimism.

"We saw an impressive annual throughput of 225,000 head in 2019, marginally up on the previous two years," says Auctioneer and Managing Director at Hobbs Parker Auctioneers LLP, Elwyn Davies, based at Ashford Livestock Market.

"This included more than 140,000 head in the second half of the year, from more than 400 vendors, from nine different counties. These sheep were sold to 300 individual purchasers from 19 different counties," he adds.

This is a trend that is continuing, with like for like averages between January and February 2019 and 2020 showing significant increases at Ashford. Finished sheep averaged £78.85 in the first two

months of 2019, and this rose to £92.50 in 2020. Likewise, cull ewes rose from £46.60 up to £66.30, with store sheep £10 a head higher, from £60.00 to £70.00 average.

"This highlights the importance of the livestock market to the whole of the industry," says Mr Davies. "Despite the challenges within our industry, the live auction market continues to prove to be a popular forum through which to trade livestock, with the facilities providing super efficiencies in handling large numbers, and the open auction system ensuring competitive returns for all the various breeds, quality, ages and sizes on offer."

## Thriving

While the South East has seen a thriving trade, it has been a similar picture across the country.

"During January and early February, Hexham Auction Mart saw the biggest lift week on week through the live prime hogg ring for a considerable time," says Hexham and Northern Marts' Prime Sheep Auctioneer Brian Rogerson.

"The trade brought numbers forward slightly earlier than usual, resulting in a 50% increase in throughput, but caused no let-up in the trade," he adds.

At Welshpool, Morris Marshall & Poole have sold 8,926 head more prime hoggets between 1st January and 3rd March than in the same period of 2019, with averages up £14.61 on the 2019 figures. Despite a drop in throughput of cull ewes in the same period, 1,858 head less, averages have come in at £22.89 more than 2019.

Cull Ewe Auctioneer at Welshpool Livestock Market Siôn Eilir Roberts says: "Looking at

comparative prime stock sales during the past 12 months, our 4th March 2019 sale saw 3,976 hoggs sold, with a top price of £97 per head, at an average of 188ppk. On 3rd March this year, we sold 3,367 hoggs, at a top price of £177 per head, and an average of 238p/kg.

"On the same dates in 2019 we sold 1,836 cull ewes at an average of £55.52, with the top price reaching £120. This year we saw 1,767 cull ewes attract a top price of £170 per head, with an average of £78.17.

"We saw an increase in the amount of lighter weight lambs and store lambs sold prior to the initial Brexit deadline date of 31st October 2019, meaning more lambs were bought to kill at lighter weights or for further finishing, due to the uncertainty for UK sheep farmers," explains Mr Roberts.

"Contracts offered locally in 2019 by slaughterhouses, to the larger scale hogget feeding farmers, have not been offered this year. Farmers are benefitting by selling hoggets through the markets, subsequently leading to more buyer competition, and a larger number of buyers," he adds.

## Success

In July 2019, Morris Marshall & Poole took over Rhayader Livestock Market, and it is proving to be a great success.

"We cannot believe the number of farmers that have sold on a liveweight basis for the first time ever since we took over the market, and they cannot believe how much better off they are selling live comparing to deadweight," says Mr Roberts.

Sponsored by LAA



All sales have reported significant increases on 2019.

## COVID-19 update

Since the time of writing, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has impacted on all areas, including the sheep trade. LAA's priority is to protect public health while maintaining supply to the food chain. During ongoing, daily negotiations between LAA, Defra and the Welsh Assembly, it has been agreed livestock markets play a crucial role in facilitating efficient supply of livestock into the food chain. We have implemented additional security standards, robust hygiene precautions and further market restrictions to help maintain this trade and support sheep farmers. Farmers are advised to speak to their auctioneer before taking livestock to market, and to follow all guidance as set out by the Government.

"A quote that springs to mind when comparing liveweight to deadweight is: 'when they're live they're gold, but when they're dead they're sold'."

