

SHEEP FARMER

JUNE / JULY 2020

A NATIONAL SHEEP ASSOCIATION PUBLICATION

LOCKDOWN AND HOME WORKING

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE SHEEP SECTOR

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DELIVERY IS FREE TO AN AREA NEAR YOU

Events go virtual and negotiations continue

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

By the time this issue of Sheep Farmer hits doormats we may have a good indication of whether the lamb-price warnings, given at the beginning of May, were heeded and if the actions taken were effective.

I'm talking, of course, about the fact that throughout all the Covid-19 related disruption in April, May, and into June, our lamb prices remained relatively strong, apart from an alarming but, thankfully, short-term drop at the beginning of the lockdown in mid-March. Prices recovered quickly and, while not welcome at any time, Covid-19 happened at the least disruptive time for our industry.

Old season lamb numbers were down, with many lambs sold early due to the risk of a no-deal Brexit. New Zealand lamb volumes into the UK were also down, due the uncertain UK situation, and this was all happening before larger numbers of new season lambs started to come forward.

But the warning signs were there and NSA was early to press the point to our levy bodies and Government administrations that we had between six and eight weeks to prepare and to avoid a potential crisis.

This was all happening alongside the release of the findings of Defra's request for views on AHDB, where it was reported that 87% of lamb levy payer respondents said they wanted to see marketing given a greater priority. It also coincided with the launch of the new generic 'Make it' promotional campaign, supported by all levy bodies and funded through the co-funded pot – the interim solution to levy repatriation.

Catering

During several years of sheep farming discussions, I remember bemoaning that lamb or mutton was rarely seen on menus in hotels, pubs and restaurants. Sheepmeat was missing out in the catering market that chicken and beef were doing so well in. We know that things

have improved since then – not necessarily through following the same route as other meats (fast food, takeaways, and gastro burgers) – but through the higher value cuts used in restaurants, quality eating pubs, and international dishes.

But most people were taken by surprise by the impact that the closure of the hospitality trade had on our market. It seriously disrupted carcase balance and it took some time – and a lot of hard work by butchers, farm shops, and exporters – to get things back somewhere near to balance. Supermarkets also managed to increase retail sales of lamb and concerns about large volumes having to be cold stored, or talk about interest in the private storage aid scheme made available in early May, were unfounded.

Thinking forward to a time beyond Covid-19 and Brexit, it's common to hear people say 'exports are our future'. I agree, although only in part. With 65% of our sheepmeat being consumed here in the UK, it would surely be safer to say that 'exports are important to our future'. We know that in times of trouble, such as during disease outbreaks, political unrest, or anything that disrupts our supply chains, we fall back on relying more on our domestic market.

Volatility

I've long said that we are in a good position with our sheep markets. We have and need a broad basket of market options and this is essential to guard against volatility. But it's far from perfect and, for years, we have seen independent outlets come under increasing pressure. The UK has lost hundreds of butchers shops and small retailers.

It has been good to see them become one of the winners of the Covid-19 outbreak, with many farm shops and butchers reporting that trade is up three- or four-fold. There is little dispute that strategically building our export trade is an important part of our future but, without spreading ourselves too thinly, I also believe that we have to invest in all aspects of our market. They are all important and they all help with carcase and market balance. The old saying sums it up perfectly: 'Don't put all your eggs in one basket.'



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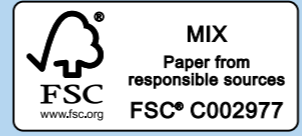
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The Sheep Centre, Malvern, Worcestershire, WR13 6PH
01684 892661 (Monday-Friday 9am-5.30pm)
www.nationalsheep.org.uk
enquiries@nationalsheep.org.uk

 /natsheep  @natsheep

NSA officeholders



Lord Inglewood
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Chair of the Board



David Gregory
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Finance & General Purposes Chairman



Eddie Eastham
UK Policy & Technical Chairman



Kevin Harrison
English Committee Chairman

NSA staff

Contact via [NSA Head Office \(details above\)](#) or email directly

Phil Stocker
NSA Chief Executive
pstocker@nationalsheep.org.uk

Chris Adamson
Activities & Campaigns Officer
chris@nationalsheep.org.uk

Gill Callow
Membership Secretary
gill@nationalsheep.org.uk

Dave Gregory
Operations Support - Maternity Cover
NSA Regions and Events
dave.nationalsheep@yahoo.com

Louise Hart
Operations Support - Maternity Cover
Head Office and External Operations
louise@nationalsheep.org.uk

Katie James
Communications Officer
katie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Julie Jennings
Association Secretary
PA to Chief Executive
julie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Nicola Noble
Technical Officer
nicola@nationalsheep.org.uk

Ellie Phipps
Policy Officer
ellie@nationalsheep.org.uk

Helen Roberts
Corporate Sales Manager
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Karen Sumner
Bookkeeper
karens@nationalsheep.org.uk

NSA regions

Central



Chairman: **David Howlett**



Secretary: **Rose Smyth**
07807 359871
central@nationalsheep.org.uk

Cymru / Wales



Chairman: **Kate Hovers**



Development Officer: **Helen Roberts**
01691 654712 / 07976 803066
helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

Eastern



Chairman: **Dan Phipps**



Manager: **Jonathan Barber**
01953 607860 / 07712 659262
jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk

Marches



Chairman: **Antony Spencer**



Secretary: **Katie James**
07748 151235
marches@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern



Chairman: **Thomas Carrick**



Manager: **Heather Stoney-Grayshon**
07966 699930
heather@nationalsheep.org.uk

Northern Ireland



Chairman: **Jonny Farmer**



Development Officer: **Edward Adamson**
02893 366225 / 07711 071290
edward.adamson1@gmail.com

Scotland



Chairman: **Jen Craig**



Regional Co-ordinator: **Grace Reid**
07787 142858
grace@nationalsheep.org.uk

South East



Chairman: **Yan Le Du**



Secretary: **Sarah Blake**
07734 428712
southeast@nationalsheep.org.uk

South West



Chairman: **Howard Tratt**



Manager: **Ian May**
07913 043234
ian@nationalsheep.org.uk

NSA Rams Sales



Wales & Border: **Jane Smith**
01291 673939
jane@nsaramsales.co.uk



Eastern: **Jonathan Barber**
01953 607860 / 07712 659262
jonathan@ceressolutions.co.uk



South West: **Sue Martyn**
01409 271385 / 07967 512660
suem@nationalsheep.org.uk

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Notice of NSA Annual General Meeting

At the time of publication of this notice we are observing the Government's social distancing measures and prioritising the safety of our members and staff.

Because we do not know what measures may still be in place in the coming months, we have decided to provide an internet video link to join the AGM. Notice is hereby given that the 127th Annual General Meeting of National Sheep Association will be held at the Sheep Centre, Blackmore Park Road, Malvern WR13 6PH on Thursday 13th August at 10.00am and via internet video link. To transact the following business:

1. To approve the Minutes of the 126th Annual General Meeting.
2. To receive:
3. The Trustees Report to year ended 31st December 2019.
4. and adopt (2) and (3) above.

To elect:

5. Officers for the ensuing year; President and Honorary Treasurer
6. Vice-President(s)

To appoint:

7. Auditors.

By order of the Board.

Members are entitled to submit their votes in advance of the meeting by completing a proxy form or to appoint a person to attend and vote on their behalf. All signed and completed proxy forms must be received by post or by attaching a signed scanned copy by email no later than 10.00am on Wednesday 12th August 2020. *For full details on the use and completion, and to access proxy forms, please visit [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events](#) or call NSA Head Office.*

Role change at Head Office

Due to changing times and the completion of the iSAGE research project, the post of NSA Livestock Researcher has been turned into NSA Technical Officer on its holder Nicola Noble's return from Maternity leave. Nicola's contact details remain unchanged. Naturally, NSA is saying goodbye to Wendy Jones, NSA Livestock Research Maternity cover. NSA is grateful to Wendy for her hard work and dedication throughout the last year and wishes her well going forwards.



Cancellation of NSA Wales and Border Ram Sales

The NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales will not be going ahead this year, in the light of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and recent updates from both UK & Welsh governments. Instead there will be an online register to link buyers and vendors, organised as a free service to NSA members.

It is with deep regret that the officers of the NSA Wales & Border Ram Sale Committee have made the very tough decision to cancel the sales in 2020. They are normally held at the Royal Welsh Showground in August and September. The decision was left for as long as possible, in the hope that the situation might improve by August. However, with current social distancing regulations and restrictions of large events, the health, safety and well being of buyers and sellers and everyone involved in the sales is our main priority. Cancellation is the safest decision.



Winner named for first 2020 prize draw

With plans to start his own sheep enterprise in the near future, news that he was the first winner of NSA's 2020 membership prize giveaway was perfectly timed for young shepherd Michael Hogg, from Tyne and Wear.

Michael, who currently works as an employed shepherd on a mixed farm near Barnard Castle, was randomly selected to win the first of four Ritchie portable sheep races. Michael says his interest in sheep farming has been with him for as long as he can remember. He decided to join NSA to show his support for the organisation after visiting 2019's NSA North Sheep event, where he competed and came second in the NSA Next Generation Shepherd Competition. "I attended NSA North Sheep, which was a fantastic show. Until then, I was aware of the NSA although I had not realised what a fantastic organisation it is in sharing my passion for sheep and being a voice for all UK sheep farmers," he says.

He adds that the race will bring huge benefits going forward because he's about to set up his own sheep enterprise. "This sheep handling system will provide an ideal setup for carrying out fundamental husbandry tasks with the flock and offers the potential to expand on the handling system for a greater capacity in the future," he says.

All new members joining NSA – as well as existing members who recommend a friend, neighbour or family member – will be entered into the draw for a chance to win one of the remaining races, kindly provided by Ritchie UK, that will be given away throughout 2020.

Full membership and prize draw details, including terms and conditions, can be found at [www.nationalsheep.org.uk/membership](#).

Update on NSA activity and events

The Covid-19 pandemic began at a time of year when social distancing is, for many sheep farmers, almost normal.

As the situation continues, in addition to the disruption caused to seeing family and friends, the restrictions put huge question marks over the routine things that form sheep farmers' way of life. Going to market, as well as farmer meetings and sheep dog trials, even visiting the vet – life is different.

NSA's activities are part of all our members lives, but the impacts described above were always going to affect these too and, since the lockdown measures came in, our work has now fallen into three categories:

- Work we can continue with and even do more of. Much of the policy work continues, including: the Agriculture Bill and all the work being done on future farm support programmes; our communications and press work; social media; Sheep Farmer magazine; and now, of course, webinars instead of face-to-face meetings.

- Work we clearly can't do. With all agricultural shows cancelled and the social distancing requirements at markets and sales, we can't be out and about. Membership recruitment is tougher because of a lack of face-to-face contact (anything members can do to help here by encouraging friends and neighbours to join us is always much appreciated) and, of course, sadly we have had to cancel Scotsheep this year.

- Finally, a host of work that we will do one way or another, but don't yet know how and can't yet share the details as we would like to. The fact that these major activities are still shrouded in uncertainty makes producing this issue of Sheep Farmer difficult because this is where we would have been previewing Sheep 2020 and Scotsheep, and it's also where we would have been giving detail of our forthcoming ram sales.

I'm sure members will understand the difficulties this presents and all we can do is be honest with you about where our thinking is and ask that you keep an eye on our website and look out for our weekly e-newsletter and text messages. We will keep members informed as best we can.

I want to talk first about Sheep 2020, our flagship

national event at Malvern where the original date of 28th July was abandoned, with a new tentative date of 19th October being put into the diary. This October date still stands but, although social distancing measures are being relaxed, we still don't know whether an event of this size and scale can go ahead. Even if it can, we don't know what the bio-security arrangements or the social distancing measures will need to be.

Confident

We know there will be things that we can't do – the farm tours, the shearing competition, inviting international guests, and the grass reseeding demonstrations. But we are confident that we could put on an excellent and informative day.

On the negative side, we are aware that while some people may be eager to attend, there will be others who may still be nervous – particularly as this will likely be well in advance of the availability of a Covid-19 vaccine.

We are also aware that an October date isn't ideal for those who usually use the summer event to 'warm up' for the seasonal breeding sales, such as the breed societies and auctioneers. As a result, NSA's National Event Organiser Helen Roberts has drawn up some plans for a virtual web-based Sheep 2020, which would be very different. There are now successful examples of events that have been run in this way and the key benefit is reduced uncertainty and the ability to bring the event forward to a time that's more suitable for our breed societies and the trade.

Neither of the choices are ideal and I can't tell you much more at this point, except that the event steering group and NSA Board will be a key part of the decision making process. Please keep your eyes and ears open and check NSA's website regularly.

NSA ram sales are the next key area of activity that I want to mention, and anyone who has visited NSA Wales and Borders Main Sale, at Builth Wells, Powys, will immediately understand the challenges faced by the organisers (*more on page 8*). But the main sale at Builth is not our only sale – there is the Early Sale on the same site, our South West Region Ram Sale at Exeter, Devon, as well as early and main sales organised by our Eastern Region at Rugby,

Warwickshire, and Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, respectively.

You will see advertisements in this issue for these sales and, sadly, as this Sheep Farmer was going to print, NSA Wales and Borders took the tough decision to cancel both of its sales.

This statement belies the work that all the sales organisers have been doing, the head scratching, the discussions between themselves and the organising committees, and of course the discussions with the auctioneers. There have been many discussions about different ways to hold the sales, whether vendors would be prepared to drop rams off and not come back into the market, and even whether online sales could be an option. Everyone involved is committed to trying to do the right thing and is taking into consideration: industry needs; the logistics of complying with social distancing requirements, which we don't yet know the details of; the personal safety of all those attending; and consideration that many vendors and buyers could be at risk and may not be prepared, or able, to attend.

Practicalities

Defra and the devolved Governments have permitted live sales of some breeding animals to take place and the Livestock Auctioneers Association has done a great job in discussing the logistics of this both with the markets and with the administrations. But shows and sales that would normally generate a large gathering of people are not currently permitted, although this is under review. This is under review. We are in unknown territory and still have a while to go before any of the main breeding sales take place. So what can I say, apart from please keep a close eye on NSA communications around these sales? We will be doing what we can, but we will also be relying on vendors and buyers sticking to the rules. The reputation of our sales is built on best practice and that includes all aspects of how our sales are conducted. Life will, gradually, return to some form of normal and, in due course, we will return to doing all NSA activities. In the meantime, please bear with us and support us, if you can, in doing what we believe is right and in the best interests of our industry.

By Phil Stocker, NSA Chief Executive

Iceberg-disease webinars prove a huge success

This spring NSA had planned to travel the country to deliver a series of roadshow meetings in relation to iceberg diseases in sheep.

These meetings were to be held in association with NSA's close partners, the Moredun Foundation and SRUC's Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme.

However, due to Covid-19, NSA has tried something it has never done before – webinars. The seminars, held in May, had more than 350 people register with a positive 60% attendance rate. The speakers addressed approaches to reducing risks and losses from iceberg-diseases.

The webinar kicked off with NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker introducing iceberg diseases, including why and how they should be managed more effectively. This was followed by three 15-minute presentations.

Craig Watkins, Moredun, spoke about the management and control of John's disease and was followed by Chris Cousens, also from Moredun, who gave a presentation on Ovine Pulmonary Adenocarcinoma (OPA).

The final speaker was Alison Braddock, SRUC, who provided an overview of the Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme, which currently includes options for Maedi Visna and John's disease.



Attendees heard from a variety of speakers on Iceberg diseases.

Phil explains: "Getting to grips with the five iceberg diseases on an industry scale is going to be a key part of increasing our productivity levels and using our resources more effectively. It's time to shine a positive light on those who are taking the time and trouble to test and screen for these diseases."

Contributions

"I'd like to thank our colleagues at Moredun and the SRUC's Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme for their invaluable contributions to these webinars and I hope these webinars are a further step towards increasing trade for commercial breeding sheep that come with a level of health assurance."

"Nothing can be completely foolproof, but this is all about reducing the risk of buying in diseases that you didn't order."

The webinars concluded with a question-

and-answer session. The engagement was highlighted by 15 questions asked at the end of one of the seminars. Feedback following the events has been positive and included comments such as 'a first-class webinar' and 'excellent, a brilliant way to keep the farming community connected and informed'.

NSA believes this is a fantastic way to engage with both members and non-members and is in the process of planning further webinars. NSA welcomes your input and is keen to know what topics it could include for further webinars this summer, so please get in touch to discuss what you would like to hear more about.

A recording of the webinar is available at www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars/nsa-and-moredun-foundation-iceberg-diseases-webinar-recording-may-2020/.

Working together to keep the sheep industry healthy



Moredun have released some new resources, such as their free-to-view film on OPA control (bit.ly/opa-control), and the latest disease news sheet, "Sustainable parasite control: Test, don't guess!" (bit.ly/moredun-parasite-control). Don't forget to log into the Moredun Members Portal as an NSA Associate Member for more!

www.nationalsheep.org.uk/moredun
www.moredun.org.uk

You will need your NSA membership number to access the Moredun Portal. Contact NSA Head Office if you need assistance or do not have internet access.



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Regional Reports

South East Region

By Yann Le Du, Chairman

While the ongoing pandemic has forced the cancellation of the region's first series of 'Field Days' in early June, we still hope it may be possible to run some in the autumn.

We are all becoming more familiar with 'online' get togethers, so it is hoped it will be possible to hold the region's next scheduled committee meeting in July, virtually. In the meantime, if you have any issues that we can help with then please do not hesitate to get in touch with NSA either regionally or nationally. Favourable spring weather has allowed lambing to be completed under clear skies and shearing to forge ahead with few, if any, days lost to rain. A blessing with the potential shortage of Antipodean shearers. However, rain dances are now, for many, becoming the order of the day with grass fast burning off across our region. As new season lamb marketing gathers pace during the next few months, the hope is that lockdown measures can be eased, both at home and across Europe, to allow the trade to better absorb lamb numbers without serious detriment to prices.

Marches Region

By Antony Spencer, Chairman

Like everyone else, our activities have been a bit limited here in the Marches region. We had to postpone our spring tour to Cotswold grass seeds for the time being.

We did manage to have a virtual committee meeting, via Zoom, where we decided to try and get this and another farm walk in the pipeline for later in the year (restrictions permitting) - watch this space for details. We have had a brief hiatus for the past month with our Secretary Katie James taking furlough due to childcare difficulties. But we are looking forward to having her back very soon.

YOUR NSA REGION: To attend or enquire about an event 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.

Central Region

By David Howlett, Chairman

It has been concerning to see the number of people visiting the Peak District not only in terms of the vast numbers, but also the poor behaviour and disrespect.

Numerous fires here at Chatsworth, and another in the Hope Valley area, have been caused by BBQs - despite the public having been told not to have them. This has caused disruption with the fire brigade having to come and put them out, in addition to sheep worrying, littering and much more. But, despite everything, NSA Central Region is continuing to work for its members. If there is anything we can do to support you, please do get in touch. The pandemic has forced us to cancel and postpone meetings and, although we are not there yet, we are looking forward to events we hope to host later in the year. We hope our members had a successful lambing time.

Northern Region

By Heather Stoney-Grayshon, Regional Manager

NSA Northern Region Committee wishes all members and their families well in these turbulent times. With no shows and limited access to livestock markets, isolation may be a concern for some.

Please reach out and try to keep in contact with friends and family. A phone call or even a text message can make so much difference. The committee is attempting to keep active with meetings via Zoom, while also keeping members informed by email. If you do have something you wish the committee to look at, please speak to myself or Chairman Thomas Carrick. Although 12 months away, NSA North Sheep 2021 is in our minds. The venue has been announced as Bradford House Farm, at Belsay near Ponteland in Northumberland, on Wednesday 2nd June. This is being kindly hosted by William Woodman and his family. If there are any enquiries regards sponsorship, please do contact me. Stand booking will we open online later in the year.

South West Region

By Ian May, Regional Manager

Due to the current Covid-19 restrictions, the South West Regional Committee met from the comfort of our own homes in early May, via Zoom.

The meeting was well attended with both long-standing members and fresh faces taking part. It is great to have such a dynamic committee, with members representing the whole industry across the region. While the meeting was a success and we managed to cover a number of important topics, it did highlight some of the region's rural broadband issues and the added value that meeting face-to-face has in sparking discussion and debate, which it is hard to replicate online. One of the key discussion topics was the recent publication of the long-awaited results from the Defra AHDB consultation, along with the Covid-19 crisis and Brexit (*more on page 10*). Looking ahead, discussions are continuing on how best to run this year's NSA South West Ram Sale to ensure a dynamic sale and the safety of everyone involved. In a similar vein, we are considering next year's Sheep South West and how best to plan the event with any potential knock-on impacts. Finally, it isn't possible to sit here writing this without noting the continuing dry weather and limited grass growth. While the weather has been favourable for lambing, and has probably helped us to cover shearing with the capacity we have locally, if it continues then we are likely to see significant impacts going forward.

Northern Ireland Region

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer

The lockdown co-incident with lambing, so NSA Northern Ireland committee waited until early May to gather, virtually, via Zoom, when the busiest block of lambing finished.

Our committee all proved to be 'techies' and the meeting went well and will be followed by another in early June. It is only now, when the bulk of the spring work has been finished, that we realise there are enforced 'stay at home' rules. We had been organising a trip to the now postponed NSA Scotsheep. Those intending to attend had booked flights to Scotland, but, thankfully, all have been refunded or replaced with a voucher. Anyone who had planned to go and has had no contact with EasyJet, please do contact me for assistance. The committee has been busy considering NSA Sheep Northern Ireland 2021 but, due to social distancing restrictions, we have been prevented from meeting potential hosts. A summer farm visit was pencilled in for this year, but we have put that on hold for the time being.

Eastern Region

By Jonathan Barber, Regional Manager

Although many activities have been cancelled, we have not given up hope of joining the Seabrook Family, in September, to celebrate their 50 years of tenancy on the Ickworth Estate, Suffolk. We will keep you informed about the event.

As far as our Ram Sales are concerned, we are pressing ahead and fingers crossed they will be able to take place in the markets on our set dates - Rugby Market, Warwickshire, on Friday 28th August and Melton Mowbray Market, Leicestershire, on Tuesday 15th September. They may not be in the exact format vendors and buyers are used to but, together with our auctioneers, our aim is to give our members the opportunity to trade top-quality rams at these venues. The date at Melton was altered earlier in the year to a Tuesday. This is to fit in with the main market day, with breeding ewes. The auctioneers felt that this would attract more buyers than the stand-alone day. We will keep in touch with all previous vendors by email. If you are interested in entering rams at either of these sales and would like an entry form, then please get in touch. If you have any views on how they should/could ahead, then also let me know.



The McNee family, pictured here with Willy Millar, Event Chairman, have been very accommodating.

Scottish Region

By Jen Craig, Chairman

The regrettable decision to postpone NSA Scotsheep 2020 was taken by NSA Scottish Region in early May.

The event will now be held at the original venue (Over Finlurg Farm, Tealing, By Dundee, DD4 0QE) on Thursday 27th May 2021 - a year later than planned. NSA Scottish Region is disappointed to have to postpone it as plans for the event were well advanced. We can see that restrictions on social distancing and large gatherings of people will be in force for the considerable future, as we all try and reduce the spread of Covid-19. I cannot express enough gratitude to our hosts, Robert and Hazel McNee, who have put a considerable amount of time and money into getting the farm looking right for this year. Unfortunately, postponing the event will have a severe impact on NSA Scottish Region financially. However, through the continued support of our many sponsors and trade exhibitors, we will get through this and look forward to delivering this crucial event for the sheep industry in Scotland and further afield.

Cymru/Wales Region

By Helen Roberts, Development Officer

Social distancing, furlough, Teams, and Zoom have all become part of the new vocabulary since I previously wrote a report.

NSA Cymru/Wales Region held its first Zoom meeting in mid-May and, although it would be great to meet face to face, it will probably become part of the normal way to conduct some of the meetings going forward. The main topic of discussion was how will we conduct autumn sales, whether they are NSA or other breeding sales, and talks are ongoing to how this might happen. We must thank the Livestock Auctioneers Association for the measures that are currently in place so we can at least trade the prime stock and couples. I urge both buyers and sellers to remember the rules that are in place in order for these sales to happen and for our own safety. Plans for NSA Welsh Sheep 2021, on Tuesday 18th May at Red House, Aberhafesp, Newtown, by kind permission of the Owen family (pictured), are taking shape, and we look forward to sharing more information with you soon.



The Owen family will host Welsh Sheep 2021.

NSA SHEEP EVENT 2020

THE THREE COUNTIES, SHOWGROUND, MALVERN
WORCESTERSHIRE, WR13 6NW

MONDAY 19TH OCTOBER
9:00AM - 5:00PM

- SEMINARS & MARKETING
- 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

FURTHER INFORMATION FROM THE WEBSITE OR ORGANISER: HELEN ROBERTS
T: 01691 654712 M: 07976 803066 E: helen@nationalsheep.org.uk

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Year-round planning determines NSA Ram Sale success

Counting sheep keeps Jane Smith awake at night. Her role as Executive Director of NSA Wales & Border Ram Sales means she is charged with organising around 5,000 sheep at the Main Sale.

That's just where the number crunching starts. There are around 8,000 people who come to buy and sell at the Royal Welsh Showground on the third Monday in September. Some 200 people work at the sale – from auctioneers, vets and inspectors to stewards and Tup Taxi drivers.

Around 6,000 hurdles are put together to pen the sheep and straw is delivered in two articulated lorries with drags. It costs £115,000 to stage the two sales. That's £30 for every ram on the showground – whether it sells or not. The Tup Taxi service alone costs £9,000, and there is a big payment to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Show for rent and services and £1,000 for internet.

Delegation

Jane says it begins almost as soon as the September sale ends, starting with the budget for the following year. Then, in the New Year, it is time to get quotes from suppliers, for things including marquees, parking, security, and services.

Jane's gift for delegation makes it all look straightforward, but she is skilled at monitoring costs and spotting investment opportunities. It takes tremendous stamina, an excellent mind for figures, superb organisational skills, and

an ability to get the best out of people under intense pressure.

The challenges today are very different from those in the 1970s, when the first sale had just 200 rams, rising to a peak of 12,000. Jane has been at the helm since 1993.

"There was no licensing and there was little legal requirement back then," she says. "Sheep and people just used to arrive and sheep and people just used to go. Now, of course, it's an entirely different scenario.

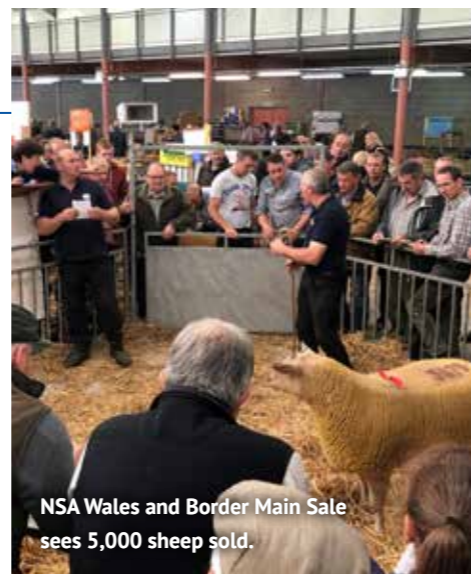
"You have to have staff that are up to speed and recognise anything that might not be correct. Health and safety has impinged on the sale a great deal. The NFU's Nigel Scriven takes responsibility for reviewing this each year, particularly that for any new caterers and other service providers. And he also oversees traffic management."

The sale is an important economic driver with a turnover of a few million pounds. Recognition came at the 40th anniversary two years ago when the Princess Royal visited, enthusiastically spending a few hours chatting to buyers and sellers and taking an informed interest in the sheep.

Jane adds: "Sheep are the easy part. It is obviously an important business day for people. You must always appreciate that the one sheep is just as important to the one vendor as the 60 brought by a bigger business."

Jane tries to ensure that everyone has the best opportunity to achieve the best price for their sheep.

There is a ballot to allow, over time, vendors to have equal opportunity to sell at the optimum stage of the auction.



NSA Wales and Border Main Sale sees 5,000 sheep sold.

Cataloguing entries takes about eight days. The aim is to get the information to the printers before the August bank holiday so that the catalogues are ready for the beginning of September. From then on, Jane works between 60 and 70 hours a week and moves to the showground a week before the sale.

Fulfilling

Her horse lorry is brought into service to move the computers, office equipment, paperwork and other essentials to the control tower at the sheep ring.

The job is demanding, frustrating, testing on the nerves but immensely fulfilling. "I am very fortunate, I have a supportive committee and a great little team of three – Carl Evans, Judith Cockerill and Jeff Chilman – who help once we get to Built to make sure we are ready," Jane concludes. "I enjoy it. I worry a lot that I get things right and have sleepless nights, particularly about the ballot. But I absolutely love it."

NSA events

NSA webinar on CODD

With 2020 rolling on and social distancing measures holding firm, NSA is once again taking to the screens to update members. Join us on Thursday 25th June, 7.30pm, for a webinar focusing on the issues that contagious ovine digital dermatitis challenges (CODD) presents. Lameness in sheep is regarded by many as one of the most significant welfare concerns affecting the national flock. While much focus is given to foot rot, CODD has become an increasingly common cause of lameness in sheep. The webinar will feature NSA Chairman Bryan Griffiths and wife Liz and will give an overview of their flock and the challenges they have faced with lameness, culminating in their ongoing efforts to tackle CODD. Following this there will be presentations from Jennifer Duncan, Senior Lecturer at University of Liverpool, and sheep vet and Liz Nabb, who will discuss how to get your vet involved and the potential difficulties in diagnosis. They will consider a holistic approach to lameness, utilising the five-point plan with emphasis on how it is relevant to CODD along with the responsible use of antibiotics and the importance of quarantine protocols for purchased sheep. To register visit www.nationalsheep.org.uk/events/.

'Test Don't Guess' webinars

NSA, Moredun Institute and Elanco are working together to run two practical webinars on Sustainable Parasite Control: Test don't Guess, aimed at farmers and animal health professionals.