At Louth Livestock Market in Lincolnshire, Livestock Auctioneer Oliver Chapman, with market operator Masons Chartered Surveyors, has witnessed a similar pattern.

"Strong sheep trade in the first few months of 2020 has seen the return of vendors to markets," he explains. "Liveweight selling is seeing some of the strongest trade for a long time. Comparing figures for the first dozen sales in 2020 compared with 2019, the average price per head of prime sheep has seen a 17% increase to average near £100 per head.

## Averages

"Cull ewes can only be described as 'on-fire' everywhere, as they see a 49% increase in average price per head to near £95, when comparing January and February of 2019 with the same time period in 2020," adds Mr Chapman.

In the north of England, Greg MacDougal has also welcomed many returning and new customers to the live sales ring at Bentham Auction Mart.

"The hogget trade in particular has seen a significant upturn, even looking back during the past four years," he says. "At the same period of 2019, we were looking at 182.1p/kg SQQ, with

an overall average of 191.1p/kg. In 2020 we have seen 233.2p/kg overall, with an SQQ of 233.8p/kg." Hogget numbers are on a similar level to 2019 (between 3,000 and 3,500 per week) while the autumn store lamb sales saw numbers up by 10%.

"We have certainly been gaining numbers and seeing customers coming back to the market who have, until recently, been preferring the deadweight market," says Mr MacDougal.

The same producers are appreciating the speed at which the live ring reacts to upturns in demand, and recognise without the live ring, 'deadweight' returns would be slow to respond.

Mr MacDougal adds trade for cast sheep is fantastic, with the live ring proving the only credible option to achieve up-to-date market values, which seem to get higher by the day.

Cull ewe numbers are tight. At the most recent sale, 1,325 ewes were sold compared to 1,442 on the same date in 2019.

"The market provides the environment and open platform to sell stock without restrictions of size, age and specifications. Add to this that the markets are setting the price and achieving the best returns for the farmer, and we are seeing a thriving trade and making the most for our customers," he adds.

The hogget trade has been equally as strong at Skipton Auction Mart. Auctioneer and Farmstock Sales Manager Ted Ogden, at CCM Auctions,

says: "There is no other way to describe it – the hogget trade has been very good. We have been looking at averages during the past few weeks of 240p/kg to 245p/kg, compared to 190p/kg for the same period in 2019."

"Cull sheep have also been strong, with good continentals reaching up to £200 a piece. On average we are probably looking at between £20 and £30 more per head on the year. Throughputs of prime and cast sheep are typically 10% to 15% up for the time of year, with weekly entries of between 3,000 and 4,000 head."

## Escalation

Mr Ogden agrees the strength of the live sales ring is driving this trade. "The live markets have been the vehicle to see the escalation in prices. The competition creates the medium to set these new price levels," he says.

Executive Secretary of the Livestock Auctioneers' Association Chris Dodds says this is clear evidence that, across the country, the transparency and competitiveness of the live sales ring is driving trade on behalf of the sheep farmer.

"I am delighted to see so many vendors returning to the market to generate best returns on their livestock, and I am equally pleased to see buyers identifying live sales as the chosen purchasing route," he says.



Markets reported a booming trade at the beginning of 2020.

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# Utilising forage crops: comparing Wales and New Zealand

The vast majority of land in Wales is unsuitable for growing crops, making grassland systems essential for rearing livestock sustainably. Around 80% of its landmass is primarily suited for grass-based livestock farming, but is there a way of optimising grassland utilisation in Wales?

With uncertain times ahead for Welsh farmers, Mabli Johnson, from Montgomeryshire, wanted to explore New Zealand's utilisation of grassland in a bid to gather ideas on how to better manage forage in Wales.

Mabli was awarded a scholarship from Hybu Cig Cymru (HCC) – Meat Promotion Wales – in 2019 to spend six weeks in Canterbury, New Zealand, to learn about the way farmers utilise their forage crops.