The webinars are designed to provide farmers with a practical overview of two parasite challenges, covering: the wider impact of worms and liver fluke on flock and herd productivity and profitability; the importance of monitoring and testing; and practical application on how to make a difference on farm. Further information on how to register will appear in NSA's Weekly Bulletin. Or, to pre-register your interest, email: katherine.openshaw@elanco.com

WEBINAR 1: WEDNESDAY 1ST JULY

Topic: Sustainable Parasite Control: Test Don't Guess: sheep worms

Speakers: Phil Stocker, NSA; Dave Bartley, Moredun; and Matt Colston, Elanco

WEBINAR 2: DATE TBC

Topic: Sustainable Parasite Control: Test Don't Guess: liver fluke in sheep and cattle

Speakers: Phil Stocker, NSA; Philip Skuce, Moredun; and Matt Colston, Elanco

Buy and sell the best at an NSA Ram Sale



WITH A VARIETY OF RAM SALES TO CHOOSE FROM, WHY PICK AN NSA RAM SALE?

Every animal is inspected before sale for testicles, teeth and general health. This is done by NSA-approved inspectors with the final decision made by a vet.

Sheep with performance recording records are available and clearly marked in the catalogue.

All stock is sold under auctioneers' conditions of sale, with additional assurance from NSA Ram Sales if something goes wrong and the buyer needs to contact the vendor.

Different breeds and vendors are brought together in one place, offering sheep reared in every environment in the UK to fit all market specifications.

Some stock is sold as part of official breed society sales, with additional catalogue information available.

More than 7,000 head are offered at NSA sales collectively.

What Ram Sales are available? THREE NSA RAM SALES WILL TAKE PLACE IN 2020.

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

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 - Built Wells - **CANCELLED**

See page 2 for contact details for Ram Sale Organisers. Dates may change due to Covid-19 outbreak.



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Covid-19 situation update

With much concern throughout March, April and May, some measures across the UK are beginning to relax.

While this is a welcome relief to some, many farmers are finding some frustration rising from the public flocking to the countryside, with few other outdoor venues available to be visited.

NSA has been calling a fresh push regarding the countryside code, to encourage visitors to be respectful and considerate. This has also coincided with the launch of NSA's 2020 Dog Worrying

campaign, which this year is focusing on general respect and understanding of the countryside. NSA has also been keeping abreast of the developing situation around shearing this year.

The season began with concern about incoming shearers and, while the problem was managed, it has developed into issues for British Wool with selling product. This year nine million kilogrammes of clip from 2019 remains with British Wool, while it began collecting 2020's clip. This drop will inevitably impact on prices and NSA is speaking with both British Wool and Defra about this.



AHDB consultation response finally published

Almost two years since NSA responded to Defra's request for views on AHDB, the response has finally been published. It landed as Nicholas Saphir began his tenure as Chairman of the organisation.

"This is an important step for the English beef and lamb levy board," says NSA Chief Executive Phil Stocker. "AHDB was very aware of many of the responses to the request for views and it has already taken a number of these into account. For instance, it has stepped up its promotional and trade development work, and it has strived for a closer connection with industry bodies in strategy development. We can expect to see further changes and I am fairly confident that these will benefit both AHDB and industry."

The key points of NSA's response were:

- AHDB should work to secure a future where enterprise viability is possible for all levy payers. Levy funds should not be used to restructure the industry in a way that offers no future for some of the contributors.
- By AHDB's own admission, much of the research and knowledge exchange has a low impact on the industry as a whole. This isn't necessarily a criticism of the work done because those who use the information value it. But the fact is that most sheep levy payers would like to see levy funds spent on market and trade development.
- The provision of services, such as the Livestock Information Programme, should fulfil information and traceability functions in a practical delivery model.
- There should be more stakeholder organisational engagement at the sector board level with truly representative organisations, like NSA, having a role to play on the Board.

NSA has been in close and positive dialogue with AHDB since the release of the Defra report and it will continue to work with AHDB, with the aim of ensuring its work fits the needs of industry.



Agriculture Bill progresses in Parliament

The Agriculture Bill passed its third reading in the Commons at the end of May and dealt a disappointing blow. MPs voted to reject an amendment that would have ensured UK food standards were protected against imported foods of lower standards.

"The Government keep falling back on its manifesto commitment being adequate, but manifestos don't have the rigour or longevity of legislation," says NSA Chief Executive, Phil Stocker. "NSA is continuing to press this by working with other farming and environmental organisations, and also more directly through contacts in the House of Lords where the Bill will be read in early June. But the Lords input is recommendatory and it doesn't look as though the Government is in any mood to listen."

The progress of the Agriculture Bill also marks a step towards the winding down of the Basic Payment Scheme and the development and roll out of new farm support schemes in England. The development of ELMS and the Pathway programme, which plans to support health and welfare improvements, are progressing at pace and numerous ELMS test and trials projects are taking place across England.

These programmes and others within the devolved nations, are still under development and Defra and Devolved Administrations are either continuing, or soon will be, consulting with stakeholders on this topic.

More information on the ELM scheme can be found at https://consult.defra.gov.uk/elm/elpolicyconsultation/supporting_documents/.

Prevent enzootic abortion or prepare for future losses.

Enzootic abortion (EAE) costs the UK sheep industry an estimated £20 million annually¹.

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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



Trade and partnership discussed during Australian tour

In what was possibly one of the last foreign trips before the lockdown, NSA was represented by Ellie Phipps, Policy Officer, as part of a delegation from the UK to examine the Australian beef and lamb sectors to help UK Government best understand the sector and prepare for a trade deal.

"The trip's aim was to help inform the UK Government about similarities and differences between the two sectors, understand more about the Australian attitude towards a trade deal, and to also see where the UK could learn from Australia's livestock sector," says Ellie.

The first two days of the visit were beef orientated, based at Texas, Queensland, where the delegation visited both a farm and a feedlot, holding up to 50,000 head of cattle.

The second part of the visit – focusing on sheep production – took place at Dubbo in New South Wales. It was hosted by Fletchers – one of Australia's largest lamb exporters. The visit included a trip to one of the company's

local suppliers, and then a meeting with the management team at Fletchers – to replace the visit to the plant due to Covid-19 restrictions. "The team at Fletchers were disappointed not to be able to show us around the plant but did run us through the process, stage by stage, via PowerPoint. This gave us some idea of the scale of operation," Ellie comments. "It was interesting to learn about Australia's attitude to trade."

Strengthen

While in the UK we send most of our exports to one market – France – in Australia they have a huge

array of open markets and take some 62 cuts from one carcass to supply numerous different markets."

The Australian Government is interested in the UK as a further trade partner to yet further its trade reaches. However, NSA is clear that this must not be done at the expense of UK agriculture. Standards in Australia are different to the UK and far more work would be needed to assess the equivalence.

The visit also enabled NSA to make links with its Australian counterparts, and NSA will continue to strengthen its international relationships as trade discussions continue.



Delegates also met with the Australian Government to discuss future trade.

Cymru/Wales

Since lockdown, NSA Cymru/Wales Region has engaged in weekly meetings with Welsh Government as a key stakeholder within the Agricultural Resilience Group (ARG) and the focus groups on sheep health and welfare.

Welsh Rural Affairs Minister Lesley Griffiths regularly attends the ARG meetings and feeds back any concerns that we may have to Defra.

We appreciate that the sheep sector is currently holding firm but, with the hospitality trade not there, we cannot guarantee that the good prices will be maintained as more lamb comes on the market. A glimmer of hope is that the export trade seems to be quite stable and our product is wanted.

The levy boards are working together to market lamb and increase domestic consumption. We are all fearful that the UK Government is pressing ahead with the Brexit deadline of 31st December 2020, and that means the possibility of a no-deal. This would place a lot of uncertainty on the sheep industry and talks about a ewe premium, or slaughter premium, will be back on the table.

By Helen Roberts, Regional Development Officer



Although not a big part of the industry, NSA Cymru/Wales has also raised the issue of milk sheep, saying that these should be eligible for the dairy scheme. Welsh Government is looking into this and we hope there will be a positive outcome. This sector of the industry includes some enthusiastic new entrants and it would be good to retain them going forward.

Labour

NSA Cymru/Wales Region has put forward its views concerning labour shortages and how this could affect shearing and the health and welfare of the livestock. Welsh Government has worked with Lantra and created a skills matching service, available online, and NSA has launched a shearing list to complement industry efforts for the 2020 season.

The Minister has published a summary of responses to the Sustainable Farming and Our Land consultation and we were invited to take part in the co-design survey, which closed on 30th May. *More information is available at:* www.gov.wales/revised-proposals-supporting-welsh-farmers-after-brexit.

Scotland

By Grace Reid, Regional Coordinator



NSA Scottish Region is continuing to feed into various stakeholder groups regarding Covid-19 on a weekly basis.

The recent focus has been beginning to move to post Covid-19 recovery for the industry. We have been looking at how to change the way we work, such as using video and teleconferencing facilities in lieu of face-to-face meetings.

Collaboration with other organisations has been vital and extremely welcome in this time of uncertainty. Recognition must be given to the work of the Institute of Auctioneers and Appraisers in Scotland during the past few months to keep markets operating. This has been key, looking to the future, in regards of ram and breeding sales.

Predator control is an important part of conservation and wildlife management. It has become increasingly evident that predator attacks are on the increase with unmeasured threat to animal welfare and enterprise profitability. We launched our predator evidence survey at the end of May, which has been seen a tremendous response so far. We will use the results to back up our position to policy makers to further support sheep farmers and crofters, and to enable change to facilitate sustainable sheep farming in Scotland. This survey takes around 15 minutes to complete and will close to respondents on Tuesday 30th June. *To take part, visit:* www.nationalsheep.org.uk/nsa-scotland/news/29431/nsa-scotland-predator-evidence-survey-2020/.

Northern Ireland

By Edward Adamson, Development Officer



NSA Northern Ireland Region is extremely disappointed that 11 of Northern Ireland's MPs voted against Neil Parish's amendment to the Agriculture Bill, to guarantee that any imports would have to match the same standards on environment, animal welfare and food safety of UK products.

As you read this, the allocation of the £25-million Covid-19 aid package for Northern Ireland's farmers will be known. But, at the time of writing, we are fighting to get a share for the sheep sector. There are suggestions that the dairy sector will get the lion's share, with horticulture and beef sectors getting a minor share and sheep farmers allocated nothing.

Daera is comparing this year's sheep prices to those of 2019, which was not a particularly good year in the sheep sector, and so think that the sector is doing well.

If this aid package is meant to offset the effects of Covid-19, should we not be comparing the prices with the week previous to the lockdown? This saw a £20 drop in prices at a time of year when production costs are at their highest.

Before Covid-19, sheep farmers were looking at the prospects of an improved market. But they are now apprehensive about trade, as numbers peak in the summer.

Consequences

Hopefully there will not be a spike in the number of cases of Covid-19 as the lockdown is eased, because we need more focus on Brexit and the consequences of leaving the EU with no deal in place. It is understandable that attention has been diverted but, if the Government is determined to be out at the end of the year, there is still much work to be done.

To date, 2020 has been a year of extremes, with one of the wettest Februarys on record, followed by one of the warmest, driest April's on record. Into June, and we're still getting used to the 'New Normal' of social distancing to combat the public health challenges of COVID-19. It's nearly as difficult to predict what impact this is going to have on farming, as it is to predict what the weather will do for the summer.

However, we know what the likely challenges will be for livestock at grass. The high risk period for Nematodirus in lambs is likely to have passed in most areas, but it's still worth checking the nematodirus forecast into June for any late hatch areas (<https://www.scops.org.uk/forecasts/nematodirus-forecast/>). Coccidiosis often hits lambs at four to eight weeks of age, but with April being so dry, many lambs will have had little or no exposure this spring, so may still be at risk. If the warmer wetter conditions of the second half of May continue in to June, this will not only provide ideal conditions for roundworms, but will also increase the risk for coccidiosis. Any scouring lambs should be checked for worms and coccidiosis, to make sure the right treatment is given for the right parasite. Coccidiosis has also been a challenge for calves this spring, with dairy heifers turned out onto pasture heavily used by calves last year, being particularly at risk.

The fly season is already well under way, and although the blowfly risk model has not been showing high risk, there have been many cases of fly strike reported on the blowfly strike tracker <https://farmanimalhealth.co.uk/blowfly-tracker>. Follow the link to see what's happening in your area and consider applying an insect growth regulator product to protect your sheep if you have not already done so.

As we said earlier, checking dung samples from lambs can identify which parasite(s) might be causing a problem, but regular checks will also give advance warning of when worm numbers are getting high enough to slow down growth rates. Doing a follow up sample (or drench check – see <https://farmanimalhealth.co.uk/sheep-worms>) will let you know how effective any treatment has been, and how many worms have been left behind. Later in the season, clearing out these leftover worms with a mid-late season break dose (<https://farmanimalhealth.co.uk/midlate-season-break-dose>) will allow lambs to hit their growth potential as well as helping to slow the development of resistance to the older three groups of wormers.



Matthew Colston
Ruminant Technical Consultant, Elanco

For further information call Elanco Animal Health on +44 (0)1256 353131, write to Elanco Animal Health, Lilly House, Priestley Road, Basingstoke, Hampshire, RG24 9NL © 2020 Elanco or its affiliates. PM-UK-20-0343 Date of Preparation: May 2020. rdp31263

NSA Next Generation 'goes live' with debut webinars

Following the successful initiation into the world of webinars, NSA set its sights on targeting innovative, enthusiastic and professional young people.

In early June, NSA broadcast its first live webinar to address the younger membership base and explore the concept of 'Getting Started In Sheep Farming'.

The industry and the next generation of sheep farmers have never experienced such a time of uncertainty, particularly with Brexit around the corner. Some of young members will have their own ideas or will be helping others. Others will already be on your sheep farming journey. No matter what stage you are at in your agricultural career, this was the webinar to help you to lay foundations to secure a place in the future sheep industry.

The first presentation was from immediate past NSA Scottish Region Chairman John Fyall, who is also a tenant farmer and agricultural valuer. He shared his top tips on what he learnt when starting out in sheep farming.

This was followed by Adriana Vaux, a Tenant Farmers Association adviser, who explained the ins and outs of applying for a tenancy and creating a business plan.

Inspired

Young sheep farmers then heard from this year's NSA Next Generation Ambassadors, Amy Jo Reid and Dylan Laws, who inspired listeners with their stories and proved that climbing the sheep farming ladder can be done. They

had some useful advice from a young person's perspective.

The webinar concluded with a question-and-answer session. Plenty of questions were asked and attendees had the chance to reflect on some polls relating to the topics discussed.

To listen to the webinars, go to: www.nationalsheep.org.uk/webinars



NSA is planning further Next Generation webinars.

Ambassadors gather for replacement webinars

In early June this year's NSA Next Generation Ambassador group had two fascinating meetings using Zoom, in lieu of regular meet-ups. The first was with renowned sheep consultant Lesley Stubbings and the second, just a few days later, involved Nuffield scholar Rob Hodgkins.