## Legumes

Mabli was brought up on a beef and sheep farm in the Tanat Valley, Powys, where her family also run a straw selling enterprise and a contracting business. After studying agriculture at Llysfasi College, Mabli wanted to learn more about utilising forage crops in Wales in order to finish livestock more quickly.

While in New Zealand, Mabli was keen to learn more about the use of herbs, legumes and other species that would potentially lengthen the grazing season and provide livestock with a high energy and protein food source all year round.

On her return, she shared her main findings from the trip, including that there is no single solution. "I saw many different and new ways of choosing pasture, based on animal production benefits and it has left me thinking the possibilities are endless," she says. "Many people are doing different things that work for them, and no farm did exactly the same."

## Rotation

Mabli also found the most common crop rotation used in New Zealand typically comprised a grass ley, then a cereal crop cut for silage, followed by a winter forage crop. After that rotation a paddock is sown into a grass ley again.

Every farmer she visited aimed to have maximum yield from a forage and, therefore, no crops were under sown with another crop. Many farmers looked to produce 25 tonnes/ha of fodder beet, with some of them getting 30 tonnes/ha. This was down to good soil health for the use of deep tap-rooted species and heavy cultivation methods.

"The multi-species leys I saw were brilliant. They had higher growth rates and offered increased animal production. That said, although it worked well on the farms I visited, I've wonder how it would work with our climate and systems," says Mabli.

"The climate in Canterbury is different to Wales. Winters are milder, with the soil temperature only dropping below 5.0°C for two months of the year, giving farmers 10 months to establish and grow crops. Having said that, there are some dry farms that had to incorporate different species of grasses, legumes, herbs, brassicas and beets into their forage systems.

"The biggest lesson is there is no right or wrong answer, within reason. Sometimes there's no need to make big changes to pastures, and little tweaks here and there can make a huge difference to both animal and pasture production."

As well as research projects, HCC also has a number of grassland projects at home.

## Monitoring

HCC supports GrassCheck GB, which aims to improve grassland productivity and pasture utilisation on beef and sheep farms through a new grassland performance monitoring network.

The project is a collaboration between HCC, AHDB and QMS, together with the Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) and researchers at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and Rothamsted Research, as well as industry sponsors Germinal, Waitrose & Partners, Scientec Analytical and Handley Enterprises.

HCC is also involved in university projects looking at soil health, flood prevention, and breeding new varieties of grass with high fatty-acid content, as well as co-sponsoring the annual Recommended Grass and Clover List.

The use of non-intensive, grass-based livestock systems is a huge part of the positive story that PGI Welsh Lamb has for modern consumers. So investing in grassland research is crucial for the future of the industry.

*HCC will open its scholarship applications in May, visit [www.meatpromotion.wales/en](http://www.meatpromotion.wales/en).*



# Don't get caught out this spring

By Lesley Stubbings



Sheep producers are being urged to use the SCOPS Nematodirus forecast. The mild, wet winter means the threat to lambs in 2020 will be extremely variable across the country.

Nematodiosis can strike quickly, so a 'wait and see' policy is not an option because the damage is done by the immature larvae, which aren't producing eggs, and faecal egg counts (FECs) are an unreliable indicator of risk.

The SCOPS forecast predicts the hatching of Nematodirus Battus based on local weather conditions. The map is updated daily, using data from 140 weather stations (Met Office and Dark Sky) and provides a guide to risk level in each area. Producers then need to assess risk for each group of lambs, based on field history, its aspect and altitude.

South-facing fields tend to have an earlier hatch date and every 100-metre increase in altitude delays hatching by around seven days. For example, if the nearest station is at 200m above sea level but the farm is at 100m, hatching could be around seven days earlier than the forecast.

## Mortalities

Nematodiosis is a particularly nasty disease in lambs, causing a high number of mortalities and

stunting the growth of many others.

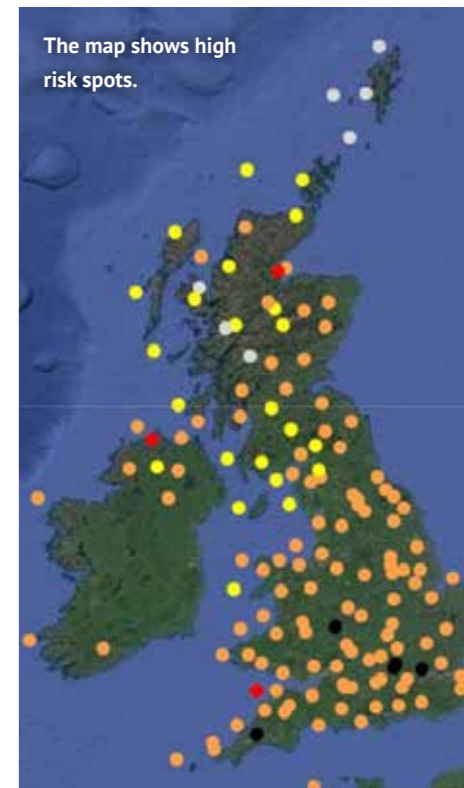
It is caused by the Nematodirus battus worm, which has a different lifecycle to other sheep worms. Under certain climatic conditions it can strike extremely quickly, with little or no warning. So sheep producers have to be on their guard.

The main difference in the life cycle of Nematodirus battus compared with other parasitic worms is that development to an infective larvae takes place within the egg and infection passes from one lamb crop to the next years' crop.

Before they can hatch, the eggs require a period of cold weather followed by warmer temperatures of 10°C or more. If these conditions occur during a short period of time, a mass hatch that coincides with the time lambs are starting to eat significant amounts of grass (about six weeks old) can be triggered and the result can be devastating.

## Survey

SCOPS appreciates feedback and information on cases as they occur. Please complete SCOPS' survey to record a confirmed case. Just leave the first half of your postcode and answer a few questions to contribute to a map to help alert others of the risk. Survey available at [www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/nematodirus2020](http://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/nematodirus2020).



# Use moxidectin responsibly

In response to concerns regarding reports of the over use of moxidectin in sheep flocks, SCOPS and Zoetis held a joint workshop in late 2019.

The aim was to agree new guidelines covering the responsible use of moxidectin in sheep, particularly in ewes around lambing time. The key is to minimise selection for resistance in the worm population by avoiding over and/or unnecessary use of moxidectin, which is vital if we are to sustain this important molecule's efficacy.

The guidelines are based on SCOPS principles and encourage farmers to ensure the treatment is always given at the right dose rate, administered correctly and allows some worms to remain unexposed to the treatment. Practical steps are summarised below:

- Year-on-year use of moxidectin in ewes around

lambing is unadvisable in any flock. Simply rotating with other wormer groups within a season is not enough.

- If ewes are treated with moxidectin for worm control, some must be left untreated. It is essential to leave at least one ewe in 10 untreated (and preferably more than that) and they need to be spread between different grazing mobs. It is not enough to simply leave 'singles', as they may be grazed in separate fields to 'twins'. Use body condition as a guide, with the fittest ewes left untreated.
- Moxidectin 2% should not be used more than once in any flock in any one year. In practice this means if moxidectin 2% is used in ewes at lambing then it should not be used again in that flock in the same season.
- Where moxidectin 2% has been used in ewes to suppress the spring rise then it should not be used to treat sheep scab (or vice versa). An OP plunge dip is an appropriate alternative.

- Check the dose rate and administration method. Underdosing remains a major risk factor in the development of anthelmintic resistance. Sheep farmers should know the weight of their sheep and dose to the heaviest (if a wide range of weights is expected then batch and dose accordingly). The correct technique for administration and maintenance/calibration of equipment is also vital.

Ask your vet or animal health adviser for more details.



# Farmer-vet team is key to working towards a high-health efficient flock

By Phillipa Page, Fiona Lovett and Emily Gascoigne, Flock Health 

Establishing and progressing with a healthy flock will impact positively on the bottom line. And being robust, both as a flock and a business, means farmers are more likely to withstand the pressure when unexpected or difficult issues arise.