Lesley held an interactive session using polls to aid discussions about worming and the use of faecal egg counts (FECs). "It was an interesting meeting that made us all think about FEC testing our flocks more often to build history and production information, as well as considering the effects of weather on levels of infectious larvae on pasture," says NSA Next Generation Ambassador Amy Jo Reid. "It was reassuring to learn that we are on the right track regarding effective worm control and our awareness of anthelmintic resistance."

The next morning there were pictures from the group out and about collecting faecal samples, which was great to see.

Rob Hodgkins runs 2,000 Wairere Romneys, plus a 650-hectare (1,600-acre) arable enterprise, in partnership with his wife Jo, based in Hertfordshire. He gave the ambassadors an insight into his business and explained how they are successfully incorporating sheep into their arable rotation and their decision to breed for Myomax genetics within their flock.

Improvements

"It is inspiring to see what can be done by constantly looking for improvements," says NSA Next Generation Ambassador Dylan Laws. "It was also great to see that there are good

opportunities available if you can develop a profitable system that benefits landlords in the long term."

Amy Jo added that it was a 'brilliant meeting'. She says: "someone really passionate and knowledgeable about his business, knowing any cost at his fingertips. He presented a different concept to sheep farming. It was thought provoking and fascinating to learn about The Myomax Project."

Due to Covid-19 NSA is unsure when this year's group will be able to meet up face to face again, but is planning more Zoom meetings for them during the next few months to keep them engaged, inspired and learning.

Positive experiences mark first NSA travel bursary

This year's NSA Samuel Wharry Travel Bursary, run in association with the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, recipients were Charlie Beaty and Marie Prebble. Both are working hard to finalise their reports, which are due shortly after this edition of Sheep Farmer goes to print. NSA caught up with Charlie and Marie to hear their reflections on their experiences from the project.

The bursary offered two young people funding to support travel to research an area of the sheep industry of their choice. Charlie decided to travel to New Zealand as part of her research into grass management systems. "The project gave me the opportunity to visit farms that I may not have been able to, had I not had such a good excuse," she says.

From 200 hectare (500 acre) to 10,000 hectare (24,700 acres), she adds that each farm had certain things that they did in certain ways. "I visited an organic farm that was incredible. I had no experience of organic agriculture and, if I'm honest, have always been a bit sceptical. But there is so much that conventional agriculture can take from it, particularly in terms of reducing inputs. With anthelmintic resistance being such a pressing issue, we really should be taking more notice of certain organic practices."

In its first year, Charlie and Marie were the first people to benefit from the Samuel Wharry bursary award. But with that territory comes trial and error. "If I could give myself any advice from the beginning, it would be to not try to fit too much into my trip," says Charlie. "You are much better off taking plenty of good knowledge and experience away from a few visits, rather than hundreds of visits where you struggle to take it all in. It's about quality, not quantity."

Writing

"That said, it presented a brilliant excuse to have a holiday full of farm tours. I also learnt to make mayonnaise from scratch – I had to mention that."

With her project write up now underway, Charlie adds: "Writing the report is proving to be more difficult than I had expected. In retrospect, I think my topic was potentially too broad – hindsight is a wonderful thing. The target word count was 3,000 words, which sounds a lot but really isn't."

Despite this, Charlie says that taking part has been a fulfilling experience. "I'd happily do it all over again. The most fulfilling thing has been the people I've met and the opportunities that have come as a result. I have met and spoken to some extremely knowledgeable people. Many had contrasting opinions and practices, but different things work for different businesses. I have gained a lot of extremely valuable contacts who I hope to remain in contact with."

Marie Prebble says that she's learnt a lot about the shearing and wool industry through work experience at home and from travelling to France, Scotland, Norway and Iceland as part of her project.

Interesting

Highlights for Marie include being able to shear in a final at the 2019 sheep shearing World Championships in France and at the Norwegian Championships in October, while networking with knowledgeable and well-connected people involved in shearing and wool handling.



"It was particularly interesting to shear in Iceland and experience a strong cultural attitude to wool," she says. "I learnt a lot from attending the North Atlantic Native Sheep and Wool conference in Norway and made several contacts there."

She says that she would 'absolutely' recommend young sheep farmers to apply for a bursary. "It's a fantastic opportunity, for any young person involved in the sheep industry, to explore an area of work they find interesting."

From the outset Marie has found the whole experience fulfilling: "From coming up with a project proposal, through to being interviewed for selection and being able to take on the project – it's been an amazing opportunity."

"I am so grateful to all those at NSA, and others working in the industry, for their time and input along the way. It was obviously disappointing not to be able to present my findings in April due to Covid-19, but I look forward to being able to pick the project up again when NSA Sheep Event takes place, or with any further collaboration with the Company of Merchants of the Staple of England, who so kindly supported this Samuel Wharry memorial award."

She adds that the only thing that she wish she'd known at the start was how expensive wool Icelandic jumpers are to buy.

Ambassador update

NSA Next Generation Ambassador Annie Carr gives an update on her shearing season.

Shearing season is well underway and, although grass growth may be suffering, the run of dry weather has meant that we've been able to press on and have a great start to the season. This year sees me working full time on wool wrapping, because the restrictions in place due to Covid-19 mean things are having to run slightly differently. Having a dedicated wool wrapper significantly reduces contact with farmers, leaving the back pens and shearing board completely separate to allow for social distancing.

Reducing the incidence – and risk – of iceberg diseases

By Liz Genever, contributor

A recent NSA webinar, run in conjunction with Moredun Institute and SRUC, highlighted the need to focus on 'iceberg' diseases to ensure improved sheep productivity and welfare (*more on page 5*).

Iceberg diseases are five infectious diseases of sheep - border disease (BD), caseous lymphadenitis (CLA), Maedi Visna (MV), ovine paratuberculosis or ovine Johne's disease (OJD) and ovine pulmonary adenomatosis (OPA). They have been identified by the sheep industry as important, but farmer awareness is low with a recent survey suggesting less than 5% of flocks are routinely screening for them.

Losses

An iceberg disease limits production efficiency through sub-clinical disease, while their clinical presentation is mild, difficult to differentiate or very late in the disease process. They are referred to as iceberg diseases because sometimes only the tip of the problem is seen as clinical signs, with the vast bulk of the losses being hidden and out of sight. They also share similar issues – none are treatable with antibiotics, interpretation of the tests can be challenging, and limited information is known on prevalence.

As the season's breeding sales arrive (potentially in different formats), it is important for sheep farmers to think about how to reduce the risk of bringing iceberg diseases in their flock. But this is also a longer-term issue with more sellers of breeding stock needing to start to process of understanding the health status of their core flocks.

You must start by understanding the health status of your flock and it is crucial that your vet gets involved. The recommendation starts with testing blood from 12 thin culls for MV and Johne's, with faeces being taken for additional Johne's testing.

Weaning is a good time to identify some potential thin culls, with any that haven't put weight on after a month on good grass being ideal candidates. It is also worth checking their teeth and parasite burden.

The interpretation of the tests can be quite challenging because there are risks of false positives and false negatives, so it is worthwhile involving your vet at the beginning to ensure that the right animals are tested. The aim of testing the thin culls is that you are trying to find the most likely candidates. A different approach is needed if you are screening animals.

In addition to the widely available thin-ewe screen, these animals should have a clinical examination for signs of CLA. It would be worth checking blood samples for BD, particularly if there are cattle on the farm that have been diagnosed with Bovine Viral Disease (BVD) or you have seen problems with lambs.

It is more challenging to screen for OPA, with the gold standard being a diagnosis based on a post-mortem. This can lead to screening by ultrasound to assess the lungs. It is worth speaking to your vet as they may be able to offer the service once the disease has been diagnosed in your flock, via a post-mortem examination.

Inspect

Vets for certain flocks are following cull ewes as they go to slaughter and will collect the lungs and all the guts to inspect them for OPA and Johne's. It means that some value for the animals are realised.

Once you have invested time and money in the screening tests, it is important not to buy the diseases in when purchasing rams or female replacements. Any in-coming stock (even those coming back from away grazing) should be quarantined for four weeks, monitored for signs of disease, and have their quarantine worm treatments. The iceberg diseases are unlikely to show up in the quarantine period, but it provides an opportunity to test the animals, if they haven't been tested before transportation.

If the farm has historical health problems but they have been dealt with, this helps to prioritise the tests. For example, previous history of BD on the farm means it becomes a priority for testing.

The Premium Sheep and Goat Health Scheme offers a MV accreditation scheme and a Johne's scheme, which could be used to provide more reassurance when buying in breeding stock. It is worth contacting the seller to understand if they

are a member of any schemes and what their Johne's score is (on a scale of one to five with, one being excellent and five being poor).

But just because they are being monitored for certain diseases doesn't mean that they don't have others, so it is worth asking the breeders for as much information as possible.

It is also important to know the animals' vaccination status because if they have been vaccinated for Johne's and CLA then they would test positive if blood tested for these diseases. For example, if animals are tested and they come back as positive, it could be that they have been vaccinated rather than exposed to disease.

A physical examination for lumps or scar tissue associated with CLA would be useful. As mentioned before, OPA is challenging to assess in the live animal without ultrasound scanning. At the very least, a conversation should be had about what the seller does for disease screening. For example, do they send an occasional random cull for further testing.

The expansion of health assurance schemes will be needed, particularly to ensure access to export markets and to cover commercial flocks. For most of these diseases, due to the complexity of diagnosis and screening, a risk-based approach will be needed, similar to the one-to-five scale for Johne's with annual testing and routine monitoring of cull ewes. For OPA, it could be related to repeated screening with ultrasound and culling.

Vaccines are available for Johne's and CLA, which have been fundamental in the control of these diseases in other countries. The development of a vaccine for MV is very unlikely as the virus is similar to human immunodeficiency viruses (HIV). Moredun Institute is currently investigating options for OPA, so a vaccine may be developed in the future. For BD, a few flocks use the BVD vaccine off licence, so the focus could be getting data on the efficacy or safety of UK-licensed BVD vaccines in sheep for immunity against BVD and BD.

Other countries have achieved eradication, but the current aim for the UK is a greater amount of screening and knowledge of prevalence of these diseases.

For more information visit: www.ahdb.org.uk/knowledge-library/iceberg-diseases-of-ewes.

Lambs need cobalt for fast finish, not B-vitamin 'go faster stripes'

Sheep farmers are advised to be wary of misleading 'go faster stripes' on supplements for weaned lambs that claim vitamin B inclusion. This alert comes from vet Dr Elizabeth Berry of Animax.

"For ruminants, supplementary B-vitamins are no more than pixie dust," she says. "As long as the diet contains sufficient cobalt, ruminants make their own B12, for example.

"Moreover, vitamin B1 and most others in this group are also made by rumen bugs as long as rumen function is good. At best, inclusion in a supplement is a placebo."

For farms producing finished lambs, Dr Berry says getting them to target weight as quickly as possible without concentrates clearly makes good business sense. Among factors governing the conversion of grass into meat, she advises that one of the most critical in lambs is the role of cobalt.

"In all ruminants, cobalt is essential for the synthesis by rumen bacteria of vitamin B12, which is critical in energy and protein metabolism," she explains. "While lambs are suckling, milk provides their cobalt requirement in full. But post-weaning, cobalt levels in grass are deficient in many parts of the country."

Without supplementation, the usual sign of deficiency is slow growth due to poor appetite. This can be followed by weakness, anaemia and emaciation.

This year in particular, Dr Berry says heavy rainfall in February and March will have leached cobalt from top soil.

"Since then, of course, we've seen rapid grass growth but the resulting dilution effect creates extra-low cobalt levels in herbage. So for maximum growth rates off grass, supplementation is even more important than usual.

For convenience and reliability, Dr Berry recommends either a pure cobalt, or cobalt-selenium-iodine combination, trickle charge leaching bolus. Both of these, Tracesure Cobalt and Tracesure Lamb Finisher, contain premium cobalt sources with high

bioavailability, which is not universally the case.

"To avoid doubt," she says, "these boluses do not contain B-vitamins because, as long as cobalt inclusion is sufficient, they're unnecessary."

Leaching bolus technology is patented by and unique to Animax, designed to release trace elements at a regulated rate. The company's livestock specialists are available to farmers for free advice.

Tom Rayner, North of England, 07769 694 427

Tim Sandles, South England, 07500 048392

Sam Taylor, Wales & Border Counties, 07790 372828

Matty Gray, Scotland, 07584 486229



Same breed and age, with Tracesure supplementation (right) and without (left)

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Expanding the farm business keeps new South West Chairman active

By Ellie Phipps, NSA

Next Generation Ambassador and recently appointed NSA South West Region Chairman Howard Tratt has plenty to keep him busy – between setting up his own farming business and keeping up with NSA matters.

Having begun his farming career on his family farm, Howard took the decision to set up his own business around 18 months ago. "Stepping back from the family farm and setting up my own business was not an easy or quick decision. But, as many farmers will understand, turning enough profit to maintain multiple wages can be difficult – particularly when investments in growing the business and capital expenditures are needed," Howard says. "I had built my own flock of Lleyns up to 60 ewes, while managing the home flock, so it was a reasonable starting point to go it alone."

Howard branched out and this year lambed 105 ewes (55 Lleyn cross ewes and 50 Exlana and Easycare) with 95 replacements running



Howard Tratt.

dry. He puts the Lleyn ewes to a Suffolk Charollais cross terminal sire and aims to breed Exlana cross Easycare replacements from his best ewes.

Howard says: "I like the Lleyn ewes, but was finding increasing cost and stress in managing wool. Particularly the additional chemical and labour requirements for dealing with fly strike, which is a problem here from April through to October.

Exploring

"That's when I started exploring the idea of wool shedders and decided to try some Exlana ewe lambs.

"I tupped them to terminal sires, as ewe lambs, and was pleased with how they performed next to the Lleyns. So I bought a few more and then an Exlana ram. I bought in 70 Easycare ewe lambs, in autumn 2019, to push up my numbers. They'll be bred to Suffolk cross Charollais tups as 2Ts and the best performers will go to Exlana the following year, to breed replacements."

Howard runs his ewes across 16ha (40 acres) with a series of Annual Grass Keep arrangements, with half soon to move to a farm business tenancy (FBT). He aims to keep his stock fully grass fed, where possible.

"I was brought up on a farm without seeing the use of concentrates. This was largely enabled by perennial ryegrass and white clover medium-long term leys and partly a lower stocking rate," he reflects. "Now I am running sheep on all

permanent pasture. I manage rotational grazing, where possible, but smaller parcels of land are set stocked.

"Noticeably, performance is not near where it was in the home flock on better grazing. With the effect this dry spring has had on grass growth, I am looking at introducing creep to the lambs."

Alongside running his flock, Howard also works on a local dairy unit, which he says is important for the social aspect. "I do a lot of my work alone because a flock of this size doesn't warrant the additional labour costs. But I hope that, as it develops, one day it will. I enjoy working as part of a small team on a local dairy and I think it's a good thing to have that for the social side, as well as the additional income."