When flock health issues were discussed at the recent NSA Next Generation Ambassadors event, it was encouraging to hear young shepherds speak of the value of working with trusted sheep vets. They spoke of how having a proactive relationship with their vet offers huge benefits for the progress of the flock, as the vet and shepherd work together to direct 'vet-spend' in the most cost-effective way to ensure a return on investment.

## Protocols

Successful businesses grow by re-assessing protocols and looking at different ways to make small improvements in many areas. Reviewing flock health interventions is an important part of this. We are constantly reviewing our use of antibiotics and vaccinations, for example, as well as new-born lamb protocols and procedures undertaken within the first 48 hours of life.

On many farms this is the time for tailing and castrating lambs – procedures that were recently highlighted by the British Veterinary Association and the Sheep Veterinary Society as they released a new policy statement.

Unfortunately, the associated press release sparked considerable controversy among sheep farmers. The actual policy, rather than the simplified news reports, outlines considerations that many of you will have already been discussing with your vet.

Indeed, we have been talking about the welfare considerations and precise reasons for tail-docking and castrations for a number of years with different producer groups, as we strive to optimise flock health, welfare and productivity – all key reputational factors for the UK sheep industry.

## Welfare

The need for docking and castrating lambs varies depending upon the sheep system. For groups of later finishing lambs, it may well be the most appropriate course of action to maintain good welfare, particularly to reduce the chance of fly strike or the risk of unwanted pregnancies that may go on to compromise welfare later in life.

However, as the legislation starkly reminds us, tailing and castrating are 'mutilations' that are painful procedures and it is obvious these must not be undertaken as a routine or just out of habit without due consideration. Pain

## Tailing and castration legislation

The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) Regulations 2007 are essentially the same for England, Wales and Northern Ireland\* and they allow for:

- Castration using a rubber ring or other device to constrict the flow of blood to the scrotum on animals aged not more than seven days. When any other method is used, an anaesthetic must be administered where the animal is aged three months or older.
- Tail docking using a rubber ring or other device to constrict the flow of blood to the tail on animals aged not more than seven days. When any other method is used an anaesthetic must be administered. In all cases, enough of the tail must be retained to cover the vulva of a female animal or the anus of a male animal.

\*Similar Scottish legislation allows for tail docking and castration, but without specifying age or method limitations.



Carefully read the legislation to ensure you are docking at the right length.

can be minimised using local anaesthesia or anti-inflammatories. But this is also complicated as neither of these types of drugs are specifically licensed for use in sheep, so we always use them under vet prescription.

The situation in other countries varies. For example, docking and castrating with rubber rings is banned in some European countries, or only permitted with anaesthetic. There is an effective piece of Australian equipment, Numnuts, which injects local anaesthetic and applies the ring at the same time.

However, this piece of kit is not commercially available in UK, which we understand may be due to legislation issues around the timings of rubber ring application, the age of lambs, and the use of local anaesthetic.

## Decisions

A number of UK enterprises have already carefully considered their different categories of lambs and made separate decisions as to where it is possible



Tail docking: a rubber ring can be applied to the tail to lambs aged seven days or less.

to reduce, refine or replace unnecessary tailing or castrations. This may include, for example, leaving lambs that will finish early, segregating males and females or having a breeding programme that aims for smaller tails.

Good worm control has many benefits including maximising growth rates, reducing faecal soiling around the tail area and minimising the risk of blow fly strike to individual lambs.

For some farmers it is increasing efforts in these areas that has reduced their need to either tail-dock or castrate certain groups of lambs.

In summary, please do keep talking with your vet about these issues and appreciate that their primary concern is to work with you to ensure the health, welfare and productivity of your flocks. Together we can defend the good reputation of the UK sheep industry.

## Best practice pointers for docking and castration

Where castration and tailing is necessary, train new staff carefully to minimise discomfort and achieve optimum outcomes.

**Docking** – a rubber ring can be applied to the tail to lambs aged seven days or less.

- Ensure the tail is clean, if not remove faecal material and clean. This has been identified as a potential route of infection for joint ill. If using local anaesthetic, apply 1ml in a 'ring' of four blebs above where the ring will be applied (1ml is the maximum dose for a 4kg lamb and the dose should be reduced for smaller lambs).
- Apply the ring to the tail, ensuring the tail covers the vulva in females and is below the skin folds on the underside of the tail in males. Shorter tails have been reported as a cause of vaginal prolapse in pregnant ewes and anal prolapse in growing lambs, due to the reduced muscle mass and nerve innervation in this area.

**Castration** – a rubber ring can be applied to the scrotum to lambs aged seven days or less

- If using local anaesthetic, apply 0.5ml under the skin each side, on the neck of the scrotum above where the ring will be applied (1ml is the maximum dose for a 4kg lamb and the dose should be reduced for smaller lambs).
- Apply the ring, ensuring both testicles are within the scrotum.
- Ensure the nipples are above the ring and the skin is free.



Rubber-band castration: ensure both testicles are within the scrotum



# Spot and tackle mineral deficiencies this spring

TECHNICAL

Mineral deficiencies can have a big impact on lambs, but diagnosis is not always straight forward, as they can easily be mistaken for other issues.

However, there are some key signs to look out for and several options available for overcoming mineral deficiency problems in your flock.

Selenium deficiency, also known as vitamin E deficiency or white muscle disease, can have a significant impact on rapidly growing young lambs aged between two and six weeks old.

If young lambs show signs of lameness or 'stiffness', but don't have swollen joints suggesting joint-ill as the cause, selenium deficiency is next on the list to investigate. Muscle fibres are affected due to an accumulation of toxins that mainly affect skeletal muscle, but can occasionally cause sudden death if the heart muscles are affected. Diagnosis is made largely on the clinical signs of the affected lambs.

## Deficiency

Lambs usually respond well to an injectable form of vitamin E but, depending on the severity of the deficiency, repeat treatments may be required to help them recover and achieve normal growth rates.

Administration of a trace element bolus or treatment with a mineral drench to ewes during late pregnancy may help prevent deficiency in younger lambs before they begin to graze.

If ewes are deficient in copper during mid-pregnancy, a condition called swayback may be seen in new-born lambs. Lambs with swayback appear to rock back onto their heels and are unsteady on their feet.

Weaned lambs can also be affected by copper deficiency, although this is less common compared with younger lambs. In older lambs the signs can be quite vague, such as poor growth rates, susceptibility to infections and flat, dull looking fleeces.

## Swayback

There are copper injections available to treat clinical copper deficiency, but these are not readily available or safe and treatment of young lambs with swayback is usually unsuccessful - making prevention essential.

If deficiency is confirmed on-farm, then trace element boluses containing copper can be administered to ewes mid-pregnancy. It is important to be careful when supplementing some breeds, particularly Texels, as they can be prone to copper toxicity and this can be fatal.

Cobalt deficiency, also known as pine, can have a significant impact on the growth of weaned lambs. If lambs are not achieving expected growth rates after weaning, are scouring, or have an 'open' fleece and appear to be more susceptible to conditions such as scald and orf, then cobalt deficiency could be to blame.

Other conditions, such as parasitic gastroenteritis, should be ruled out first. If there is a high incidence of scours despite worming, and high worm burden has been ruled out via a worm egg count yet clinical signs continue, cobalt deficiency should be considered and investigated.

Between six and 12 lambs should be blood sampled to analyse serum levels of vitamin B12 - the gold standard test for diagnosing cobalt deficiency. Cobalt is required for lambs to generate vitamin B12 but is not stored in the body itself, so low levels of vitamin B12 in the sample will

By Melissa Bexon, VetPartners **vetPartners**

indicate a lack of cobalt in grass or forage.

Once diagnosed there are various treatment options available. The most appropriate approach is dependent on the system and flock size. A mineral drench is a cost effective, simple option. But it is not long lasting, so often has to be repeated after three to four weeks. A trace element bolus is a good alternative for a longer, controlled release. This is more expensive than a drench, but only needs to be done once at weaning. This can save on the labour cost of gathering up and treating the lambs.