Focused

With his business still in its early days, Howard is focused on growing it carefully to ensure that it is both resilient and profitable – and enjoyable. He adds: "It's currently an uncertain climate for sheep farming and it's very early days for my business. There are currently no permanent fences in my business – literally. But I'm learning to make it work."

His sheep farming year begins in November with tupping. "Ewes are tupped in November to lamb outdoors in April. During lambing I do three main checks each day – first light, midday, and last light.

"The outdoor lambing system works well for

"I had built my own flock of Lleyns up to 60 ewes, while managing the home flock, so it was a reasonable starting point to go it alone."
Howard Tratt

Howard lambs all his ewes outside.

Continued on page 23 ▶



British Wool LEARNING



Wool Processing Terms

1 What is shearing?

Once a year, usually in the warmer months, sheep are gathered for shearing. This means that their thick winter coats of wool are cut – like a hair cut! A specially trained person called a shearer carefully shears one sheep at a time. One sheep can be done in less than two minutes, which means 250 sheep can be done in one day. It does not harm the sheep.



2 What is raw wool?

Raw wool is the name we give to wool that has come straight from the sheep's back which still contains grease and dirt.



4 What is an auction?

An auction is a sale where people bid to buy something. British Wool holds regular auctions throughout the year at its Bradford headquarters.

3 What is grading?

Specially trained people look at the wool and feel each coat or fleece with their hands so they can sort them into groups of the same type and quality, ready to be sold at auction.

5 What is scouring?

Scouring means washing the wool to remove the grease and dirt.

6 What is carding?

Carding gets the tangles out of the wool and helps to clean and pull apart the fibres of the wool.

7 What is combing?

Combing wool is a bit like combing your hair. It helps to straighten long fibres and take out the shorter ones.

8 What is spinning?

Spinning pulls out the wool fibres and adds a twist to make one long, strong thread. Different types of wool yarns can be made by twisting the wool in different ways. After spinning, yarns can be used in many ways including making cloth.

9 What is dyeing?

Dyeing is when dye or colour is added to the wool. Colour can be added at many stages in the wool process.

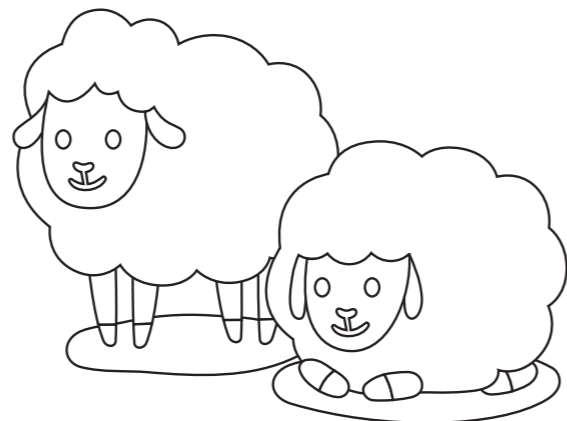
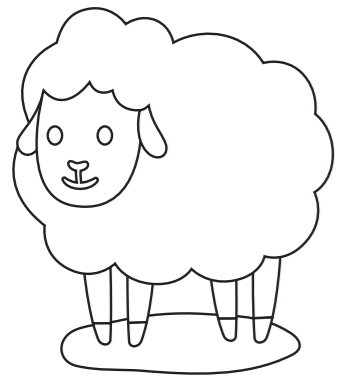
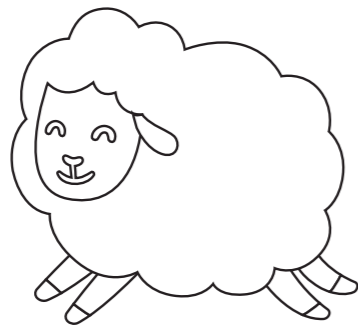
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CHILDREN'S PULL OUT LEARNING BOOKLET WITH BRITISH WOOL AND NSA



Colour in the ewes, jumping a rainbow

We would love to see your designs and a selection will be featured on NSA's social media pages – and in the next issue of Sheep Farmer magazine. To enter, post and tag your entry to Facebook or Twitter with @Natsheep and @BritishWool, or send a photo to louise@nationalsheep.org.uk. Don't forget to add your name, age, and county.

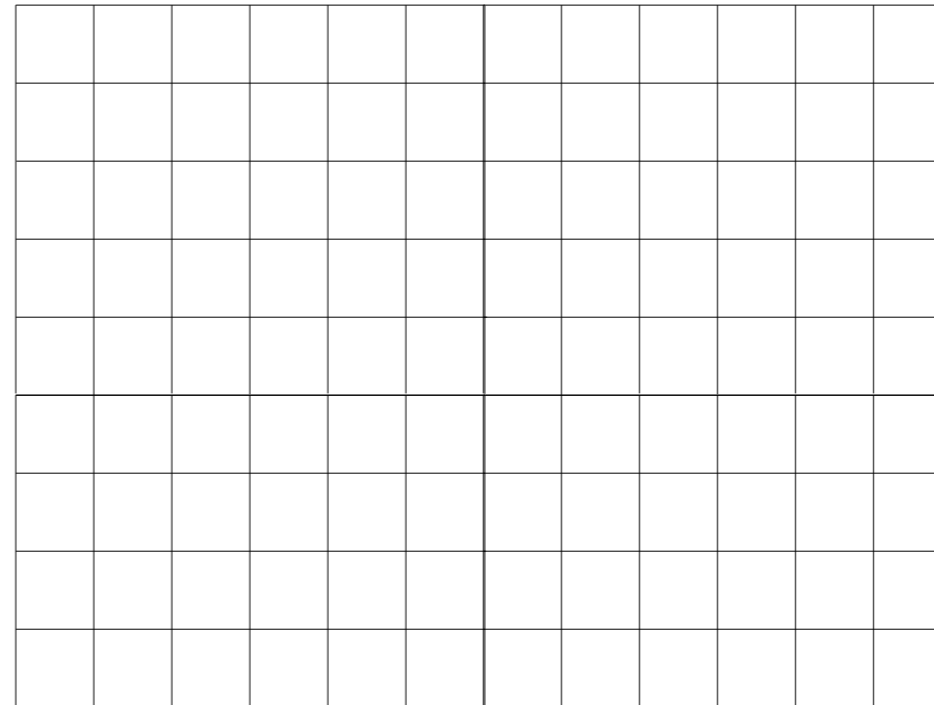


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Terms and Conditions Please tag @Natsheep and @BritishWool on either Facebook or Twitter. Please only upload your own colouring-in sheets. By submitting your picture to NSA your details and image may be used on social media. Closing date to be in with a chance of being featured in the next Sheep Farmer magazine is Friday 24th July. By entering this competition you acknowledge that it is in no way sponsored, endorsed, administered or associated with Facebook or Twitter. All information provided by you is provided to NSA and British Wool and not Facebook or Twitter. Please do not share offensive or inappropriate comments or images, as they will not be entered into the competition. By submitting your picture you agree that all images and/or comments shared are provided to National Sheep Association and British Wool on a royalty-free, non-exclusive license to use, reproduce, modify, or publish for promotional or marketing purposes. Entries must be your own original work. If entering via Facebook, please check your privacy settings allow your photo to be shared publicly. The decision of the Promoter on all matters is final.

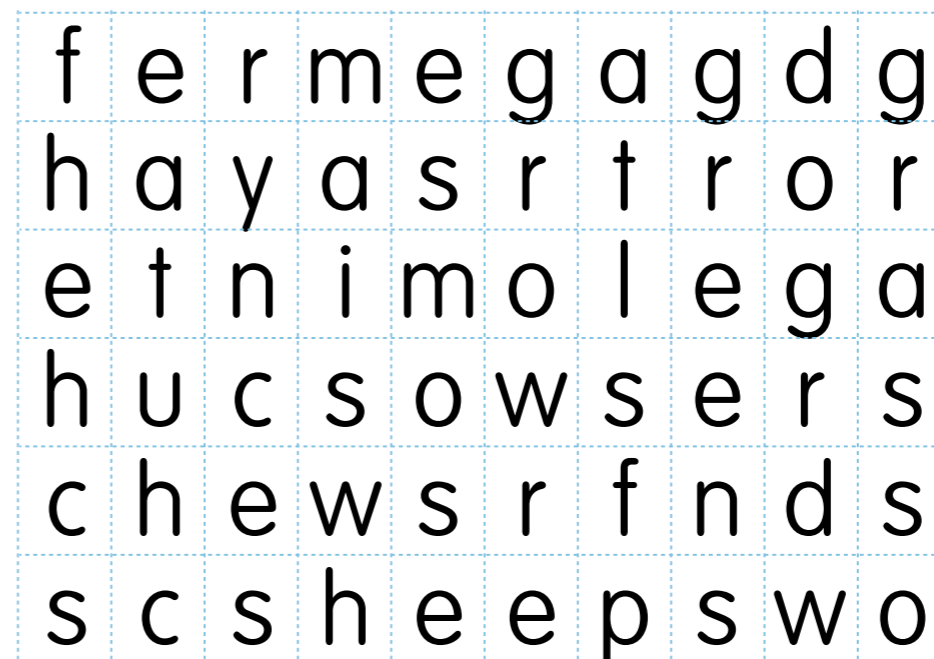
Design a farm

The farmer wants to build a new farm in the space available. Use this grid to design the new farm. There must be room for all of the things listed below.



- House and garden = 9 squares
- Lambing shed = 12 squares
- Hen house = 4 squares
- Animal food store = 6 squares
- Duck pond = 4 squares
- Small barn = 8 squares
- Sheep field = 28 squares
- Large barn = 15 squares
- Dog kennel = 2 squares
- Tractor shed = 6 squares
- Hay field = 14 squares

Wordsearch



Find the words. Sheep love grass!
Find the words about grass.

- eat
- grass
- hay
- chew
- green
- sheep
- grow
- dog





How much does a sheep cost?

Selling wool from sheep can help the farmer to pay for other things that are needed to run the farm. Can you help the farmer work out how much it costs to run this part of his farm? Show your workings.

The farmer has:

- 290 x Sheep
- 2 x Sheep dog
- 1 x Tractor



Income	
Sheep's wool	£480
Outgoings	
Sheep feed	£10 per bag
Dog food	£5 per tin
Fuel for tractor	£10 per week

The sheep eat 30 bags of food a week. How much does it cost to feed all the farmer's sheep for one week?

One dog eats 10 tins of dog food in one week. How much does it cost to feed all of the sheep and the dogs for a week?

When the farmer has fed his animals and filled the tractor up with fuel, how much will he have left from the sale of his sheep's wool?

How much would it cost the farmer to feed all of these animals and run the tractor for 4 weeks (one month)?



Which sheep breed is behind the mask?

Your Answers: A _____
B _____
C _____



LEARN MORE AT britishwool.org.uk

Answers to all puzzles and questions available on NSA website.

STAY SAFE

“

The outdoor lambing system works well for me and has been simple – particularly this year with such good weather. I like to think it could be replicated multiple times.

Howard Tratt

”



Managing singles is one of Howard's biggest issues.

me and has been simple – particularly this year with such good weather. I like to think it could be replicated multiple times, so if I can get it right now it will work as the flock grows,” he says.

“My biggest issue is managing singles and avoiding big, hung lambs. But I think I've nearly got it right. Corvids caused a few problems this year but, touch wood, foxes during the past two lambing seasons have not been a problem. I think this is thanks to lambing behind three strands of electric polywire.”

Ewes are given a 4-in-1 mineral bolus, six weeks pre-tupping and six weeks pre-lambing, but otherwise receive no mineral buckets or hard feed.

Most lambs are then sold through Sedgemoor Action Centre, which is local to Howard. “It's useful having Sedgemoor just down the motorway. In 2019 I sold most of the lambs as stores, but I'd like to improve post-weaning lamb growth and sell more finished.”

That said, he is also enthusiastic about promoting local sales. “A few years ago I was direct selling lamb meat boxes locally, but found the extra running around an inconvenience. But it is an idea that I'd like to revisit one day.

“I have recently started supplying a newly opened butcher's shop, a stone throw from where I graze the flock. They are very keen on local produce so hopefully that will be an ongoing outlet. It adds a perk to the job when you get good feedback from local people.”

Howard believes that low stress management and the right sheep for the system result in

few health issues. He vaccinates his ewes for clostridial disease, with a 10 in one product. “I do vaccinate the ewes, but that's about it. I've been advised to vaccinate lambs, too, as an insurance policy and probably should. It's something I will focus more on in the future.

“I'm aware that grazing the same land is going to cause a worm issue, so I do need to manage that. I did a faecal egg counting course, so I can monitor worm burdens and drench performance.”

Performance

Howard uses simple methods to informally performance record his flock. “Any lambing issues, or ewes seen not to be feeding their lambs so well, are noted and ear tags recorded. I ear notch ewe lambs from unassisted twins at birth.

“It doesn't warrant too much time for a small commercial flock, but this very basic recording helps me identify and select my breeding females. With more ewes, I think it would soon warrant buying a handheld device and software package to read and record data.”

With all his land rented, Howard says availability and security of grazing is one of his biggest challenges. “I'm hoping to secure an FBT on more of the land I graze, largely for peace of mind. I have a good relationship with a few landowners, but there is no real long-term security for the grazing.

“I rely on being tidy and respectful in the hope that they'll continue to allow me to graze. And so far, so good. Land with a ring fence is the dream,

Farm facts

- Most lambs sold through Auction at Sedgemoor.
- Comprising 16ha (40 acres) with temporary fencing.
- Where possible, system is run on rotational grazing.
- Stock run without concentrates.

but for now it's the more nomadic approach, competing with ponies and lifestylers.”

Looking to the future, Howard says: “One day I'd like to be selling breeding females, but am currently retaining them as replacements. When I get to high enough stock levels, I would like to take on an apprentice.

“I doubt I know half as much as many shepherds, but I've heard it said the best way to learn is to teach – or maybe someone might learn how not to do it. I have always found spending time on other farms invaluable, particularly my work placement year in Pembrokeshire where I was gifted my first sheep. I would like the chance to give that opportunity to someone else.”

Howard joined NSA in 2015 and attended a number of events before joining the NSA Next Generation Ambassador scheme in 2017. “I had a cracking year with the Next Generation Ambassadors. We had some great visits, the chance to meet different farmers, see different systems, and get a better insight into the sheep industry.

“The year definitely motivated me to continue with, and improve, my own sheep system. This year I was elected as chairman for South West Region and I'm looking forward to getting further engaged with the organisation.”

Take time to 'get under the hood' of your business

As the Covid-19 restrictions continue, we are yet to fully understand the effect that the pandemic will have on British farming and rural businesses.

The additional uncertainty surrounding future commodity prices, supply chains and our meat processing capability are just some additional factors to add to the recent upheaval of agricultural lending and adverse weather.

But there are opportunities to be found if farmers have a good understanding of their business and the market. No matter what the future holds one thing is clear – now is a critical time to reduce uncertainty. Farmers must be proactive, flexible, and forecast their business's ability to continue as a viable enterprise.

So here is our advice. First, set aside some time to evaluate your farm and any opportunities. Farmers should take the time to really 'get under the hood' of their farming enterprise. Make sure your business is robust and if you sense an opportunity in the marketplace then explore and evaluate it.

It's also important to evaluate your financial situation. Make sure you understand your numbers. Start with your most recent set of accounts and dig down into the detail. Take a closer look at exactly how you make your

income and what your costs are to generate that income. Go through the 'administrative expenses' column and 'sense check' each entry.

Understanding your cash flow is also vital. Taking each figure at the top of the sheet, start to build a picture of what will be happening, going forward, to your cash each week and each month.

Scenarios

From there, you can begin to model some different scenarios. For example, what will happen if you decide to opt to chase one of the opportunities you have identified? What will happen when you change some of the numbers that are within your control? How will you fund any future investment that's required?

It's important to make your decisions and get behind them. Making a clear decision in uncertain times is difficult, but talk it through with your family and work colleagues. Remember you can always take advice from other professional contacts, such as your farm consultant, bank manager or your accountants.

To keep your business on track, revisit the finances and decisions weekly. Check that they still make sense, particularly from a financial angle and see if you need to adjust your plan. Basically, ask yourself: is it still working?

Taking time to pause and reflect is also key. Ask yourself what the future might look like in,

By Ben Carter, Old Mill **OLD MILL**

say, a year's time, or three year - and what are you learning now that should be embedded into the business in the long term?

Government support

There are a number of Government support schemes that may be of interest to your business:

- The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CRS).
- Deferring VAT and Income Tax payments
- A Statutory Sick Pay relief package for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
- A 12-month business rates holiday for all retail, hospitality, leisure and nursery businesses in England.
- Small business grant funding of £10,000 for all businesses in receipt of Small Business Rate Relief or Rural Rate Relief.
- Grant funding of £25,000 for retail, hospitality and leisure businesses with property with a rateable value between £15,000 and £51,000.
- The Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme offering loans of up to £5m for SMEs through the British Business Bank.
- A new lending facility from the Bank of England to help support liquidity among larger firms, helping them bridge coronavirus disruption to their cash flows through loans.
- The HMRC 'Time To Pay' Scheme.
- The Bounce Back Loan Scheme for all small businesses.



Sheep farmers need to plan for a future without BPS.

UK sheep sector shows resilience in face of Covid-19 crisis

By Brian Richardson, contributor

The UK sheep industry has always shown itself to be resilient, and the past few months have demonstrated the challenges the sector faces, along with the complex nature of supply and demand that makes forward planning so difficult.

On paper, at least, the volume of lamb produced in the UK matches the demand. But, as Yorkshire & Clydesdale Bank's UK Head of Agriculture, I know that it is obviously not as simple as this. Particularly as exports to Europe and imports from New Zealand and Australia have meant the trading of lamb is an incredibly dynamic market. It is difficult to predict pricing cycles.

The farming and wider agricultural industry has always been subject to the unexpected, with the vagaries of markets, weather, and diseases often causing big swings in income and expenditure. Many can be foreseen, but by no means all.

Standards

The many thousands of sheep producers across the UK work incredibly hard looking after their flocks. They produce an exceptionally high-quality product to the highest of welfare standards. So, understandably, getting a fair and equitable price for this world-class product is essential to support the long-term nature of their businesses.

Covid-19 probably came at a good time, if there is such a thing, for the sector, as there were few lambs available, and the early concerns about market volatility dissipated relatively quickly - meaning prices have been reasonable.

Of course, we must remember that we also still have future trade negotiations to agree after Brexit, and the sheep industry is perhaps more vulnerable than other sectors to some of the possible outcomes of these trade deals.

Against this background, and with many challenges to overcome, how can the British sheep industry evolve and adapt to new circumstances, and the wider changes that will affect it? Like the rest of farming post-Brexit, there will have to be changes, and every farm business will have to look at what it does differently. Sheep farmers will have to plan for a future without BPS and one with more environmental focus on payments.

The sheep sector is well placed to participate in the new 'public good' payments with their 'green' focus, and also working towards the new zero-carbon agenda by 2040.

It is perceived, widely, as being environmentally friendly, and benefits from appearing to be less dependent on carbon contributing inputs. This gives the sector a base to work from, while establishing what the future for lamb production will look like.

The industry also needs to keep looking at how it can improve production systems and efficiency with an eye, all the time, on meeting market requirements. We all know how great

lamb is but, here in the UK, the consumption of red meat, and sheepmeat in particular, is in decline. And consumers' buying and eating habits are changing quickly and they look for different cuts, and choices. It is important that we are aware of these trends, and ensure that the industry keeps adapting to ensure that it meets the demands of the market.

Making sure that sheep farmers produce what the market wants, adopting best practice and improving productivity and efficiency are all essential in looking at how they can plan their businesses for the future.

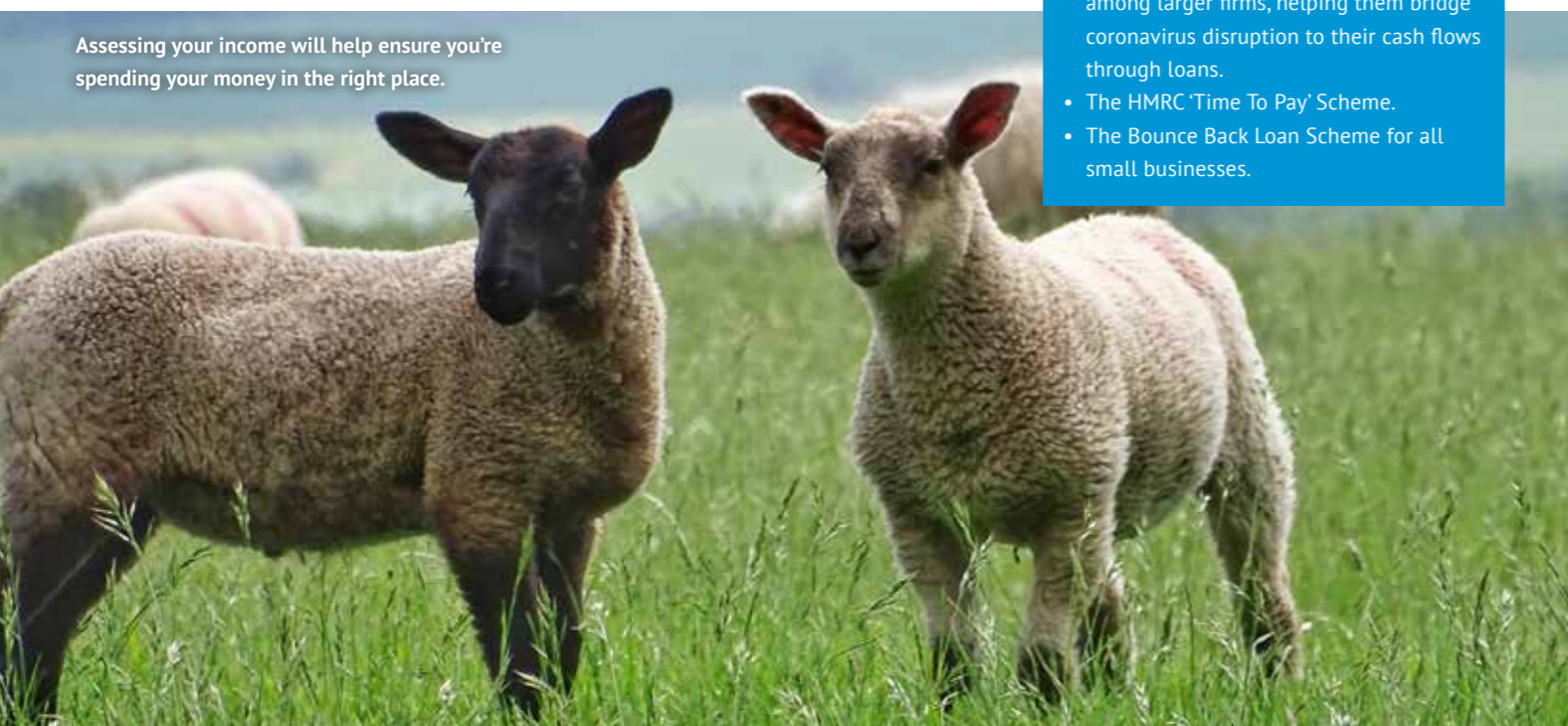
Secure

With lots of individual producers, it's a challenge to bring a real focus to this requirement and the industry must work together to secure its future. It has never been more important, given the changes coming to the farming sector.

There are many complexities in running a business. Currently, the potential for extreme volatility caused by the pandemic makes keeping on top of accounts, cash flow and budgets more important than ever. Covid-19 will not be the final challenge, so it has never been more important to have a full picture of your business.

I have confidence in sheep farming's future but to grasp the opportunities in these new and changing circumstances, and to maintain success going forward, the industry will need to continually look to improve what it does. Improving business planning and monitoring will be an essential part of this.

Assessing your income will help ensure you're spending your money in the right place.



Collection and receiving continues despite lockdown

Despite the short term challenges facing the wool sector, and the wider economy, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the clear message British Wool is that its depots and Head Office function are operating and it is collecting and receiving wool as usual.

"As we head towards the shearing season, British Wool's network of depots and collection sites are ready to start receiving wool from producers. This, given the circumstances, is quite an achievement," says British Wool's Chief Executive Joe Farren. "Following government guidance relating to Covid-19, protocols are in place to ensure the safety of producers, as well as British Wool staff.

"But the pandemic has had a significant impact on the global wool market, which affected British Wool before the rest of the UK, due to the reduced demand from the Chinese market in January."

Repositioning

He explains that the global cross-bred wool market slowed significantly in February and then shut completely at the beginning of March and, as this edition of Sheep Farmer went to print, remains closed. "February to May is usually the busiest selling period of the year and, as a result, British Wool has around seven million kilogrammes of additional unsold 2019 clip wool on top of the three million kilogrammes that it would typically be carrying at this time of year.

"The market obviously closed in New Zealand at the same time and this means that New Zealand wool agents and auctions will also be carrying significant unsold stock."

The severe, but hopefully short term, drop in demand for wool products, coupled with the huge global overhang in cross-bred wool stocks from the 2019 season, is likely to severely impact prices for the next 12 to 18 months, according to Mr Farren. "It will also make our longer term objective of repositioning British Wool as a premium product more challenging. But finding new demand for our wool in China at attractive prices will be a key driver in the early stages of recovery in British Wool prices. We must be more determined than ever in this objective.

"Producers can be assured that British Wool will be at the forefront of leading the growth and renewal of wool values, but this will take time. We will emerge stronger from this period, in particular because our China-based product development strategy will be further advanced and will help to pull prices up out of the trough."

Despite the challenging situation on the global market, British Wool continues to represent the best interests of wool producers and recently collaborated with industry partners to establish a shearing register and the Covid-19 checklist for shearers and farmers.

"We have been working together with industry partners to provide support to farmers, shearers and contractors for the season ahead," says British Wool's Head of Producer Marketing Gareth Jones. "The response from the industry, so far, has been fantastic. A large number of shearers, wool handlers and contractors have already listed their details on the shearing register.

"With the process of connecting people across the UK underway, these new measures aim to keep everyone involved in shearing safe, by using the Shearing Checklist.

"Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions, our shearing courses have all been cancelled this year. A full refund will be given to those who have paid for a course," adds Mr Jones.

For British Wool updates, please follow @BritishWoolFarm on social media or visit our website: www.britishwool.org.uk



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Covid-19 has forced wool markets to close.

Livestock markets facilitate competitive pricing during pandemic crisis



Sheep farmers have benefited from the efforts of the livestock auction industry to keep markets open and retain the competitive sales environment, as trade recovers after the initial COVID-19 shock.

Following in-depth negotiations between the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA), Defra and the Welsh Government, it was agreed that livestock markets play a crucial role in facilitating efficient supply of livestock into the food chain.

With the implementation of additional security standards, robust hygiene precautions and market restrictions, livestock markets were able to maintain trade and support sheep farmers through the challenging trading conditions.

"We adopted the 'drop and go' policy, with vendors delivering animals to market and leaving them for sale, and entry to the sales area restricted to just registered buyers – with

many buying on different accounts – and auction personnel," explains John Brereton, from St Asaph Livestock Market in north-east Wales.

"There is an excellent network of livestock markets in north Wales, and we have all been delighted with how farmers have co-operated. Trade has been good for the time of year and it is fair to say that these prices wouldn't have been achieved without the competitive bidding process," he adds.

Competitive

Ashford Market's Elwyn Davies agrees: "Our system has worked well under the circumstances, with stock selling at competitive prices, reflecting true supply and demand.

"Contrast this to the situation 20 years ago when foot and mouth disease forced livestock markets to close. This saw opportunistic buyers forcing the price of finished stock to rock bottom levels and this, in turn, depressed the value of all store and breeding stock to extreme lows."

Trade is now comparing well to averages achieved in 2019. Harvey Pile, of South Molton Livestock Market in Devon, says: "We have seen near-record numbers of spring lambs and averages a good 20-30p/kg ahead of 2019, at between 250p and 268p/kg for May, so far".

"Lockdown knocked the socks off the sheep trade, but hogget trade at Hereford has since got dearer and dearer, driven by exports, with good export hoggs at between 230p and 250p/kg, and home markets ticking over," says Brightwell's Greg Christopher.

"New season lambs have averaged 270p/kg, with 2,600 head in our recent sale, showing an increase in both price and numbers during the same period in 2019. Breeding stock has also seen excellent demand and slight increases on 12 months ago.

"It is clear that farmers have favoured that markets could operate and, without it, they would not have seen the levels achieved."



Educating consumers is key.

Education is key to demonstrate the positive role of farming

An award-winning Glamorgan-based farmer and college lecturer believes that the farming industry must make a conscious effort to demonstrate to the public the world-class work being done on UK farms to produce healthy, safe and sustainable food for the nation.

Katie Davies farms at Nant-Y-Moel Farm, in South Wales, with her husband, Trystan, and her parents, Debbie and Jonathan, and also teaches agriculture at Bridgend College. "More than ever, there seems to be huge misconceptions about farming and the environment," she says. "As an industry, we all need to take responsibility and get our message out to consumers. "Ensuring that children understand where their food comes from, and how it's produced, is critical," she adds.

Keeping this message alive is important. We, as farmers, must embrace social media – it is a powerful tool available to us all and can reach many people. I have an Instagram page, where I try to do this by telling my farming story and I would

encourage more farmers to do the same."

Katie says that she wants to educate people not only about the nutritional benefits of eating Welsh lamb, but also the direct link to lowering our carbon footprint by eating fresh, local and, most importantly, seasonal produce. "Lamb is a sustainable choice of meat, produced from grass that's a major sequester of carbon."

Marketing

The farm is a 608ha (1,500-acre) hill farm and some of the highest farmed land in Glamorgan, rising to 550 metres above sea level. It supports 1,000 head of South Wales Mountain sheep. "We have recently started marketing our Welsh lamb through box schemes direct to the public, as part of

our aim of showing consumers its quality, taste and the sustainable manner in which it is produced," Katie adds. Their focus is to reduce their reliability on bought-in feed and fertiliser, to help reduce their carbon emissions. "Using modern technology, such as scanning, and access to BCS information helps us to improve our business performance. We now feed animals accordingly, which reduces the potential for metabolic disorders, and has a huge impact on productivity.