## Injection

For flocks that have experienced recurrent issues with cobalt deficiencies, vets may consider recommending a B12 treatment, which can be given to lambs from the age of three weeks. Commercially available treatments include an injection that provides vitamin B12 supplementation for three months, or a 1ml injection providing supplementation for six months.

For upland farms with large number of lambs experiencing issues every year, this may be a sensible option as it allows farmers to ensure their lambs receive adequate vitamin B12 from an early age, without worrying about gathering them several times for administration of drenches or boluses.

For small lowland farms where lambs may be gathered more regularly anyway, drenches or boluses may be more suitable. It is definitely not a case of one size fits all.

If you are suspicious of any mineral deficiency problems, get your vet involved as soon as possible to investigate any issues, discuss the various options, and decide together what is the best approach for your flock.

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Diagnosis of mineral deficiencies in lambs is not always straightforward.

# Following the flock

In our latest look over the farm gate, we visit NSA UK Policy & Technical Chairman Eddie Eastham, from Cumbria; NSA Marches Regional Chairman Antony Spencer, from Warwickshire; and NSA South West Region Chairman Howard Tratt, from Somerset.

## Eddie Eastham

NSA UK Policy & Technical Chairman, Cumbria



In common with much of the UK, we have had a long and wet winter here in North Cumbria, but have been fortunate to avoid any serious flooding problems.

Although wet, the weather has been largely mild, promoting re-growth on grass paddocks in a rotational grazing system. This has allowed hill-bred lambs to reach prime condition without any supplementary feeding.

Other batches of lambs have been set stocked on stubble turnips since Christmas. The benefit of having dry ground for this purpose is really appreciated in a wet year. Our sales of overwintered sheep are ahead of average for the time of year, meaning fewer left to sell in the Easter/spring period.



Eddie's lambs are out on stubble turnips.

## Howard Tratt

NSA South West Region Chairman, Somerset



I've just hung up my sodden waterproofs to dry and I am hoping when this copy of Sheep Farmer is issued, the sun will be out and we'll be enjoying longer evenings.

About two years ago, after being on the family farm for five years and at Harper Adams University for three years, I decided I wanted to have a go at setting up on my own sheep business – a decision I sometimes question. But I'm stubborn and I'm persevering.

I've rented 12 hectares (30 acres) of ground, with the use of a couple of buildings, as a base with additional grazing close by. My aim is to be producing lamb off grass with minimal inputs.

This has involved moving towards a wool shedding, maternal ewe – it's quite a change of mindset. I'll be lambing 105 ewes throughout April and have 94 dry ewe lambs to bring into the flock in the autumn. Depending on land availability and security, I'll ideally be tupping 300 ewes in 2021.

Throughout April, Howard will be lambing his 105 ewes with a view to increase next year.



Antony's ewes are pleased to be back outside after a long winter sheltering from the weather.

## Antony Spencer

NSA Marches Regional Chairman, Warwickshire.



Lambing is now in full swing and, after the usual problems at the start, everything is now progressing well. Thankfully, the fields have dried up somewhat, so we are managing to get ewes and lambs turned out relatively quickly to take some pressure off the sheds.

I think the ewes are particularly glad to get back out to grass as I had to get 300 in before Christmas, due to ground conditions and, even with good silage and a clean and dry bed, they have definitely gone a bit 'stale'.

The ewe lambs, on the other hand, are grazing fodder beet and, even with the never ending rain of the past few months, they look really content and seem in good condition for lambing outside in April. Fingers crossed for a bit of sunshine.

We use teaser tups in the autumn to try and lamb in three waves, each one a fortnight apart, to ensure we can cope with the rush and have enough shed and pen space for the stock. A little bit of forward planning at tupping certainly makes for a happier team at lambing time.



Throughout April, Howard will be lambing his 105 ewes with a view to increase next year.

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