"This approach to farming, and our long-term success, requires research. As farmers we need to look at the science and invest in proven products that will reduce our carbon footprint. I believe that, in future, we will be required to demonstrate the environmental impact of all the inputs we use."

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¹ The production costs of anthelmintic resistance in sheep managed within a monthly preventive drench program I.A. Sutherland, J. Shaw, R.J. Shaw Veterinary Parasitology 171 (2010) 300–304.

Programme delivers strong results for pilot farms

The first year of the GrasscheckGB programme has delivered strong results for the nine beef and sheep pilot farms in Scotland.

The project aims to improve grassland productivity and pasture utilisation on beef and sheep farms through a grassland performance monitoring network.

Pilot farmers are required to measure grass each week throughout the growing season, with regular grass samples taken for quality analysis. Each has an electronic plate meter to measure grass yield on their farm and an automatic weather station to record key metrological data such as temperature, rainfall and sunshine hours.

The end-of-year report highlighted that on-farm grassland production averaged 11.298tDM/ha. Through rotational grazing and measuring grass weekly, Scottish farms managed to utilise more than 80% of the grass grown, showing a high level of technical expertise.

Benefits

Regional grass growth differences were shown to be linked to weather conditions, with the south of England experiencing extreme

summer heat followed by a very wet autumn. This was confirmed by the on-farm weather station data, with Scotland recording the UK's highest grass growth rates during June and July due to an ideal combination of soil moisture and temperature.

One of the pilot farmers, Dane Davidson of Brogan Farms near Ellon, said he has seen many benefits as a result of being part of the project. He runs a sheep breeding and finishing enterprise, which also buys store cattle to graze through the summer depending upon grass availability.

"We are using the data collected through the project to analyse our overall farm grass availability and this allows us to better plan our grazing. The aim is to achieve a higher quality and more consistent level of grass availability that matches livestock requirements throughout the season.

"Measuring and monitoring grass for GrasscheckGB gave us a greater understanding of the farm's annual grass growth curve and average farm cover at any given time. This is useful when deciding on the number and timing of store cattle purchases in the spring, as well as store lambs in the autumn. Grass growth peaked on our unit during late May, which coincided with peak lactation for our lambing ewes," comments Mr Davidson.

"The formatting have on grass growth and then understand the national differences by comparing data against other pilot farms."

He says formatting of rain fell, which provided adequate moisture to soils after a relatively dry April.

Grassland

John Ritchie, from Montalt Farm near Perth, who is also part of the GrasscheckGB project said that his output increased. "Our output has risen from 380kg to 540kg of liveweight sold per hectare during the past five years, because we've learned how to utilise our grass better by rotating stock and measuring.

"As a business, we are now looking to grow an average of 9,000kg of dry matter per hectare on our improved grassland."

Mr Ritchie adds that paddock grazing has also helped him to significantly reduce fertiliser use.

"In 2019 we didn't use any fertiliser on our grazing fields and we hope this will continue due to better understanding of grassland and grazing management. Just 75 units of nitrogen have been used on the ground set aside for silage and we are looking to reduce this further in the future."

QMS' Cattle & Sheep Specialist John Evans comments: "We've just entered the second



GrassCheckGB monitors growth on farms across the whole UK.

year of the GrassCheckGB programme and the farmers taking part will continue to measure grass each week until October, which will be reported to the industry on a weekly basis."

Decisions

"The automated on-farm weather stations will continue to take regular readings and this, along with the grass data, will allow farmers to make timely management decisions."

GrassCheckGB publishes weekly summary bulletins on Twitter (@GrasscheckGB)

throughout the grazing season, detailing average farm grass growth rates across the country, soil conditions and weekly total rainfall. Bulletins include management notes tailored to the current conditions recorded on project farms throughout the grazing season.

For more information and to find your nearest GrassCheckGB farm, visit the project website at grasscheckgb.co.uk.

GrassCheckGB project background

The project is a collaboration between Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), Hybu Cig Cymru Meat Promotion Wales (HCC), the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), together with the Centre for Innovation Excellence in Livestock (CIEL) and researchers at the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI) and Rothamsted Research. It is sponsored by Germinal, Waitrose & Partners, Sciantec Analytical and Handley Enterprises Ltd. CIEL is supporting the purchase of equipment on farms through funds from Innovate UK, the UK's Innovation Agency.



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Wormer-resistance study results improve lamb performance

A Welsh lowland sheep farm is £2,600 better off since lambs are now dosed with a different class of wormer, after a study suggested resistance to a drench given routinely to lambs in spring.

Parasite control and the use of wormers on the flock at Halghton Hall, near Wrexham, was reviewed when the farm participated in the Farming Connect Parasite Management Project, a study that examined, in part, the efficacy of the four main classes of wormers.

The project, which ran on eight farms between March and September 2019, was carried out on behalf of Farming Connect by Techion UK.

Monitoring

Halghton Hall, a Farming Connect Demonstration site at Bangor-on-Dee, is farmed by David Lewis, who runs a flock of 600 ewes, 200 ewe lambs and 1,200 lambs.

He had been using a white wormer as a second-dose treatment for nematodirus worm burdens, and sometimes also as a third dose.

However, routine monitoring of FEC tests revealed unexpectedly high strongyle counts in early May.

The white wormer was targeted at nematodirus

worms only and appeared to be ineffective at controlling the strongyle species. A farm has resistance problems when a product is not killing at least 95% of worms. Reduced drench performance due to resistance leads to more worms surviving and, ultimately, reduced lamb performance.

Mr Lewis was advised to switch to a yellow wormer and, after making that change, achieved a significant improvement in performance.

Benefits

The number of lambs still to be finished at the end of August fell from 150 in 2018 to just 15 in 2019. By the end of November 2019, all the lambs had been sold, but at the same time in 2018 there were still 100 left to finish.

Techion UK's Eurion Thomas, who led the project, said there were multiple benefits from this shift in performance, notably an additional income of around £1,000 because lambs were sold earlier, when the price was higher.

"Approximately 100 extra lambs were sold in July rather than October, when the lamb price was typically £10 higher. This means that those lambs realised an additional £1,000 of income," he says.

He also estimates that there was a creep feed saving of up to seven tonnes because lambs finished earlier.

This equates to a cost saving of around £1,400, as well as saving £200 in labour costs.

Improved flock productivity extended beyond lamb performance. With fewer lambs on the farm there was more grass available, so Mr Lewis took the opportunity to increase ewe numbers.

Other changes at the farm may have influenced flock performance, such as increasing reseeded and using performance recorded sires, but he believes that better parasite control was the final key to unlocking the farm's potential.

"Since we changed to a yellow wormer for the first dose, based on FEC results and Techion's advice, the lambs have just flown and most were sold as finished lambs by August."

He aims to continue FEC monitoring and to base treatments on this information.

Mr Thomas adds that strategic use of the two new fourth- and fifth-generation wormer groups will help to maintain efficacy rates at the current level.

"The farm was not alone in recording wormer resistance – there was a significant lack of efficacy recorded across several farms and this surprised the farmers," he explains.

Six of the eight farms had pre-monitoring FECs high enough for WormerCHECK to be carried out and, in all six, wormer inefficacy was found for Benzimidazole.

Levamisole was ineffective on five, Ivermectin on four and Moxidectin on two farms.

"The results are a concern as they do show widespread inefficacy," said Mr Thomas.



Flock performance and ewe numbers have increased

"Many farmers were unknowingly using ineffective wormers before the efficacy test was carried out and, if their use had coincided with a time of high burdens, then this would have resulted in significant loss of performance and income."

However, the results of the Farming Connect study are comparable to previous levels of resistance or inefficacy reported in the UK,

namely HCC's WAARD project and the Sainsbury's FECPAKG2 project.

Resistance

The flocks in the Farming Connect study that had the least problems with resistance were those that had been following the Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep (SCOPS) principles. The farm with the best results had been applying

these principles and monitoring FEC for more than 10 years.

"It's a good sign that the guidance provided by SCOPS for many years has helped to protect against multiple resistance development," says Mr Thomas. "This highlights that parasite management should be an integral part of every farm animal health plan and should be discussed regularly with the farm vet."



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SCOPS' TOP TIPS



How well is your wormer working?

- Regular testing ensures the wormers you choose are fully effective.
- A basic drench test involves simply taking a faecal sample (FEC) at a set time after treatment to check for worm eggs.
- Ask your vet or animal health adviser, or visit the SCOPS website for more details and to make sure your lambs are not losing out on good worm control.

More information at www.scops.org.uk



Take time to reflect and plan for flock health

The lull in the sheep calendar, between lambing and breeding, can provide the perfect opportunity to reflect on what went well this year and what didn't go so well.

The perfect forum for reflecting and planning is with your sheep vet during a health consultation, or health plan. A veterinary health plan should not be a 'box ticking' exercise to appease assurance inspectors, but a real opportunity to drive forward flock productivity and welfare.

While a written health plan should encompass all aspects of flock health, no vet or farmer has the attention span to give every subject the time it deserves in one sitting. It may be worth focusing on a small number of key issues that are likely to give your farm the biggest boost in the coming year.

Benchmarks

Begin by assessing your scanning levels. While there are several suggested benchmarks of what an optimal scanning percentage should be, this key performance indicator (KPI) will be farm specific. Benchmark against your business and your peers with comparable farming systems; the ideal format for this is through a veterinary-led flock health club.

If results were disappointing your vet could suggest one or more of the following to improve things next year:

- Body condition score (BCS). You could implement and act on actively condition scoring to ensure all ewes are in optimal condition. Don't forget trace element nutrition as well.

- Check ram fertility. One in six rams are sub-fertile. Fertility testing will weed out poor performers.
- Is ewe cycling and ovulating optimal? Nutritional flushing and use of a vasectomised 'teaser' ram may help.
- Is there a disease issue? For example, lame ewes or liverfluke.

Investigation

More than 2% total abortion or 4% barren rate warrants investigation. If a diagnosis was made at lambing time from samples submitted then now is the time to work out a vaccination or management strategy to reduce problems next year.

If a diagnosis was not reached, then blood sampling a batch of barren or aborted ewes may be of value. There is usually subsidised testing available for toxoplasma and enzootic abortion in unvaccinated ewes.

Lambing time is when we experience the greatest spike in ewe mortality. Under seven days of age is also the period where we experience most disease and death in lambs. The weather during much of lambing 2020 has been extremely favourable, so is not likely to have been responsible for many losses. This should help in providing a true reflection on the primary, controllable causes of mortality in your flock.

The best place to start is by getting a reasonable grasp of how many deaths occurred in the flock and, if possible, their causes. Recording this data need not be onerous and your vet can help you to put in place a system that works for you. Some of this data can even be gathered in retrospect from information that all farms keep, such

as receipts from fallen stock collection.

Post-mortem examination of ewes and lambs when the cause of death is not clear, can be a cost-effective way of starting to formulate a plan for prevention in the following season.

Issues such as watery mouth, joint-ill, lamb dysentery, twin lamb disease, mastitis and prolapse are all common through the lambing period. All will have specific prevention advice, but almost all disease control at lambing time is strongly underpinned by balanced ewe nutrition.

Adjustments

Your sheep vet or nutritionist will be able to help you formulate a specific feeding plan and this should be done each year as the availability and quality of the forage can vary. A metabolic profile of ewes should be carried out approximately four weeks pre-lambing through a blood sample to assess energy and protein provision. This will ensure that the diet provided is working for the ewes and allow for any adjustments to be made.

Assessing how this year's lambs are growing can also offer some pointers for 2021. Maximising lamb growth rates in early life is key to efficient lamb production. Lambs that are finished quickly cost less to produce, are less likely to succumb to disease and will leave more grass available for weaned ewes to regain body condition in order to get good scanning results the following season.

The ideal time for intervention is at eight weeks from the middle of lambing; check lamb weights and ewe BCS at this time. If you are unfamiliar with body condition scoring then your

By Ed Hill, Thrums Veterinary Group



Your sheep vet is a good place to start to improve your flock health plan.

sheep vet will be able to help you learn and the AHDB reference manual 'Managing ewes for Better Returns' is a fantastic resource. While weighing lambs regularly is ideal, on some farms it is not practical. Retrospective growth rates can be extrapolated from sales data that is readily available.

At this point lambs should have been growing at a rate of at least 300g/day and ewe BCS should be between 2.5 and 3 for a lowland ewe or between 2 and 2.5 for an upland ewe. If a ewe's body condition score is falling below these targets, early weaning should be considered.

If lambs are not achieving 300g/day then find out why. Basic nutritional needs of lambs can often be the limiting factor and a lamb on a high-quality grass sward may be able to finish more than a month quicker than an equivalent lamb on an average quality sward.

Parasites may also be holding lambs back. Lambs don't need to be showing signs of diarrhoea for growth rates to be restricted by as much as 50% by gut worms or coccidiosis, which causes a depressed appetite and impaired gut function. Again, as part of a health review, your sheep vet is best placed to advise on minimising parasite risk and, where

treatments are required, which are the most appropriate and how to minimise the risk of anthelmintic resistance.

Profitability

Taking the time to review what went well and finding a few key areas to focus on to improve for the next season will pay dividends as part of a continual improvement process. There are many vets who have a passion for sheep health and production and they should be your preferred partner in driving forward the welfare and profitability of your flock.

Weather for lambing was favourable this year, so lamb losses will reflect more controllable causes.





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Identify, treat and prevent infectious conjunctivitis in sheep

Sheep farmers should keep a close watch for Ovine Infectious Keratoconjunctivitis (OIKC), also known as contagious ophthalmia or 'pink eye', during spring and summer. It's a contagious eye disease of sheep and has also been reported in goats.

Sheep present with conjunctivitis, closing of the eyelids and tear staining in one or both eyes. In some cases the cornea becomes cloudy and blood vessels can be seen at the edge growing towards the centre of the eye (pictured).

There are three main organisms that cause OIKC. *Mycoplasma conjunctivae* is regarded as the main agent, but *Chlamydophila psittaci* and *Moraxella ovis* may also be involved. Non-infectious causes of keratoconjunctivitis in sheep may include trauma, neoplasia and congenital abnormalities.

Observation

Clinical and farmer experience suggests that outbreaks of OIKC are extremely frustrating to control in sheep flocks. Close observation of the flock is important in detecting and treating early cases.

Local antibiotics eye ointments are not effective against *M. conjunctivae*, but intramuscular long-acting oxytetracycline treatment can be effective in some field outbreaks.

That said, medication does not always eliminate the organism and repeat treatments are often necessary. Outbreaks often persist for

between four and six weeks before complete clinical resolution is seen.

M. conjunctivae can be carried by sheep for up to 23 weeks in experimental infections. Sub-clinically infected, carrier animals often appear to be the means whereby *M. conjunctivae* is introduced into previously uninfected flocks.

After an initial outbreak, the flock may succumb to further outbreaks of disease in subsequent years. The susceptibility to disease and the severity of the clinical signs often appear to be greater in adult sheep than young lambs.

Outbreaks of OIKC may be triggered by tight stocking rates and close head-to-head and eye-to-eye contact between sheep at troughs and feeders. Flock outbreaks may occur during the winter months (see graph). It may also be seen in outdoor sheep following high winds and driving snow.

Infection appears to spread both by direct and indirect contact, for example between animals, feeders and on shepherds' overalls and hands.

Outbreaks tend to be prolonged if different groups of sheep are constantly mixed together, resulting in reinfection and fresh outbreaks of

By Amanda Carson and Rachel Collins, APHA Animal & Plant Health Agency

disease. It is advisable to keep affected groups of sheep intact, avoid mixing of animals, wear separate overalls and wash hands when moving from affected to unaffected groups.

There is no current evidence available on the efficacy and effectiveness of autogenous vaccine to prevent or control OIKC caused by *M. conjunctivae*.

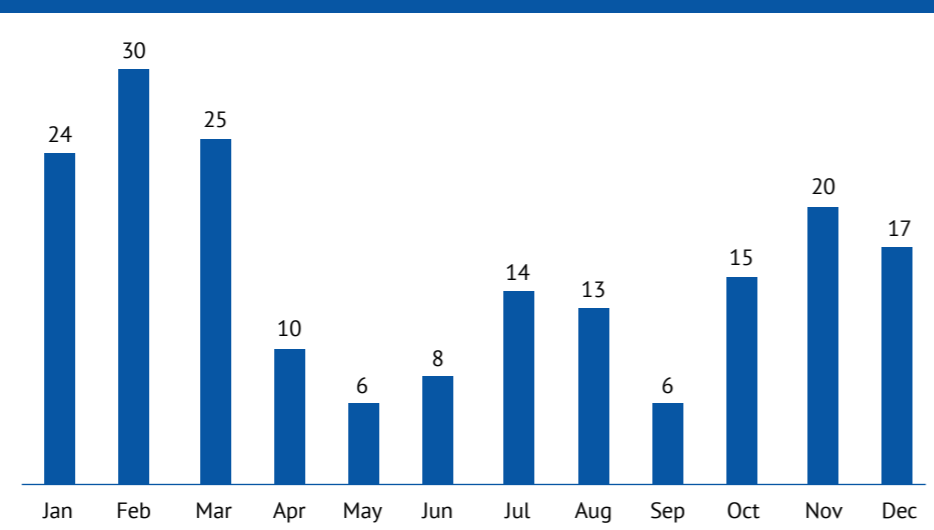
Treatment

During April, APHA Veterinary Investigation Centres Starcross and Penrith investigated incidents of conjunctivitis in sheep.

Starcross received an ocular swab from a group of housed upland sheep experiencing cases of conjunctivitis that had responded poorly to whole group tetracycline treatment. *Moraxella spp* was isolated in purity and found to be sensitive to all the antibiotics on the sensitivity panel including tetracycline.

Penrith reported a case that had experienced outbreaks of 'pink eye' in pedigree Texel ewes every few months. *Mycoplasma conjunctivae* was detected by PCR on pooled eye swabs.

Seasonal distribution of GB VIDA cases of Infectious Keratoconjunctivitis (2002 to 2020)



Corneal clouding with blood vessels growing across the eye.

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Survey reveals true impact of dog attacks on flocks

By Fiona Lovatt and Phillipa Page, Flock Health Ltd 

Dog attacks or worrying incidents are a persistent problem and a huge concern for the UK sheep industry.

The number of incidents appears to be increasing – however, this could be attributed to farmers being more able to share their experiences.

To unravel the truth, Flock Health worked with Ipsos MORI & the Scottish Government in 2019 to carry out a large-scale survey. The aim was to accurately assess the actual prevalence of attacks and their impact on flocks across Scotland. More than 9,000 sheep farmers were invited to take part – either online or via telephone interview – and there were 1,931 responses, lending credibility due to the high response rate.

Incidents

As this was the first large scale survey of its kind, it isn't possible to categorically indicate whether the number of attacks is actually increasing. Although 38% of respondents thought that they were increasing in their area, compared with 41% who thought there was no change.

In total, 14% of respondents said that dogs had attacked or chased their sheep during the previous 12-month period, with an average of 3.5 separate incidents during that period. Unsurprisingly, larger flocks and flocks with sheep on fully open land were more likely to experience an attack, as were flocks on land with a track or road close to the sheep that was regularly used by dog walkers.

Farmers were asked to give details of the most recent incident and the results were sobering: if every 20 separate incidents were totalled up, this resulted in an average of 32 killed sheep, 10 sheep having to be destroyed, a further 34 injured, seven

ewes aborting, 20 incidents of mismothering, and 560 sheep being stressed but physically uninjured.

This study also provided data on the time, financial and emotional impact of dog attacks on the farmers concerned. Respondents typically spent 5.5 hours dealing with each attack. Treating the affected animals and investigating the attack took up the most significant amounts of time.

The average financial cost of each attack was calculated at £697, with the biggest costs due to the value of dead sheep or aborted lambs. Only 9% of farmers who took part in the survey reported receiving money (from the dog owner, the courts or an insurance claim) and of this small number that did receive compensation, the average (mean) amount received was £417.

An area that has not been previously studied in depth is the emotional impact of dog attacks. Around 80% respondents said the most recent dog attack had upset them 'a great deal' or at least 'quite a lot'. Beyond the immediate distress at seeing and dealing with injured sheep, the loss of livestock was described as 'soul destroying' and this was explained with reference to the efforts and pride associated with rearing livestock.

Farmer respondents emphasised the fact that they felt obliged to be tough and resilient when dealing with a traumatic incident, but that it took enormous mental and emotional energy to remain calm in the aftermath of the attack when dealing with the dog owner.

In many cases the dog has apparently 'never done it before', which may be irrelevant to the situation, but can also result in a very shocked and distressed dog owner.

In other cases, the owner is aware of the tendency of the dog to worry sheep but apparently careless enough to not take adequate control.

This, of course increases, the farmer anger and frustration.

Police

In half of the dog attacks reported in this study (49%), farmers believed the dog(s) were accompanied at the time of the attack, while in 38% of cases the dog(s) were believed to be unaccompanied. Most commonly, respondents were under the impression that the dogs belonged to another non-farming local resident (42%), with 27% reporting that the dogs belonged to a visitor to the area and 7% reporting that it/they belonged to a neighbouring farm.

The findings indicate that only around a third of dog attacks in Scotland are currently reported to the police. There were mixed experiences of the police and courts' response to attacks and, consequently, mixed views about whether it was worth reporting an incident.

Report every dog-attack incident to the police or rural crime unit and speak to NSA for advice if needed. This will hopefully both raise awareness and improve the consistency of the police response.

Unsurprisingly, there was strong support among respondents for increasing the penalties for failing

Lamb losses

During the Easter weekend, at Overbury Estates in Gloucestershire, four young lambs were killed and the flock obviously distressed by out of control dogs (pictured). Similar to many popular areas of the countryside, there are numerous footpaths across the farmland.

Tom Chapman, the shepherd at Overbury, and NSA Next Generation Ambassador, describes how he feels when faced with an attack on the flock. "It's always sad when you see a dead lamb that you've worked hard to keep alive, whether it's caused by nature or a freak accident. But for someone to be so careless and inconsiderate as to leave a dog out of control is even more devastating. It causes so much stress to all animals in the field, not just the few or many that they kill. That's real animal cruelty."

Dog-attack cases

A dog had been caught in a field after first chasing a ewe into a pond and then attacking her. The ewe suffered catastrophic injuries to her ears and jaw and was euthanased shortly after the vet arrived on scene. The dog's owner arrived on the scene and was devastated to see the attack. His dog, a newly-acquired rescue dog from London, had slipped the lead and headed straight to the field of sheep where it then chased and attacked the ewe. Even as a vet, who frequently sees injuries and trauma, this was a particularly difficult case to deal with and felt hopeless to treat the ewe. In order to end her suffering, the only option was to euthanase her. The farmer, fortunately, arrived as the attack was happening and was able to catch the dog. The owner was very upset about what had happened and offered to pay any costs. In this case the farmer accepted, but discussed with the owner about action for the dog as both parties were concerned that the dog may do this again. The dog was rehomed to an urban home, which may not have totally solved the future risk but it did at least remove the dog from regularly exercising in a rural area.



Many owners still claim they are unaware of what their dog is capable of.

to have a dog under control, for requirements to keep dogs on leads within defined areas, and for greater powers to remove dogs from those who fail to control them. The frequency of dog attacks in all areas of the UK suggest that more needs to be done in terms of education. We have previously had discussions across the veterinary profession

rooms of small animal vet surgeries as to the potential risks to livestock from their pets and the importance of knowing the exact whereabouts of their dog at all times.

Back on the farm and, although it will prove an extra job, it may be worth putting up signs at specific times in the season or certain areas of

with a view to placing signs in the waiting

the farm. Home-made signs explaining why and details about your flock appear to have a greater impact and may be worth trying. Otherwise do get hold of a printed sign, such as one provided by NSA.

The full Scottish Government Ipsos MORI report can be accessed at www.gov.scot/publications/sheep-attacks-harassment-research/pages/2/

NEW PRODUCTS

Wool felt face masks are designed for comfort

A Cotswolds-based textile manufacturer has mobilised its production to make face masks available, at cost, to help reduce the spread of Coronavirus. Unspun's face masks are reusable, washable and, while designed for a close comfort fit, they are not medical grade PPE and therefore do not take resources away from frontline workers. The non-medical masks are made from soft, lightweight and highly breathable non-woven Merino wool felt. The structural integrity of the felt permits the mask to stand out, away from the mouth, giving the wearer space to breathe and talk without feeling excessively restricted. When properly fitted, the adjustable elastic straps and nose clip ensure that the air goes through the mask filter and not around the edges. The masks can easily be removed without touching the face and can be disinfected in boiling water, to ensure they are safe to reuse many times. This makes them a cost-effective alternative to disposable masks. Made from the company's trademark coloured felt, the amount of colour and pattern will vary with each individual mask. The felt is 100% natural, renewable and biodegradable. The masks come in two sizes: medium (to fit women and young adults) and large. The masks are manufactured at cost with free UK shipping, for £9.99 each.



Versatile mounting 'blocks' suitable for all types and sizes of fastener

Mounting bases to secure piping, electric cabling, tubing, cable brackets, wall mounts, and quick fasteners are now available from Dairy Spares. Kwik Blocks comprise a V-shaped design, which means that they can be used with any size of clip or strap, minimising the need to stock a wide selection of sizes. The system provides the base to which users then provide the appropriate fastener to fit the task. Developed and manufactured in the US, the system is suitable for vertical and horizontal mountings and will restrict rotational movement. Made from a strong UV-stable, high density copolymer propylene, the blocks are suitable for use in many situations, including in corrosive and/or wet environments. They are available in two sizes, to suit use with jubilee clips of up to a 9mm or 12.5mm diameter. There are two designs: 'without ears' and with a single screw hole, or 'with ears', which provides an extra screw hole either side for added stability. Recommended retail prices range from £1.98 +VAT for the smaller sized block 'without ears', to £4.62 +VAT for the larger block 'with ears'.



The average financial cost of a dog attack was calculated at £697.

Following the flock

In this latest edition of Following the Flock, we visit NSA Central Region Chairman David Howlett, NSA Northern Ireland Regional Chairman Jonny Farmer, and NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman Kate Hovers to find out how lambing has been for them this year.

David Howlett

NSA Central Regional Chairman, Derbyshire



Lambing has now finished and, thankfully, the weather played its part this year. It is surprising how quickly the ground has gone from too saturated to travel on, to the other extreme of being rock hard and no moisture.

The weather certainly made our lambing easier. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we ended up lambing a lot more sheep outside with as few socially distanced staff as possible. Results are very pleasing, given the circumstances, and I would like to thank all the team for their hard work in unprecedented times. Shearing is currently taking place with the dry hogs and February-lambing ewes. Lambs have been worm tested, drenched accordingly and now weaned and I'm pleasantly surprised at how well they are doing. The early bite of grass has resulted in practically no creep feed being fed and lambs are coming to market very well. Farm shop sales for lamb have been strong. Having said that, every blade of grass is now in high demand, with cattle out at grazing and silage fields shut up. So if the arable farmers could get their combines out, I'm sure it will rain and help our grass situation out.



Kate Hovers

NSA Cymru/Wales Regional Chairman, Powys



Lambing has been a tale of two parts here. Our smaller, early bunch of old ewes and hopeful show or sale sheep ended up staying indoors for a week or more as rain, more rain, and gales marked March weather in South Wales.

In contrast, the April lambing was a delight. I've never worn a t-shirt at lambing time before. We only left the rams in for a month in 2019 - in on 5th November, out on 5th December. We didn't seem to have more barren ewes and lambing was finished before complete exhaustion set in. Even so, the final nine ewes spread out across a week. I am always home during lambing, but these strange times have kept me off work and home since then. With that and the good weather there has been no excuse not to keep up with jobs. Lambs have all had a Nematodirus drench, according to risk, and a follow up faecal egg count, two weeks later, was free of worm eggs. We have just finished giving lambs a first 4 in 1 Clostridial vaccine and we will be weighing them next week.



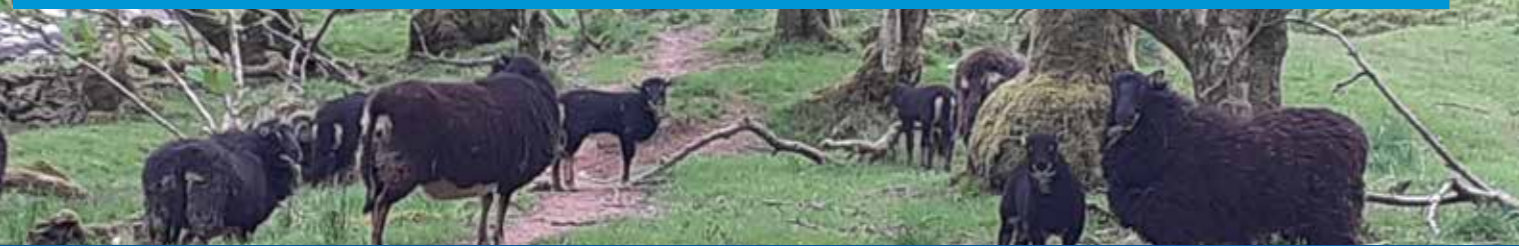
Jonny Farmer

NSA Northern Ireland Regional Chairman, County Antrim



Lambing began on 10th April with one of the best spells of lambing weather we've had in recent years. It made our outdoor lambing system a lot more pleasant.

Ewes are set stocked and then batched up into rotation around the start of May. This coincided with reduced grass growth due to the lack of moisture. We've had to eat down to very low residual cover and have not had the entry covers we'd have liked. But after 10 days of panicking we got some rain and grass growth exploded, so things are looking much better now. By the end of May we should have lambs dosed, vaccinated, marked, and weighed. We will know a count of what we have to sell later in the year. I like to get lambs over the weigh bridge and see how growth rates stand compared to previous years. We will start to take faecal samples to determine future treatments. Like everyone else, I'm sure, I've missed attending agricultural events and look forward to normality returning soon after lockdown restrictions are eased.



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